

# CHINESE LITERATURE

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**SPRING**

**1953**

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Printed in China



# Chinese Literature

P. O. Box 6, Peking, China

Published by the *Foreign Languages Press*  
26 Kuo Hui Chieh, Peking, China.

## ON THE IDEOLOGICAL REMOULding OF WRITERS AND ARTISTS

*Address at a meeting of literary and art workers in Peking*

by HU CHIAO-MU

The All-China Federation of Literary and Art Circles has decided to lead the literary and art workers in Peking in a study of the question of which line to take in literature and art, in order to improve work through thought reform. The pressing need for this study is only too apparent. The fact that this question has been raised by writers and artists shows that at least some of the cadres (whose task is to organise the creative work, criticism and study) in this field have not yet given a definite, clear-cut answer to this question. If such is the case, and if some of the cadres still have doubts as to what line they should take, how can they give effective leadership?

But such is the case. Despite the fact that the All-China Congress of Literary and Art Workers convened in July, 1949 proclaimed acceptance of the line pointed out by Comrade Mao Tse-tung at the Yen-an Forum on Literature and Art held in 1942, it did not follow that all literary and art workers could actually as a matter of course and without the slightest reservation accept this line. They had first to go through a concrete and intensive ideological struggle like that waged among the literary and art workers in the old liberated areas during the years immediately before and after 1942. Some of the writers who voted in favour of the resolutions of the 1949 Congress had failed to grasp the full significance of Comrade Mao Tse-tung's instructions, but still clung to the bourgeois or petty-bourgeois outlook in regard to art and literature. Therefore when they heard

that our literature and art should, in accordance with the philosophy of life and world outlook of the working class, educate the masses and criticise the philosophy of life and world outlook of the bourgeoisie and the petty-bourgeoisie, and that consequently working class literature and art concepts should be used to criticise the literature and art concepts of the bourgeoisie and the petty-bourgeoisie, they were shocked and felt that "the policy has changed".

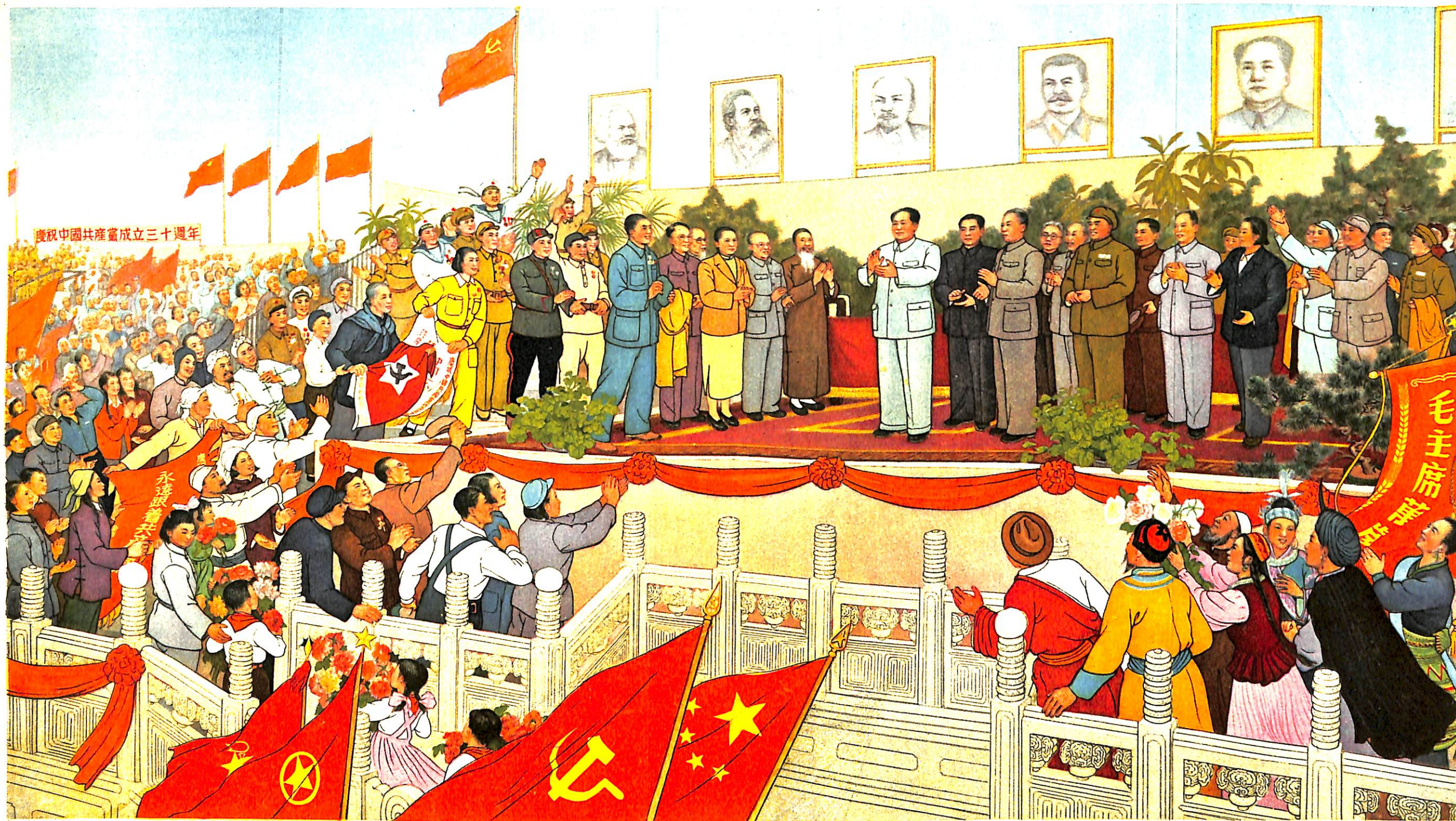
Ranged on the side of these writers were also a number of Communist writers and artists, including even a few who had pledged support to Comrade Mao Tse-tung's literature and art policy at Yen-an. These comrades, once they had come into contact with bourgeois and petty-bourgeois writers and artists, lost their ability to criticise them, and began to "unite" with them unconditionally. According to these comrades there need be no struggle within the realm of art and literature, and writers and artists who have received bourgeois or petty-bourgeois education can "serve the people" just as well without being reformed. It is because of the influence of these two groups that the progress of our art and literary work during the past two years has been greatly impeded.

Of course, we cannot deny that our literary and art workers have accomplished no little during these two years. This is because these two groups form only a part of our workers, and even these two groups have done some work which has proved to a greater or lesser degree beneficial to the people. However, I shall not dwell on this point, because that is not the purpose of our meeting today. What we need to do now is to examine some other aspects of the problem.

It is generally felt today that not enough literary works have been produced. And most of the works in existence have failed to correspond to the new life of the labouring masses. They are wanting in new characters, new incidents, new emotions and new themes. And because they often distort the true image and struggle of the working people, or reduce them to abstract or set forms, the result is a negation of realism. (Where the work describes a historical episode, it becomes a negation of historical realities.) Can we deny these facts?

Inseparable from these is the fact that many writers have very little contact with the working people, and are indifferent to their cause. These writers are apathetic and slovenly in their work; or they give up writing to immerse themselves in administrative affairs





HO YI-MIN and TENG SHU: Celebrating the Thirtieth Anniversary of the Communist Party of China





and social activities. Certain individuals have simply been living to eat, and leading an idle existence. Is this not true?

Still another phenomenon is manifest in the same connection. Since their establishment in 1949, many, if not all, literary and art organisations have never seriously organised their writers for creative work. Neither have they seriously organised their participation in the struggle of the masses, nor yet their studies whether political or artistic. Again, are these not facts?

People say there is so much criticism and it is so severe that writers dare not take up the pen. But what is the truth of the matter? Just the opposite. The afore-mentioned conditions have developed, not because of ever increasing criticism, but because there has been practically no development of criticism. In this connection we may mention the criticism of *The Life of Wu Hsun*. As is well known, the criticism of this film was not initiated by any of the literary and art organisations, but by the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China. The filming, showing and publicity of this picture, if not approved by many leading figures in literary and art circles, at least met with no objection from them. Even after criticisms had been raised by the Central Committee, some people still remained indifferent. There were certain signs of active criticism following the criticism of *The Life of Wu Hsun*, but right up to the present, with the exception of the editorial departments of some literary and art publications, not a single literary and art organisation has yet taken upon itself the responsibility for organising regular criticism and self-criticism. Is it right for us to tolerate this state of affairs? And why has it persisted for two years?

Evidently, a great number of the cadres in our literary and art circles have forgotten this basic viewpoint: that, according to Marxism, art and literature are the superstructure built on a definite economic basis of society. What is the function of this superstructure? Comrade Stalin says:

The superstructure is a product of the basis, but this does not mean that it merely reflects the basis, that it is passive, neutral, indifferent to the fate of its basis, to the fate of classes, to the character of the system. On the contrary, having come into being, it becomes an exceedingly active force, actively assisting its basis to take shape and consolidate itself, and doing everything it can to help the new system finish off and eliminate the old basis and the old classes.

It cannot be otherwise. The superstructure is created by the basis precisely in order to serve it, to actively help it take shape and consolidate itself, to actively strive for the elimination of the old, moribund basis together with its old superstructure. The superstructure has only to renounce this role of auxiliary, it has only to pass from a position of active defence of its basis to one of indifference towards it, to adopt an equal attitude to all classes, and it loses its virtue and ceases to be a superstructure. (Stalin: *Concerning Marxism in Linguistics*)

Isn't it because some of our cadres have adopted a non-Marxist viewpoint in regard to art and literature that our literature and art have failed to become "an exceedingly active force" and have been unable to arouse in the rank and file of our literary and art workers the spirit of selfless labour and struggle? To give up or slacken in the class struggle in the field of art and literature, to fail to conceive of art and literature as a serious part of the class struggle, with the result that the superstructure begins "to pass from a position of active defence of its basis to one of indifference towards it, to adopt an equal attitude to all classes" — is this not the very root of the various dangers to which our present-day art and literature are exposed?

A great many cadres in our literary and art circles have obviously failed to keep in mind the basic instructions given by Comrade Mao Tse-tung at the Yen-an literary forum. In line with Stalin's teaching, at Yen-an Comrade Mao Tse-tung pointed out that the basic function of literature and art is

to fit literature and art properly into the whole revolutionary machine as one of its component parts, to make them a powerful weapon for uniting and educating the people and for attacking and annihilating the enemy, and to help the people to fight the enemy with one heart and one mind.

Comrade Mao Tse-tung further pointed out: In order to fulfill this task correctly, literary and art workers must take the same standpoint as the working class. Those who have not yet done so must do their utmost to reform themselves, so that they may "transfer themselves from one class to another". Further, he said:

If you want the masses to understand you and want to become one of them, you must be determined to undergo a long and even painful process of steeling. . . . If our writers and artists from the intelligentsia wish their works to be welcomed by the masses, they must transform and remould their thoughts and feelings. Without such a transformation and such a remoulding they can do nothing well and will be ill-adapted to any kind of work.

Comrade Mao Tse-tung's concluding remarks in his Yen-an address pointedly summed up the significance of thought reform as a principle:

Those intellectuals who are of petty-bourgeois origin always, through various ways and means, including literary and art means, stubbornly try to express themselves, spread their own opinions, and demand that people remould the Party and the world in their image. In these circumstances it is our duty to shout to them: 'Comrades! Your stuff won't do! The proletariat cannot compromise with you; to yield to you is to yield to the big bourgeoisie and the big landlord class and to run the risk of losing our Party and our country.' Then whom should we take as model? We can only remould the Party and the world in the image of the vanguard of the proletariat. We hope our comrades in literary and art circles will realise the seriousness of this great controversy and actively join in the struggle, so that every comrade will become sound and healthy and our entire ranks truly united and consolidated ideologically and organisationally.

Are not these guiding principles of Comrade Mao Tse-tung equally applicable to present conditions? Is not our revolutionary literary and art world today more closely beset than ever by bourgeois and petty-bourgeois ideologies? China today is a people's democratic China; in other words, a democracy led by the working class. But this does not mean that the leadership of the working class can be maintained as a matter of course, nor that the bourgeoisie and petty-bourgeoisie will cease their attempts to remould the world in their own image. No, this cannot be expected to happen. Whether on the literary and art front or on any other ideological front, the working class, while joining hands with the bourgeoisie and petty-bourgeoisie, must at the same time fight for its own status as leader. And while it recognises that bourgeois and petty-bourgeois ideologies are permitted to exist in our society today, it must continue to criticise the errors in these ideologies and point out that they cannot possibly be expected to lead the remoulding of the world. The working class must remain determined to remould the world and the bourgeoisie and petty-bourgeoisie in its own image, and must never lower itself to the ideological level of the bourgeoisie and petty-bourgeoisie and "serve" them. To give up this ideological struggle is to give up the leadership of the working class and the cause of people's democracy. The result will be isolation not only from the working class, but from the great masses of the people who are today led by the working class. This



is because the masses are convinced by their own experience and political consciousness that the light that can guide them to a bright future is not the ideology of the bourgeoisie or petty-bourgeoisie but that of the revolutionary working class. They, too, like the working class, demand that our art and literature guide them to look forward, not backward.

Accordingly, our literary and art workers, who give such important leadership to the spiritual life of the people, should spare no effort in striving to take the same stand as the working class and maintain close contact with the labouring masses. Only by going to the masses in a revolutionary spirit, making themselves a part of the masses, and fully comprehending their life, struggles, thoughts and emotions, can writers and artists hope to derive from the masses the urge, the imageries, the themes and material for their creative production which will eventually go back to and serve the masses in the form of really revolutionary creative works. And only by so doing can our literary and art works flourish, follow the highway of realism and avoid straying into the negation of realism, be welcomed by the masses and influence them, and become "an exceedingly active force".

Therefore our most urgent problem in our present work is to establish the ideological leadership of the working class firmly and assist the many literary and art workers who are not of the working class to go through ideological reform. Until this problem is solved, no other problems can be solved.

What then is the present path for writers and artists?

First, they should, in accordance with the instructions of Comrade Mao Tse-tung, engage themselves earnestly in ideological reform, study Marxism, and identify themselves with the workers, peasants and soldiers. The All-China Federation of Literary and Art Circles has selected some appropriate articles and has directed that criticism and self-criticism shall be used during study, so that literary and art workers can distinguish right from wrong and determine the correct standpoint. This is an excellent measure. We hope that this study will be pursued earnestly and that it will provide a starting point from which many of our writers and artists will leave the non-proletarian standpoint and attain the proletarian standpoint.

Second, Marxist ideology in regard to art and literature should be widely taught and non-Marxist ideologies should be criticised so that everyone may realise clearly that art and literature play an important part in the class struggle of the working class, that literature and art cannot remain indifferent to the cause of the working class and the broad masses, or treat all classes equally, but under the leadership of the working class must be a mighty weapon to unite and educate the people and to strike and destroy the enemy. Writers and artists must maintain close contact with the labouring masses, finding sources for creative work in their life and struggles.

Third, the leadership of our art and literature should be reorganised. Since our art and literature are the ideological struggle of the working class, their leadership must be ideological leadership as well as leadership of creative production and criticism. Therefore we must oppose the vulgar liberalism and excessive attention to administrative routine, which disregard ideology. We must enlarge and strengthen the leadership of creative production and criticism, and limit as far as possible our occupation with administrative affairs so as to diminish the routine and yet, at the same time, strengthen the administrative function in the production of art and literature.

Fourth, all literary and art organisations should be reorganised so that every really necessary literary and art organisation may become a combat unit which will effectively help writers and artists to identify themselves with the working people, and organise their creative work, criticism and study well. Organisations which cannot do so should be dissolved and "writers and artists" who cannot actually carry out literary and art work should be dismissed by the organisations concerned.

Fifth, all literary and art publications — and primarily periodicals — should be reorganised. The All-China Federation of Literary and Art Circles has already made a bold decision regarding the reorganisation of the latter. It is to be hoped that this decision will be carried out quickly and resolutely, and that in the future all literary and art periodicals will fight against slovenly writings and for higher ideological and art levels.

Sixth, we demand that writers and artists who are Party members become models in the afore-mentioned activities, i.e., models in the study of Marxism, models in uniting with the workers, peasants and soldiers, models in the practice of criticism and self-criticism,

and models in their literary or art work. We oppose any lack of discipline on the part of Party members who are literary or art workers.

Comrades, if we will only carry out these measures faithfully, we will certainly attain our goal. Let us stand together and raise the banner of art and literature of the People's Republic of China to greater heights!

## REMOULD OUR THOUGHT TO SERVE THE MASSES

by MAO TUN

It is just ten years since Chairman Mao Tse-tung's *Talks at the Yenan Forum on Literature and Art* was published in May, 1942. This historic document is a brilliant example of the profound integration of Marxism-Leninism with the practice of the Chinese revolution. It criticised certain shortcomings involving matters of principle in the revolutionary literary and art movement during the long period from the May 4th Movement in 1919 until 1942. It clarified various confused and non-proletarian ideas on literature and art still current in literary circles. It went to the heart of momentous questions of principle that had long been in dispute in this field, and solved these questions. It pointed out clearly that literature and art should serve the people and, first of all, the workers, peasants and soldiers. That to achieve this aim, literary and art workers should remould their ideology. That in order to remould their ideology, they must throw themselves wholeheartedly into the actual revolutionary struggle.

The publication of this document marked a great revolution in the literature and art of our country. It marked a great revolution in every sphere of the cultural life of our country.

The revolutionary literature and art of China had by no means been barren prior to the publication of this historic address. Nevertheless, the creative methods had been essentially those of critical realism. With the publication of this document, a new era of revolutionary realism dawned, marked by such works as *The White Haired Girl*, *The Rhymes of Li Yu-tsai*, *Sun over the Sangkan River*, and *The Hurricane*. But the significance and the greatness of the document go beyond this. It embodies the highest



guiding principles for our work in literature and art, both now and in the future when we enter the Socialist stage of our development. Its dialectical solution of the question of popularisation and improvement of quality, its correct instructions concerning the criteria of literary criticism, its penetrating critique of the bourgeois and petty-bourgeois outlook on literature and art, its valuable guidance on such questions as the ideological remoulding of literary and art workers and the united front in literature and art, are classics not only for China but for all countries where there is a struggle between revolutionary and counter-revolutionary literature and art.

The facts have proved that anyone, anywhere, who really understands Mao Tse-tung's teachings on literature and art as embodied in this historic document, and who persistently puts them into practice, cannot go wrong and will achieve results. Failing this, he will certainly make mistakes and do a bad job. Therefore, as the entire nation commemorates the tenth anniversary of this Talks, we must intensify our study of it, and examine our work and our outlook on literature and art.

It cannot be denied that serious ideological confusion still exists in our literary and art world. There are still serious mistakes and shortcomings in our work, some of which were first disclosed in last year's movement for the ideological remoulding of literary and art workers, and later in the movement against corruption, waste and bureaucracy. There are many reasons for such mistakes, but the chief is our failure to understand fully Chairman Mao's line in literature and art. We imagine we have understood, when such is not the case. Hence we often blunder or go astray in carrying out policies. These blunders are due primarily to our failure to carry out the principle of writing and working "for the workers, peasants and soldiers".

In his Yen-an Talks Chairman Mao raised the question: For whom are we writing? "This problem may seem to have been solved by our comrades engaged in literary and art work in the various anti-Japanese bases," he said, ". . . but actually, this is not the case. Many of our comrades have not found a clear-cut solution." Even today we can say there are many among us who still have not found a clear-cut solution.

The next question is: What methods are we to adopt? We all assert that our first step is to reach as wide a public as possible.

We say, "Improvement of quality is based on popularisation, and popularisation is in turn guided by the improvement of quality." But our actual work proves that we have either looked down on popularisation or misinterpreted or vulgarised it. Or we have considered popularisation and improvement of quality as two separate things, saying in effect, "You reach a wider public, while I raise the standard." Some of us even go so far as to look for "quality" in the literature and art of the bourgeoisie. A whole series of such mistakes occur continually.

In his Yen-an Talks, Chairman Mao repeatedly warns us that the problem of "whom to serve" is the fundamental one. That in order to take a firm stand on this question and do our work well all literary and art workers of petty-bourgeois origin should go through ideological remoulding. Undoubtedly we have all read the Talks, and memorised this passage in it. The question however is not whether we have read it or memorised it, but whether we are able to act in accordance with its instructions and do our utmost to carry them out.

Chairman Mao has told us that to be truly able to serve the workers, peasants and soldiers, literary and art workers should first of all throw themselves into the actual revolutionary struggle so that their thoughts and feelings may be remoulded. At the same time, they must study both Marxism-Leninism and society. He further said that "by Marxism-Leninism we mean the living Marxism-Leninism that is completely applicable to the life and struggle of the masses, not the Marxism-Leninism found only in books." Therefore the crux of the matter is whether we throw ourselves whole-heartedly into the actual revolutionary struggle. Today, no one would say that he is against doing so. However, those who have really "thrown themselves into the actual revolutionary struggle" have not necessarily all done so "whole-heartedly". At a certain moment, on a certain matter, they may be whole-hearted; but at another moment and on another matter, they may be only half-hearted.

What constitutes whole-heartedness? By this we mean to be entirely selfless, to hold firmly to the principle of serving the people — particularly the workers, peasants and soldiers, and firmly and uncompromisingly oppose all that is detrimental to their interests. Unless a person acts in this way, he can only be described as "half-hearted". In this case, although he may participate physic-

ally in the struggle, he remains actually a spectator. Such an attitude seriously hinders ideological remoulding.

It should be noted that most of our intellectuals coming from the petty-bourgeoisie are brain workers. In the old society they were constantly threatened by unemployment, their life was very unsettled, and many of them even lived on the verge of starvation. This made the great majority of them dissatisfied with the old society and want a revolution.

In the old society, the insecurity and constant threat of unemployment among the literary and art workers were as severe as, if not worse than, that among intellectuals in other occupations. This explains their revolutionary nature. A considerable number of them have, in fact, joined the revolution. But it is just because of this that they and other petty-bourgeois intellectuals often at heart resist ideological remoulding to a greater or lesser degree. They think, "I've always been a brain worker and never exploited anyone. I've always wanted the revolution. Am I not one of the working people? Why do I still have to go through ideological remoulding?" In other words, they deny having any non-proletarian ideology, and therefore see no need for ideological remoulding. But this is wrong, because although "the intellectual does not stand in any economic antagonism to the proletariat, his status of life and his conditions of labour are not proletarian, and this gives rise to a certain antagonism in sentiments and ideas." (Lenin) This is exactly the case with petty-bourgeois intellectuals. On the one hand, they easily "accept" the revolution; but on the other, they stand in a certain antagonism to the proletariat in the sphere of ideology. Whoever refuses to admit this fact will achieve little in ideological remoulding even though he has joined the revolution and thrown himself into the actual struggle. And if a literary or art worker denies this fact, it is impossible for him to serve the workers, peasants and soldiers truly.

The above-mentioned failure to throw oneself whole-heartedly into the actual struggle and the refusal to admit one's non-proletarian ideology are common defects among literary and art workers coming from the petty-bourgeoisie. They are also the chief stumbling blocks in the path of our ideological remoulding. Recent events reveal that if a man's ideology has not been thoroughly remoulded, even after living among workers, peasants and soldiers, and throwing himself into the struggle for a long time, he will not be able

to resist the corrosive influence of bourgeois ideology when confronted with a change of environment. He will, in consequence, fail to stand firm, and make serious mistakes. From this we should realise clearly that ideological remoulding is a protracted and arduous process.

It is exceedingly dangerous to think complacently that ideological remoulding is completed after spending several months in the countryside or working in a factory for half a year. The effectiveness of remoulding has to be tested by concrete problems. For literary and art workers, whose business is to create, their works will be the test. If a writer wants to test whether his ideology has been remoulded, the best method is to keep on writing and practise serious criticism and self-criticism. Write — practise criticism and self-criticism — plunge again deep into life to learn from the masses — then write again — practise criticism and self-criticism — plunge into life again. . . . Only by repeating this process can ideological remoulding really succeed.

The following question has been put forward:

When reading some one else's work, I can often discover defects in it and point out what is non-proletarian in its ideology. But when I come to write myself, although I don't dress my characters as workers, peasants and soldiers while giving them the thoughts and emotions of the petty-bourgeoisie, still, compared with real people — combat heroes or model workers — my characters are wide of the mark. In a word, my writing lacks profound ideological content. But why is this so? Is it because my ideology has not been well remoulded and, therefore, I cannot produce work of a high ideological level?

This question is a common one and one that troubles many writers. It is a case of what is meant by the Chinese saying: "Sharp eyes but clumsy hands". Undoubtedly it is dangerous if a writer's eyes are not sharp. Nor is there a writer in the world whose eyes are dull but whose hands are deft, that is to say, one who fails to see faults in others' works and yet is flawless in his own. Conversely, keen eyesight is a prerequisite to deft hands. The question is how to make the hands as efficient as the eyes.

What, then, is meant by "hands"? Some regard it as the technique of writing, and regard "eyes" and "hands" as opposites. They say, "Our eyes are keen enough", meaning "Our ideology is of a sufficiently high level". "Now we only have to train our hands",



that is, to "improve our technique". I do not altogether agree with these views. Moreover, I think them harmful.

When a literary work lacks ideological quality, or its ideological level is low, the fundamental reason is that the writer lacks the ability for profound thought — his powers of observation and analysis are not sufficiently keen or comprehensive enough. This is not a matter of technique. Technique here is a secondary consideration.

Such views are harmful because they are the source of most of such erroneous tendencies as concentrating on technique and regarding technique and ideology as in opposition to each other. The correct solution to the question has been pointed out in Chairman Mao's Talks. It is to study Marxism-Leninism and study society.

Writers and artists should study literature and art. That is correct. But Marxism-Leninism is a science that every revolutionary must study, and writers and artists are no exception. Besides, we must also study society, that is, study the various social classes, their interrelation, their individual condition, outward appearance and psychology.

Moreover:

We study Marxism-Leninism only so that we can observe the world, society, literature and art from the viewpoint of dialectical materialism and historical materialism, not so that we can write philosophical discourses into our works of literature and art. Marxism-Leninism can only embrace but cannot replace realism in creations of literature and art, just as it can only embrace but not replace the theory of atoms and electrons in physics.

On the basis of these instructions given by Chairman Mao, we can see that for intellectuals of petty-bourgeois origin the first step is to remould their ideology. This means to establish the standpoint of serving the workers, peasants and soldiers. Without this standpoint, or failing to hold to it firmly, we may profess to serve the workers, peasants and soldiers, while actually not doing so at all.

But even if we have this standpoint, it does not mean that we have mastered Marxism-Leninism. We must still study it, for it is a science which every revolutionary must study, and writers and artists are no exception. Since writers and artists portray living people and social phenomena, they have to study society as well. They have to study the various classes of society, their interrelation and respective conditions, their physiognomy and psychology. For

a profound and comprehensive study of these, dialectical materialism and historical materialism are absolutely indispensable.

Hence, the afore-mentioned question of "sharp eyes but clumsy hands" serves to show that although that particular writer has gone through a process of ideological remoulding, he is still not adept at applying the principles of dialectical materialism and historical materialism in his observation of society. This is where the crux of the matter lies, and not in whether his ideology has been well remoulded, as he puts it. To say a person has not remoulded his ideology well means that there are still non-proletarian ideological elements in his thinking. When these are reflected in his writings, it becomes a question of whether his work is fundamentally unsound or not. It is not a question of whether his ideological level is high or low.

When we say that the ideological level of a certain piece of writing is not high, we mean that while there is no mistake in principle in such a work, nevertheless, its observations and analysis are not comprehensive and profound enough. The questions raised have not gone to the heart of social contradictions. It fails to distinguish between major and minor contradictions. It fails to express the universal nature of the contradictions on the one hand and their particular nature on the other. It fails to express the unity and conflict of the various aspects of the contradictions.

If a writer of proletarian origin does not study Marxism-Leninism and is not good at applying the principles of dialectical materialism and historical materialism in his observation of society, he too will be unable to produce a work of high ideological quality.

Since the question of ideological remoulding for the petty-bourgeois intellectuals and writers and artists is one of determining standpoint, it must be considered a primary question, for "without such a remoulding, they can do nothing well."

Chairman Mao's Yen-an Talks, taking into consideration the ideological conditions of literary and art circles and defects in their work at that time, gives clear guidance on such questions as "whom to serve" and "how to serve". Moreover, two philosophical treatises by Chairman Mao — *On Practice* and *On Contradiction* — published in July and August of 1937 respectively, deal even more comprehensively with the most fundamental problems regarding the creative methods of realism.

While it is vital for those of us who are engaged in literary and art work to study the Talks, it is no less important for us to grasp the principles enunciated in *On Practice* and *On Contradiction*. We should be much mistaken if we permitted ourselves to think that since these are philosophical treatises, they need not concern us as literary and art workers.

We have had some experience in life, but we are constantly at a loss to know how to "organise our materials", how to "generalise", how to "refine", how to "cut". And in writing this has inevitably resulted in mere cataloguing of phenomena, in "photographic" reproduction, in portraying the superficial phenomena of life without penetrating deep, in peering into corners instead of taking a bird's-eye view. All of these problems we can solve if we study *On Practice* carefully.

*On Practice* teaches us that as we immerse ourselves in life, we first gain a perceptual knowledge of things. This perceptual knowledge is a superficial knowledge of individual things. It is one-sided and partial in character, and cannot penetrate through the appearance of things to their substance and to the laws governing their development. Perceptual knowledge sometimes gives seemingly correct but in fact erroneous impressions. We should not be content therefore with its acquisition. We must go a step further to raise our perceptual knowledge to the level of rational knowledge, that is, to an understanding of things in their entirety, a knowledge of their substance and their internal relations. In other words, a more complete and deeper knowledge of things.

When we have raised our knowledge from the perceptual to the rational plane, we can then see the various connections between complex and constantly changing social phenomena, and the inevitable laws governing their development. Rational knowledge and perceptual knowledge are therefore "not only quantitatively but also qualitatively different". Nevertheless, rational knowledge must have a rich fund of perceptual knowledge as its base, for without it we cannot abstract knowledge of the laws embracing all phenomena.

This can be exemplified in the case of creating typical characters in literature and art. To create a typical character of a certain stratum of society, it is necessary to make a close study of at least a dozen people leading different kinds of lives within that stratum. Only then can one make a generalisation and thus create a character

typical of that stratum of society. Here the first step is to acquire a rich fund of perceptual knowledge. Next, it is necessary to raise this to the plane of rational knowledge by "generalisation". After rational knowledge has been acquired, it must be put to the test and further developed in actual practice. Only so can we acquire correct knowledge which is in conformity with objective truth.

In the case of literary creations, writing and experiencing life must follow one another in a constant cycle. It is only through the actual process of writing that we can test whether our knowledge is comprehensive and profound, that is, whether it has been raised from the perceptual to the rational plane. Likewise, it is only by returning to life to experience it deeply, after actual creative work, that we can test whether our rational knowledge conforms to objective truth — that is, to the laws governing the development of social reality. Herein lies the reason why the processes must be repeated in cycles. It is wrong to believe that having written about past experiences one is done with them, that the only purpose of going to life again is to obtain new material.

Although the acquisition of perceptual knowledge is only the first step in the process of cognition, nevertheless this step can never be skipped. By trying to omit it, we shall inevitably make our literary and art productions empty, dry, lifeless and merely conceptual. Conversely, if we rest content with a mass of perceptual knowledge, our works will sink into the quagmire of naturalism. Productions embodying only abstract conceptions are the result of doctrinairism, the fault of which lies in not admitting the necessity of starting from perceptual knowledge, and the necessity of putting rational knowledge to the test of actual practice. Naturalism in works of literature and art stems from empiricism. The error of the empiricist is that although equipped with rich experience of life (perceptual knowledge), he does not raise this to the plane of rational knowledge.

Apart from a tendency to conceptualism and naturalism, there is yet another defect common among our literary and art workers — formulisation. Let me elaborate on this point. In writing about the struggle of the new against the old, the backward elements and the course of their reform, we are not adept at integrating the universal with the particular aspects of contradictions, at reflecting the general through the particular. That is to say, although what we write is limited to individual things, we should look beyond them

so that the reader's knowledge is not confined to these individual things. Nor are we adept at distinguishing and analysing major and secondary contradictions. As a result, our characters and plots fall into the rut of formulisation.

There are some superficial resemblances between formulised productions and works which are conceptual or naturalistic, but in substance they are different. (Of course, the next step after formulisation is schematism, and works of this kind do not differ in substance from those of conceptualism. The writers who schematise have no experience of life. They merely plagiarise other writers' presentation of the struggle between the new and the old, or of the backward elements and the course of their reform. With this as the pattern they artificially create characters and plots in a mere patchwork.)

Formulised work is produced chiefly because the writer, although possessed of rich experience of life, is not able (does not know how) to raise his perceptual knowledge to the plane of rational knowledge. *On Practice* teaches us how to develop our thinking correctly, how to apply to our perceptual knowledge a remoulding and constructive process by means of

straining the refined from the crude, sifting the true from the false, deriving the yet unascertained from the ascertained, and probing beneath the surface.

The basic method is to explore a rich fund of perceptual material for all kinds of contradictions in objective phenomena. A study of *On Contradiction* will enable us to grasp the fundamental method of "studying society".

First of all we must realise that:

The basic cause of the development of things does not lie outside but inside them, in their internal contradictions. The movement and development of things arise because of the presence of such contradictions in all of them. The contradiction within a thing is the basic cause of its development. Its interconnection with and interaction upon other things are secondary causes of its development.

Since the object of study for literary and art workers is the multiform and ever-changing development of society and life, they must understand that:

Social changes are chiefly due to the development of the internal contradictions in society, namely, the contradictions between the productive forces and the relations of production, the contradictions between classes,

the contradictions between the old and the new. It is the development of these contradictions that impels society forward and expedites the process whereby a new society supersedes the old.

Therefore the presentation and the resolution of contradictions are the indispensable basic tasks of any work of literature or art. A work that fails to reveal contradictions is unrealistic, because real life is full of contradictions.

But contradictions have both universality and particularity. A writer may see only the universality of contradictions, without discerning the particularity. In other words, he may make a general observation of the over-all aspects of things (for example, if in going to a factory, he only contacts the leading cadres in the management or in the executive committee of the trade union), without penetrating into the particular aspects (by contacting individual workers in the workshops or work teams), thus failing to unearth the particulars which are decisive. Then his writing will present only the universality of contradiction. "The contradiction in each form of motion of matter has its own particular nature." Any literary work which presents only the universality of a contradiction is bound to be one-sided. "Not understanding the characteristics of each aspect of a contradiction", understanding, for instance, only the proletariat but not the bourgeoisie, understanding only the peasants but not the landlords . . . this is called "viewing the problem one-sidedly".

Again:

To consider neither the characteristics of the contradiction as a whole nor the characteristics of each of its aspects, to deny the necessity of penetrating into things to study minutely the characteristics of a contradiction, but merely view it from a distance, and, having roughly noted a slight indication of a contradiction, want to begin solving it

— this a superficial way of looking at a problem. Defects in literary and art creations caused by conceptualism and formulisation of all sorts and shades are related to the writer's one-sided or superficial way of looking at things. The relation between the universality and particularity of contradiction has been summarised by Chairman Mao as follows:

The relation between the universality and the particularity of contradiction is the relation between the common and the individual character of contradictions. By common character we mean that contradiction exists in all processes and runs through all processes from beginning to end. . . . Hence its common or absolute character. But this common character is

contained in all individual character. Without individual character there can be no common character. . . . Because each contradiction is particular, its individual character is formed. All individual characters exist conditionally and temporarily, hence they are relative.

These words are of tremendous importance to all literary and art workers. Any piece of work, if it can express the common and the individual character of contradictions, will be a work of high ideological level.

Moreover, in a situation where a number of contradictions coexist, there will be among them a principal contradiction and secondary contradictions. What is meant by a principal contradiction?

If, in any process, a number of contradictions exist, only one of them is the principal contradiction playing the leading and decisive role. The rest occupy a secondary and subordinate position. Thus, in studying any process . . . we must devote our whole energy to discovering its principal contradiction.

But

The principal and the non-principal aspects of a contradiction transform themselves into each other, and the quality of a thing changes accordingly.

Formulation in works of art is due to the failure to analyse a number of contradictions and distinguish between the principal and secondary ones. This results in failure to portray the inter-transformation of the principal and non-principal aspects of contradiction.

As mentioned above, Chairman Mao Tse-tung's Talks has made it clear to us that the problem of "whom to serve" must be solved first, then the problem of "how to serve". To be really able to solve these problems, it is absolutely necessary to undergo a process of ideological remoulding. There is only one line for us to follow in our work, and that is the line of serving the workers, peasants and soldiers.

With regard to the problem of "studying society", which is part of the basic principles governing the creative method of realism, and which was not dwelt on at length in the Talks, detailed and profound instructions are given in *On Practice* and *On Contradiction*. These three documents are the classics of our Marxist-Leninist literary theory. With such profound and all-embracing principles to guide us, with the government helping us, giving us

every facility for remoulding our ideology and experiencing life, and living in such a great and brilliant epoch, we could not wish for better conditions. The blame is surely our own if we are still not able to produce works worthy of this great era.

On the occasion of the tenth anniversary of the publication of the *Talks at the Yen-an Forum on Literature and Art*, let us firmly resolve to do two things: first, penetrate deeply into the life and struggles of the masses and earnestly remould our ideology; and second, study society humbly and sedulously, and resolutely follow the line of serving the workers, peasants and soldiers.



# Sun Over The Sangkan River

by Ting Ling

*Ting Ling was born in 1907 in Hunan Province, Central China. Brought up at a period when the oppressed Chinese workers and peasants and patriotic intellectuals rose in revolt against feudal warlords and imperialists culminating in the revolution of 1927, she was imbued with progressive ideas since school days. She took up writing as a weapon against the old social order, and by the early '30s was already an active fighter in the left literary movement. Since then she has never swerved an inch from the path taken by the Chinese Communist Party — the path which led to the liberation of China.*

*This novel, which won the Stalin Second Prize for literature in 1951, was completed in 1948 when the People's Liberation Army started a general offensive against the Kuomintang forces. Like all of Ting Ling's works, it is based on the life she shared with the people. To quote her own words, "In July 1946, I took part in the land reform in Huailai County. . . . In September I returned to Fuping, where I began to write this novel. . . . In 1947, anxious to share more struggle with the people, I again went to the country to check the results of the previous land reform. . . . No sooner had I resumed writing than the Draft Land Reform Law was proclaimed. I therefore decided to suspend the work in progress and participated in the land distribution movement for another four months. . . ." Written in the midst of actual struggle, this novel is a unique artistic representation of the historic events that took place during the early days of the liberation war and that have brought a new life to the Chinese people.*

## CHAPTER I

The weather was sweltering. Although it was only about four miles from their starting point, Pali Bridge, to the river Yang,

White Nose's chest and flanks were soaked with sweat. She was Hutai's best mule, and pulled well, though the cart track was so muddy. The sun hanging in the west was hidden by a clump of roadside willows, but the heat was still intense, and the muddy water splattered into the cart from the wheels felt warm against bare legs. At last leaving the flooded road, the cart came to a dry place. Only then did Old Ku, who had been urging on White Nose continuously, relax. Sitting up straight, he reached for the tobacco pouch behind him.

"Dyeh! \* What a downpour that day! Look at the state this road is in, like a muddy stream!" Da, his elder daughter with her son on her knee, was sitting to the right of the old man, a little further back. She wore a new cotton gown with blue flowers on a white ground. Her hair had been cut and hung straight down at the back, combed up high in front. She was looking about her cheerfully, for to be going home with her father was a piece of rare good fortune.

"The Yang's in flood, you sit still!" The old fellow beat a rat-tat-tat with his pipe. It was proving a difficult journey.

When they reached the river and started across, the two cart wheels were practically submerged. All that could be seen of White Nose was her big spine which seemed to be writhing through the water. Old Ku's daughter held her child more tightly and gripped the side of the cart, while water from behind splattered forward. The old man flicked his whip, calling out encouragement to the mule as the cart rocked from side to side. The stretch of water in front of the cart, lit up by the sun, dazzled the eyes. The old man could not see clearly and sweat poured down his wrinkled face. The cart bogged down, then was extricated again, rocked violently, then righted itself again, till at last White Nose emerged from the river, and slowly planted her four hooves in shallow water. On the river's south bank, the cart once more reached the road and a gust of wind rose, delightfully cool!

As on the north bank of the Yang, rice was growing here in abundant profusion. The shoots were thick and tall, the height of a man's shoulder. Kaoliang screened everything else, its leaves as wide as maize leaves. The soil was moist and black, and a rich odour emanated from the thick growth. Then there came vegetable gardens encircled by irrigation ditches, the land neatly divided into patches of dark and light green. Each time Old Ku passed this

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\* Familiar term for "father".

way he felt an inexpressible longing to own a piece of such fine land himself. He could never have enough land, and he could not resist saying to his daughter: "In the section north of the river the land round Pali Bridge where you live is the best. In our Tsolu county this Sixth District is the best. See how rich this soil is. Every three years a crop of rice, and a bigger harvest in one year here than in two years elsewhere."

"Planting rice one gets more out of the land, only it's troublesome. The water has to be changed every other night, and you have to keep at it all the time. . . . My father-in-law says the orchard land in our Nuanshui village is good. I hear this is a bumper year." Thinking of the orchard trees at her old home, laden with bright red fruit, Da recalled how she and her family used to burn piles of weeds in the orchard and pick fruit there, piling it up into little mountains, then packing it into baskets to take to market — what fun it had been! But that reminded her of the pear tree which had been damaged.

"Has that willow of Chien's been cut or not?" she asked, frowning.

The old man shook his head without saying anything. "Hmph! What a relative!" she said impatiently. "But couldn't you ask the village cadres to settle the matter? Or if it's beyond them there's always the district court."

"I'm not quarreling with him over that. One tree can't ruin me, and I can make it up by sweating some more in other ways. Besides, only half of it was torn down, and we're getting quite a few pears from it this year." He sighed. Last spring when Old Ku's son Shun was digging an irrigation ditch he had grazed a willow tree belonging to Chien and growing on the ditch. Later the tree fell in a high wind, coming down across the ditch and crashing into Ku's pear tree, tearing half of it off. Chien wanted Shun to pay for the damage to his willow and would not let anyone move it. Shun wanted to argue it out with Chien and ask why he didn't look after his own tree. But Shun's father would not let him. The whole village could see quite well the pear was dying by degrees. All felt sorry about it, but only discussed it in private, not wanting to meddle in other people's affairs.

Now the old man turned to look at his daughter with eyes that constantly watered. Only after a long look did he wipe his eyes, turning round again and saying to himself: "Young people have no sense!"

He devoted all his attention once more to the mule. The Sangkan River could be seen ahead. The sun was sinking toward the western hills, and from the fields on either side of the road rose swarms of mosquitoes. They bit the little boy so badly that he cried. His mother flapped her handkerchief, to drive them off. Pointing to the trees at the foot of the mountain on the other side of the river she soothed the child: "We're nearly there, we're nearly there. Look, all those are fruit trees, filled with red and green fruit. We'll go and pick it, and it'll all be for you, Little Paitzu. There, there . . ."

Once more the cart was rocking through the river. This was in the lower reaches of the Sangkan River; five miles further on it joined the river Yang. The Sangkan flowed from Shansi to southern Chahar, carrying prosperity with it, and here its lower reaches were even richer.

Now Old Ku was giving all his attention to White Nose, mentally thanking his stars for such a good beast and for Hutai's strongly built cart with its rubber tyres. It would have been no easy matter travelling that muddy road and fording two rivers without it.

Once more the cart gained the river bank. When it reached the farms, the peasants who were still hoeing the fields stared at both cart and passengers and wondered: "Has the old man bought another cart? The crops aren't in yet, where could he have got the money?" But they had little time for speculation. The fields were growing dark, and the peasants bent again to their painstaking weeding.

The ground gradually began to rise. Slowly the cart passed fields of kaoliang, millet, flax and peas, and reached the area of orchards. Both sides of the road were thickly planted with trees surrounded by low mud walls, some branches overhanging the walls. Most of the fruit was still green, but some of it had already turned an inviting red. Voices could be heard from the orchard. Passing these orchards the cart turned into the street. Idlers were squatting outside the gate of the primary school in front of which was a stage. A group of villagers was sitting beside a wall. Others were leaning against the window of the cooperative keeping up a desultory conversation with the people inside, while watching the street. The rubber-tyred cart attracted the attention of these chatterers, some of whom came running over.

A few called out: "Where did you get that cart? What a fine mule!"

With a mumbled reply Old Ku jumped down from the cart, took the beast's bridle and hurriedly turned off at the crossroads in the direction of his home, giving his daughter no time to greet her friends.

## CHAPTER II

Old Ku was fourteen when he came with his brother to Nuan-shui village. He had been a shepherd while his brother worked as a hired hand. The two of them had toiled for forty-eight years, their blood and sweat dripping into the barren land to which their hopes were fixed. As year after year passed and the country changed hands repeatedly, their hardships began to tell on them. However, thanks to their hard work they gradually acquired land and became respectable farmers. Since their family grew fast they needed more and more land. Because they had many hands and the whole family of sixteen, men and women, old and young alike all worked on the land, they were able to conquer it. Their acreage increased until they had to hire a number of day labourers. People in need of money sold their property to Old Ku, and spendthrift sons of ruined landlords' families after a bout of gambling made over their title deeds to him too. At first he used paper to wrap up these title deeds, then a piece of cloth, and finally a small wooden case. He also bought a house with two large courtyards from the landlord Li, and everybody said that in recent years his was the only family to prosper, since both his family and fortune were increasing.

His third son, Shun, was lucky enough to attend school, and brought home a junior primary school's graduation certificate. He could write and calculate, and was a hard worker. Being a straightforward youngster who took part in village activities he was made Vice-Chairman of the Youth Association. So long as this chairmanship did not interfere unduly with his work, his father raised no objection.

Ku's elder daughter Da had married into Hutai's family at Pali Bridge. Hutai's family was quite well off. In the past two years they had bought carts, and owned a mill. Pali Bridge was on the railway, so the Hutai family did some business in transportation

too. As the women in the family did not have to work on the land they gradually grew a little sophisticated, liking to dress in foreign materials. Da was in her late twenties. Old Ku's other daughter Erh had married Yi, younger son of Chien who lived in the same village. Chien was one of the most prominent men in the neighbourhood. When he sent someone to arrange the match, Old Ku, fearing to offend him, had to agree, although he disliked Chien because he was not a proper farmer. After her marriage Erh often came home and cried to her mother, although the Chien family led a more comfortable life, the women doing little work and not cultivating the land. They depended on rents and, even more, on Chien's other activities. Hence, although they owned only sixty to seventy *mou*\* of land they lived better than most people.

The previous autumn the village cadres had urged Ku's second son to join the Eighth Route Army. Old Ku considered that since the Japanese had surrendered, his boy would not have to stay in the army long. The farm could do without him because the family had been fairly well off the last few years. Since he had three sons he could very well let one go. And he had not asked for any compensation. His son, stationed in Tsolu county town, often wrote home. As long as there was no fighting Ku felt easy about him. He would wait for a while and see.

That spring Chien had sent his son too. Yi wanted to join the army, but his wife, Ku's daughter Erh, was unwilling. She, however, did not dare say anything, seeing that her husband's father Chien was pleased about it. Chien said he was supporting the Eighth Route Army, that the Communists looked all right to him. Chien also reasoned with Ku: "It's better for him to go. Nowadays things have changed, and to have people in the Eighth Route Army is all to the good. You know, we're called 'army dependents'."

### CHAPTER III

The arrival of Hutai's rubber-tyred cart gave the Nuanshui villagers something new to talk about. Nuanshui and its neigh-

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\* About 1/6 of an acre.

bouring villages were in the mountains, off the main line of communication, and none of them could boast of so fine a cart. In the past, landlord Li had only owned an iron-wheeled cart, and this year the coöperative had bought an old cart. Now how had Old Ku got hold of such a fine cart? Some of the more curious made enquiries and found there was no mystery. It was because Hutai at Pali Bridge was ill and could not use the cart, that he let his relative borrow it for a few days. Sure enough the next day Old Ku went to Hsia Garden to fetch coal, making another trip the following day, whereupon all were satisfied and asked no more questions. The only person in the village not to believe his story was Chien.

Chien came of a peasant family, but during the past years the villagers had virtually forgotten his origin. He seemed like a rich man from another world rather than a farmer. Although he had only studied with a tutor for two years he behaved like a city gentleman. All he said and did was premeditated. In his youth he had liked to travel. He had been to Kalgan and even to Peking one year, coming back wearing a big fur cloak and hat. While still in his twenties he grew a moustache. He knew all the ward chiefs and was on very familiar terms with them. Later he got to know the members of the county government, and when the Japanese came he established contact with higher circles. It had come about that if any of the villagers had to be chosen as ward chief, made to contribute money or act as porter, his word was law. He never held office either as *hsiang* \* leader or ward chief. Neither did he do business. Yet everybody treated him with respect and sent him presents and money. He was spoken of as the man behind the scenes and wielded great power. His family lived just like city people, with wine and fragrant tea every day and white flour and rice as regular fare, not seeing a kaoliang or maize dumpling from one end of the year to another, and they all dressed fashionably.

Now that the Japanese had gone and the Communists were in power, with the arrival of the Eighth Route Army people on all sides were settling old scores. The previous year the villagers of Nuanshui had given Hsu, the former *hsiang* head, a public trial, and confiscated his property. He had fled to Peking and his family had gone to Kalgan. That spring they had also tackled Hou and fined him one hundred bushels of millet. But Chien sat at home

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\* An administrative unit composed of several villages.

not doing a stroke of work, smoking cigarettes and fanning himself. Because his son had joined the Eighth Route Army and Chien had found a village security officer to be his son-in-law while some other cadres were his friends, no one dared to lift a finger against him. When villagers met him they smiled politely. But they preferred to keep out of his way, because if he took a dislike to you he would take secret steps to injure you. He only had to say a few words, and you suffered without even knowing it was his doing. Behind his back the common people called him a 'sharpster', the foremost of the eight sharpsters in the village.

When Chien heard that Old Ku had borrowed Hutai's cart he chuckled to himself: "A straightforward fellow like you, Old Ku, learning to tell lies too? If Hutai were really ill, would he let his daughter-in-law come home? Isn't it time to get in the garlic? Hutai must have planted at least four or five *mou* of it this year, for this is the year for them to grow vegetables at Pali Bridge. And the women in his house alone couldn't string all the garlic. There must be more in this than meets the eye." Chien felt he must get to the bottom of the business, for he was incorrigibly inquisitive. It upset him if he could not probe out any secret at once. He set about investigating this matter which everyone else believed to be plain and above board.

At breakfast time he watched his daughter-in-law carefully. After hurriedly setting rice and dishes on the table on his *kang* \*, Erh turned to go. She was very afraid of her father-in-law, and now he asked her: "Have you been home?"

"No." Erh stopped, and glanced suspiciously at Chien. She was a grave looking girl.

Eyeing her glossy black hair, her father-in-law went on: "Your sister is back."

"She came back yesterday evening with your father. People say she was dressed very finely. After all Pali Bridge is a big village, all the women there like to dress well." The speaker was Chien's wife of nearly fifty, who had already lost two or three teeth, yet wore a wig to which she often fastened flowers. She had just brought in the bowls and chopsticks, and now joined in the conversation.

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\* An enclosed brick platform through which heat is piped. It serves as a bed at night.



Chien's glance had fallen on the silver bracelets on the girl's wrists. His searching scrutiny made her feel her rough hands very awkward, and she crumpled the corners of her dress till her snow-white tunic hid the ruddy hands from sight. When her father-in-law took up his wine cup she made another attempt to leave, but he spoke to her again: "After the meal go home and have a look. Ask your sister how the harvest is there."

When she left the room Erh hurried to the kitchen where her sister-in-law and nephew were eating, and her cousin Heini was boiling water to make tea. Going in she could not help exclaiming: "Heini!"

Everybody in the kitchen stared at her. Heini blinked her great black eyes, then broke into a laugh: "Erh! Whatever's the matter with you?"

Erh was about to tell her when Chien called for his niece Heini from the northern room. Heini hastily made the tea and took a tray with two cups and the tea-pot in to her uncle. Erh followed her out, then stood looking at the two pomegranate and oleander trees in the courtyard. A butterfly was fluttering among the flame-coloured flowers.

Chien told his niece that he wished her to accompany Erh home to see the visitor from Pali Bridge. She should ask what illness Hutai had and what news there was, because living by the railway they heard all the news quickly and were the first to know of any changes. He was worried about the Kuomintang troops and the possibility of civil war.

"What does that matter?" said Heini. "I shan't ask. It's nothing to do with us." But she was scolded, and dared not protest any more. Still she thought to herself, "Uncle Chien just likes to poke his nose into other people's business."

But when she had had breakfast and changed her dress she went with Erh to the Ku family. She meant to be sure to ask the questions her uncle had told her to, without necessarily telling him all the answers. She had grown a little fonder of her Uncle Chien, because she felt he wasn't so harsh recently, and seldom scolded her. Indeed he sometimes showed signs of sympathy.

## CHAPTER IV

Leaving her husband's home Erh felt like a bird released from its cage, grown younger again. She was only twenty-three. Like a wild date tree she loved the fresh morning wind and blazing sun. She was not pretty, but sturdy and strong, with something charming in her awkwardness. However since her marriage she had changed. She had never worn the complacent look of some brides, but seemed like wild grass torn from the earth and wilting. She got along all right with her husband who was a simple young fellow. They made a respectable couple and gave nobody any cause for concern.

That spring she had been unwilling for Yi to join the army, and cried for some indefinable reason — not entirely because she would miss him. Yi too had felt rather reluctant to go, because she was so young and had no children. But since his father insisted, he braced himself and left. She had wanted to live on her own, because that spring her father-in-law had divided fifty *mou* of land between his two sons and registered them as separate families. But they did not actually separate. Chien said if the family separated there would be no one to cook for him, and now that he was one of the proletariat he could not afford a servant. As she came of a peasant family, Erh enjoyed working in the fields. She liked hard, simple labour and felt thoroughly bored just cooking, sewing and waiting on her in-laws. She had asked permission to go with Heini to the Literacy Class, but had been refused. Actually none of these things accounted for her uneasiness, which was due largely to fear. Fear of what? She dared not admit it, even to herself, but she feared her father-in-law.

Coming out of their lane they reached the centre of the village. The primary school, the former Dragon King Temple, occupied the best building in the place. Usually clear, well-conducted singing and happy laughter could be heard from here, and only in the evening did things quieten down. Under two big trees outside the school gate where some stone benches had been set at random, men often came to enjoy the cool and smoke. Women would sit a little further off sewing shoe soles or minding children. In the space opposite the school was a big, empty square platform, the remains of what had once been a stage. In front of it were two large locust trees, their dense leaves

intermingling to weave a natural canopy over the space before the platform. An occasional peddler or melon vendor often rested here. On the left behind the stage was the cooperative, and on the right a soya bean mill. Beside the cooperative a big Black-board News had been set up, and on the bean mill wall was written in large characters the slogan: "Follow Chairman Mao forever!" A wide road ran south, with brick houses on either side where the rich families of the village lived. To the west were small lanes where all the houses were of mud, squalidly packed with people.

Coming out from the northeast corner of the village Erh and Heini took the road leading south. Old Ku's family had moved several years previously from the west section to this central street, and were living in a house that had belonged to landlord Li, the Money-bags.

Only Mother Ku and her grand-children were at home just then. Da was washing her nephews' and nieces' clothes. In the morning half the courtyard was in shade and it was not too hot. Mother Ku was sitting beside her daughter stringing runner beans, the two of them chatting together. The children were dragging a stool which they had set upside down in the yard. On the front they had tied a string, and inside placed a brick.

As she rounded the gate-house Erh called out a greeting. Da looked round, and seeing Heini's tall figure behind her younger sister she stood up, holding out her wet hands, and went to meet them. After looking one another over from head to foot they started chatting, and Mother Ku said: "Heini! What good wind blew you here today? Have you had a letter from Yi recently?"

When they had sat down in the shady part of the courtyard Da brought a fan from the house for Heini, who opened it and looked at the picture on it.

While Erh helped with the beans Da described to them how someone in her village had changed into a wolf. It was all hearsay, but the people who told her believed it was true, and it made a good story. Then she talked about a well-known Mr. Ma in their village, an old scholar who had written a petition to the county government accusing the village cadres of 'ruining the country, injuring the people and plotting high treason'. He denounced them as puppets. When the village cadres brought this letter back from the district nobody could understand it, but all asked, laughing, "What are puppets?" Now nobody in the village would have any-

thing to do with him. Even his son refused to talk to him. Formerly it was because of him, the old lecher, that the son's wife had run away. He really was the limit; although over sixty he couldn't keep his hands off women. He had a terrible reputation.

After Da had hung her washing out to dry, they went in to the northern room. The screen window was broken and Mother Ku had never had it mended, so the room was full of flies. Even Mother Ku admitted they had spoiled a good house.

Mother Ku took the stringed beans to the kitchen and brought back a pot of tea, and they went on gossiping. Da described an opera she had seen recently, called "The White-haired Girl", in which a tenant's daughter was ill-treated by the landlord's son. The girl's father was driven to commit suicide, after she was sold to repay debts. Then her mistress beat her and the son of the house raped her. When she had an illegitimate child she dared not face people, and finally they wanted to sell her again. . . . Da said this play was so well acted many of the audience were moved to tears. A woman living next door to them had cried the most bitterly, because her life had been much the same. She had been sold like that too. When the play was over no one wanted to leave. And on the way home all cursed the landlord's son, saying, "He got off too lightly. He ought to have been beaten to death, but they just arrested him and took him to the county court. Who knows when he'll be shot."

After a while Heini grew tired. She said good-bye and went home first. Forgetting her uncle's orders, she had not asked a single question, and the others did not detain her. After she left they started discussing her, her age and her misfortune in having no parents. Because even though she dressed fairly well, nobody cared for her, and she was not married yet. What would become of her no one could tell.

Last of all Da spoke of all the rumours at Pali Bridge. Their village cadres had attended a meeting in the town of Pingan where everything was humming with daily meetings to share out property and divide up land. It was said things would start moving soon at Pali Bridge. Her father-in-law was worried because last year when they had a trial before the masses, someone had been killed and his property confiscated. And now they wanted to share out property again — plenty of people had their eyes on the land of Hutai's family. Her father-in-law intended to plead with the

cadres. If they wanted to share out land, well and good, but they shouldn't try him at a mass meeting. Because he was afraid they would take both carts he had let her father bring one back. He would tell people he had sold it until this trouble blew over.

Then miming her father-in-law, Da said: "The Communists are all right, but they only help poor people. Anyone with a little property is in for trouble. The Eighth Route Army doesn't beat or curse people, and what they borrow they return. The last half year or so we've made a little money in business, and frankly speaking life is much better than when the Japanese were here. There's just one thing—they're always telling poor people to stand on their feet. But a man only stands on his feet if he himself works hard for a living. The poor can't get rich simply by sharing out other people's property."

## CHAPTER V

Heini's father had died when she was five. Her mother struggled along for two years, but they had little land. Things went badly, and having no son she was forced to marry again. At first she wanted to keep her daughter with her but Chien would not agree to it, saying the child was his brother's flesh and blood. And so Heini went to live with her Uncle Chien. Neither her uncle nor aunt was fond of her. They decided to bring her up as a maid-servant, and hoped later to make money out of her, because even as a child she was good looking, with a pair of clear limpid eyes.

Chien had a daughter older than Heini called Tani, who was not pretty but artful like her father and fond of bullying people. Heini was quite a different type. Her aunt had no will of her own, and though not exactly bad, she acted largely as an echo—whatever her husband said was right; she always agreed with him. This agreement, however, did not arise from any real similarity of outlook. It merely served to cover up her lack of intelligence and ability, and to remind others of her existence. Heini's two cousins were uninteresting too, but she was not influenced by them. She was warm-hearted, hard-working and innocent. She liked her Uncle Wenfu, a market gardener who was Chien's elder brother. She often went to his allotment to play, and did as he told her. This honest

man was a widower who would have liked his niece to live with him, but Chien would not hear of it. From the age of ten Heini attended primary school for four years with Tani, and proved a good student. After going home she often went out again to play, and liked to help people. The fact that she was Chien's niece made some people want to have little to do with her, but after meeting her once or twice they realised she was a good girl and forgot her family connections. She grew taller year by year and became a beautiful young woman, but did not realise it, and paid no attention to the young men who kept stealing glances at her.

When Heini was seventeen her uncle hired a man named Cheng to do the cooking. He had been a tenant of landord Li, but when Li sold his land to Old Ku the latter cultivated it himself, not needing any tenant, so Cheng went to Chien's family as a cook. Seeing he was young and strong Chien made him do all kinds of jobs. At that time Yi and his brother were still cultivating five *mou* of vineyard, and Cheng had to work on the land. With him in the household there was no need to buy firewood any more, nor to go to Hsia Garden for coal. His wages were low and he was a distant relative, so Chien said he was looking after him, whereas actually he was exploiting him. After Cheng had worked here for a year he became Chien's tenant, and was now working their eight *mou* of irrigated land.

Since Heini found no warmth in the family it was quite natural that this newly-arrived sturdy and grave young man should become her friend. Sympathising with him she often stayed in the kitchen to help tend the fire and wash the dishes, and sometimes stole up the mountain with him for firewood. Cheng was down-trodden too, having been fatherless since childhood, forced to sell his strength to support his mother and himself. This friendship meant a great deal to him, and the longer they were together the better the understanding between them. However they were suspected and separated. Chien was not going to let his niece marry a poor man. Chien stopped Cheng's job and found a few *mou* of land for him to cultivate. Because Cheng was an honest fellow with few friends or relatives he had to depend on his employer, and Chien was still able to get him to do various odd jobs.

After Cheng left, Heini felt all the meaning had gone out of life. At first she did not dare, but later she secretly made shoes and socks and took them to Cheng. Although Cheng was afraid too, he could not but respond to Heini's encouragement. They met in

secret, sometimes under the vine trellis in her Uncle Wenfu's vegetable garden, sometimes in the orchard. He often promised her: "I'm determined to save money, and once I've money I'll come and marry you."

At such times she hated her uncle and felt how unfortunate she was to have no parents. She would stand behind Cheng, leaning close to him and swearing to be true, saying, "You know, not a single person cares for me except you. If you aren't true I shall go to be a nun."

A year passed, but there was no hope for them. When Chien began to arrange matches for the two cousins, Heini was worried and cried, and Cheng could only stare vacantly, unable to think of any way out. Just then the situation suddenly changed. Japan surrendered and the Eighth Route Army came to their district. The villagers who had done underground work came into the open, everything was reorganised and the peasants clamoured to settle accounts with the landlords. Cheng threw himself into the movement, and it made a new man of him. He joined the militia of which he later became an officer, and that summer when the Peasants' Association was set up he was elected chairman.

By liberating the village the Eighth Route Army also liberated Heini. Her uncle dropped his match-making and changed his attitude to her, and appeared much more kindly. The increased respect with which Cheng was regarded in the village delighted her, for although they were seeing less of each other she did not think he was fickle. She failed to realise Cheng's new dilemma. As a matter of fact he was deliberately keeping his distance. He knew all the villagers hated Chien, that although the latter had escaped mass trial twice he was none the less the worst enemy of the poor. Now as Chairman of the Peasants' Association Cheng ought to identify himself with the masses and not go marrying Chien's niece, while an affair with her would be even worse. He feared this connection might damage his position and set tongues wagging, the more so since the marriage of Chien's daughter Tani to village Security Officer Chang had caused general displeasure. Hence he must harden his heart. Although his deliberate coldness to Heini was very painful to him, and he felt not a little ashamed of it, still he was a man, he could set his teeth and stick it out.

Some of the village cadres, however, saw Heini in a different light. They considered her as one of the oppressed, and invited her to teach the Women's Literacy Class. She made a patient and con-

scientious teacher, obviously doing her best to show that she wanted to identify herself with the new regime and that she was progressive. But in spite of the good impression she made, she could not recover her old footing with Cheng.

Gradually Heini realised the danger confronting her. The more she wanted to hold him the less confident she felt of doing so. There was not a single person she could turn to in her trouble, yet now her uncle seemed to understand her wretchedness, often showing sympathy. While unable to understand his motive, Heini felt rather grateful to him, and the girl lapsed into a melancholy out of keeping with her simple and carefree nature.

## CHAPTER VI

Only when Heini reached home and saw through the branches of blossom smoke wreathing out from her uncle's window did she remember the points he had told her to find out. But she thought: "Oh, it's just because he sits at home with nothing to do."

Voices could be heard from her uncle's room. Pressing her face against the window Heini had just caught sight of Jen sitting opposite the *kang*, when her aunt called from the western verandah: "Heini! When did you get back?"

Coming away from the window Heini looked sulkily at her aunt, then gave a little snort and went to her own room. "What's the point of sneaking like that?" she thought scornfully.

Chien tweaked his moustache, narrowed his eyes and glanced sidewise at the primary school teacher. Jen puffed at his cigarette, then went on relating the news: ". . . The paper reports this as Sun Yat-sen's idea. A good deal has been done at Pingan town. All the rich have been forced to produce their title deeds. Probably Tsolu won't escape. None of the places under the Communists or Eighth Route Army can get out of it."

"Of course, that's the Communist way, or rather their — their policy. What's that policy called? Let's see, what did you say just now it was? Ah! It's called 'Land to the tiller'. That's it, 'Land to the tiller'. That's very good, an excellent way to tempt the poor! Hah, very good indeed. . . ." By now Chien's eyes were reduced to two slits. After pausing for a moment he went on:



"Only — well, world affairs aren't as simple as that. After all, Old Chiang has American backing."

"Humph, the Communists always say they are working for the poor, for the people, but that's just so much fine talk. Mr. Chien, you should go to Kalgan to see. Hah! Who live in the best houses? Who ride in cars? Who are always coming in and out of the best restaurants? Aren't they the ones who've grown fat? Mr. Chien, nobody wearing an old-fashioned long gown can get anywhere nowadays." So saying Jen looked searchingly into the other's long face.

Chien gave his sleeves a shake, brushed the ashes off his light jacket, and said with a slight sneer: "A new dynasty uses new ministers. Are you complaining, Old \* Jen? Hah, you're a teacher in primary school, you should serve the people, hah! . . ."

Being laughed at like this caused Jen some embarrassment, and he could not help saying, "Whatever happens I have to earn my living by teaching. Always, everywhere, I have to take my cue from others. I can't afford to complain. Only I feel they are going too far. Look, we teachers have to be guided by the so-called Commissioner of Popular Education. That doesn't matter, Mr. Chien. But you know as well as I do the so-called commissioner is no other than that fellow Lichang. The bastard knows a few easy characters, but he's a fool. Yet without any sense of shame he keeps coming to issue orders for this, that and the other." He sighed.

Chien went on laughing. "Lichang had eight *mou* of land himself, and last year after the struggle against landlords he was given another two, so now he has ten *mou*. He and his father and that adopted child-bride of his can live quite well, yet they're still considered as poor peasants. In your case, how much land do you have? . . . Ah, but you don't work!"

"Each month I get a hundred catties of grain, no more, but that hundred catties isn't easily earned. In addition to the 'capital' put in past studies, nowadays one has to learn folk dances too. They like that low-class stuff. Tao Yuan-ming \*\* would not stoop for half a picul of rice, but for one bushel of grain I have to put up with Lichang's insolence. Ugh!"

"Well, a hundred catties of grain a month is not bad. Never mind, if they are sharing out property or dividing up the land you

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\* A term of familiarity with no relation to actual age.

\*\* Tao Yuan-ming (372-427 A.D.), famous Chinese poet, gave up his government post, with its meagre pay in terms of rice, rather than bow to his superior.

may be sure they won't touch you. Just as in my case — I'm not afraid of them. For instance this spring I gave fifty *mou* of land to my sons. Now there are only we two old people left and Heini, with just about a dozen *mou* of land for the three of us. Each year we only get over ten bushels of grain, so we're neither poor nor rich, simply a borderline case. Let them make all the trouble they like. We see through the vanity of this life and mind our own business."

Jen was a graduate of the rural normal school who had come to teach in Nuanshui two years before and the longer he was there the more superior he felt to everyone else. He had no friends. In the beginning he had seen a good deal of landlord Li, but later considered that fallen landlord too much of a weakling. There was another teacher named Liu with whom he should have had much in common. Jen did not mind that Liu's standard was lower than his own, but Liu relied on flattering the village cadres and always led the school children in singing, "Without the Communist Party there would be no China", or writing posters and shouting slogans. Because of this he was trusted and regarded as superior to Jen. This made Jen feel aggrieved, and gradually Chien came to be the only person he could talk to. Whenever he heard any news, he liked to discuss it with Chien to work off his depression, for although there was nothing to be hoped for here, and he sometimes left feeling even more despondent, he sometimes derived comfort. Today he had come in looking rather pleased. But when Chien received the news he brought so coolly, without any sign of disturbance, Jen felt a little put out.

It was noon of a summer's day, without a breath of air. Inside the house was oppressively hot, and Chien told his wife to brew another pot of tea. Jen was fanning himself with a little fan plaited from rush leaves, staring vacantly at the photographs on the opposite wall and at the scrolls with pictures of beautiful women. Guessing how bored he felt, Chien offered him another Sun cigarette, saying, "Old Jen, it's a good proverb that says, 'Dreams can't be trusted'. I wager Old Chiang won't let the Communists off. Wait and see to whom this village belongs eventually. Do you imagine this rabble can control the country? Take Yumin, who's one of the top people asked to decide big and small matters. That's a good cadre chosen by the Communists! Bah — Landlord Li's hired man! In the old days he had to bow to everyone. Or take the Chairman of the Peasants' Association. I know how many hairs that Cheng

has. He was in my household. If these riffraff are allowed to manage affairs they're bound to make a mess of things. Now they are simply relying on their guns and their numerical strength. Another thing, why must they always start the struggle and never finish settling accounts? Well, this is the only way to tempt the poor — this talk of giving them land and grain naturally pleases them. As a matter of fact they are fools. Who can they rely on later when the Kuomintang army comes and the Communists flee? When that happens the old status quo will be restored, and the old rulers will take charge again. As for you, Old Jen, no one in the village has your education. Even though you can't be given any office because you weren't born here, at least you won't have to put up with these insults for nothing."

"You must be joking. I'm a plain teacher and I don't want to be an official. Only I don't like seeing good people oppressed, Mr. Chien. That brings us back to the same subject — in the land reform this time I advise you to be on your guard."

When Chien saw the conversation had come back to this, he enlarged on the subject. "I'm not afraid of land reform. If they make a thorough job of it I may even get given a little irrigated land. When my son Yi left I didn't ask for any compensation. Only we should try to avoid trouble for the sake of the poor, and advise them it's better not to take land. In school you can sometimes teach the poor children when they go home to tell their parents the Communists won't necessarily stay long in power! That would be a good thing to do."

Jen thought this an excellent idea. Now he had something to do, he would carry it out very secretly. However he still believed Chien to be over-confident, and thought it his duty to warn him again: "That fellow Yumin is very cunning. Don't be deceived by the respectful way he talks. Another thing, you never know when one or two people with a grudge against you may come into the open."

"Oh . . . don't worry, don't worry! I'm not going to let those fools get the better of me. You go back and be on the look out. If there's any news, come here. If the papers report any Kuomintang victories, tell people about it. It doesn't matter even making up a few. They're not all fools in the village, and everybody has to think of the future! . . . Ah!" As he was speaking he got up from the *kang*. Jen, who had put on his shoes and was feeling very pleased, took another Sun cigarette from the table on the *kang*,

and Chien promptly struck a light for him. They heard the bamboo curtain in the room opposite move, and involuntarily exchanged glances. Then Chien called out: "Who's there?"

"It's me, uncle!" came Heini's voice. "I'm chasing the cat. She's been such a nuisance in my room."

Jen involuntarily sat down again. Chien understood the young man, and knew why he kept coming to their house and trying to win his favour. But he gave him a glance and said, "I won't keep you. The children will have finished their lunch and be ready for class. Come again when you have time." He parted the Japanese style gauze curtain patterned with flowers, and Jen had to hurry out. In the central room were the ancestral tablets and god of wealth; on the red lacquer chest gleamed polished brass sacrificial vessels. The whir of a paper fan could be heard from the room opposite. Chien immediately lifted the bamboo curtain leading to the courtyard and the two of them went out together, to be met by a gust of hot air. A few bees were buzzing about in the sun, blundering against the window. Chien saw Jen to the gate-house where once again they exchanged significant glances.

## CHAPTER VII

In the stifling noonday heat Old Ku's daughter-in-law took advantage of the midday siesta to go home to see her sister-in-law, Kuei. The latter lived at the west end of the village in a mud house with a little courtyard fenced in with kaoliang stalks. The courtyard had a vine. House and courtyard were small but neat as a new pin.

Kuei had just been taking food to her husband, and was washing dishes by the stove. Her young sister-in-law stood by her side panting, keeping a secret watch from the window.

"Is all you're telling me true?" asked Kuei, catching hold of the girl, while the two of them turned and leaned against the door. "Oh, I warned your brother against it. Look how he got into debt for ten bushels of grain to buy five *mou* of vineyard! Oh, if only we'd known, we shouldn't have bought so much land." The news was so sudden she did not know what to fix on first. It sounded advantageous but at the same time she was afraid they might lose

by it. Taking a ragged cloth off the wire she mopped the perspiration on her face, then sat down on a stool to think it over again.

Before Kuei had finished thinking or had time to discuss it with her, her sister-in-law hurried off. Old Ku's daughter-in-law was sorry for her brother and his wife, because apart from this little house and the five *mou* of land they had bought they had nothing else but debts. Moreover Kuei was a village cadre who had been pushed into the position of Chairman of the Women's Association, which was, in her opinion, a piece of bad luck.

This Chairman of the Women's Association had come here as a refugee from North China over four years previously, and after an introduction from a fellow villager had started living with Chih. He wanted to marry her because it would cost nothing, and she saw he was a straightforward fellow, so with both parties agreeable they got married without much ceremony. She was an intelligent woman of nearly forty, not a bad match for a bachelor of over thirty. The two of them got on well, and gradually began to look like a respectable household. People thought Chih lucky to have such a good wife, who was used to hardships and knew the difficulties and cares of life. She managed the house well, and was good tempered. All the occupants of the mud houses in that western section spoke well of her, and the previous year when Nuanshui was liberated and they wanted to set up a Women's Association they proposed her. In vain she pleaded ignorance and the fact that she was not a native of the village. She was elected, and whenever there was any business she summoned the others to meetings. Later she organised a Literacy Class, and took charge of that very conscientiously too.

Still sitting on the low stool she looked up at the sky above the courtyard. There was not a cloud to be seen, all was azure blue. She felt there might be a storm. One day Nuanshui was bound to be stirred up again, when everybody would seem to go off their heads once more. She recalled the previous year and that spring, and how hard she had worked, going from house to house to fetch the women. When the men called them backward, the women said, "We don't understand anything! We can't make head or tail of it!" At meetings no one opened her mouth, nobody voted for anything. She knew no more than the others, yet she had to stand on the platform and shout. But later when some people were given land she and her husband received nothing but a little grain which lasted less



than four months. They had bought five *mou* of land cheap, but they owed ten bushels of grain which they had been allowed to borrow as a favour on the part of the village cadres. And now the village was to be stirred up again. She felt this might be a good thing as far as she was concerned. If only they could pay off that debt of ten bushels. . . . Still . . .

She was just going to think it over again when the bell for the Women's Literacy Class sounded. At once she stood up to comb her hair and fasten it firmly, then changed her tattered blue cotton jacket for a new white one, and without waiting to wash the bowls in the pan locked the door and hurried off to class. She wanted to find someone to share this news with.

The Literacy Class was held in the big hall of Hsu's house, a large building which had been divided up the previous year among six or seven families with no homes of their own. It was a fine building, originally well furnished but now in a state of disrepair and disorder. A number of tables had been left in the hall for the class. The few young women who had arrived had clustered together to look at an embroidered pillow case, and were talking with such animation of the price of silks and patterns it was impossible for them to notice how upset their chairman was.

More and more women came, chattering like magpies. Babies at the breast had been brought too, who had to be amused. Then Heini, who was their teacher, arrived. At her arrival they started studying, but some women at the back kept whispering or passing remarks about their teacher.

Kuei sat on one side by herself, no longer eager to speak to the others. Looking from one to another she realised that the women left in the Literacy Class—about half of the original number—were comparatively well off. The poorer ones simply had no way of coming. If she insisted on it they put up a show for a few days but then stayed at home again or went into the fields. That only left these young wives and girls without a care in the world, who enjoyed the Literacy Class and came for two or three hours a day to learn a few characters. By coming to this lively place to exchange news of their neighbours and joke together they could throw off their family yoke and boredom. The spring had slipped past this way, and now the summer was nearly over. Now it was Kuei, Chairman of the Women's Association, who seemed different from the rest. For the first time she realised with amazement how out

of place she was here. Although neither old nor withered, she was coarse and weather-beaten. Good as she was at dealing with people, still she lacked interest.

In sudden surprise she wondered just why she was there. These young women certainly did not need her, and she was not sure they did not despise her, yet she wasted three hours a day sitting here. Yumin had told her that women must organise themselves before they could be emancipated, and be able to read before they could have equality with men. But that was just fine talk. She looked at the women again. They did not need emancipation, nor want equality. Neither did she. She and Chih were a poor couple, quite content with poverty. She in particular, who had many times been on the verge of starvation, ought to be satisfied with their present life. Of course she was not entirely content, there were still things to hope for. With a debt of ten bushels of grain they needed a little prosperity, for if they failed to clear themselves after harvest life would become even harder for them. What was the good of her sitting here? It was all very fine for Yumin to talk. He had insisted on dragging her into this Women's Association, with all his talk about serving the poor. But they were not serving the poor, while she herself was even growing poorer.

"'Prosperous' — means rich. If you are prosperous you have a lot. It means you have more than you need. 'Clothes' — the clothes that we are wearing. . . . Together meaning 'Extra clothes', or prosperity. . . ." Heini pointed to the blackboard, speaking in clear, silvery tones.

"Do I have more clothes than I need, damn her!" Kuei stood up, cast a look of dislike at Heini with whom she was usually on excellent terms, and went out into the courtyard.

This was the first time Kuei had ever left the Literacy Class early. She felt as if she had had a surfeit of something, and at the same time an emptiness as when she had gone hungry too long. The lane was deserted except for a couple of dogs lying there with their tongues hanging out. Reluctant to go home she decided to go and see Yueh, the shepherd's wife, who was Vice-Chairman of the Women's Association but had not attended the Literacy Class for a long time. She felt sure Yueh would be pleased to hear what she had to say, and they would see eye to eye.

## CHAPTER VIII

The whispering that had started when Old Ku brought home the big cart gradually spread from within doors to the fields and streets. Of course there was more comprehensive and reliable news from other quarters which people also spread, interspersed with their own wishful thinking, until there were many versions of the facts. But on one point all agreed, namely: "The Communists are coming again to help the poor stand on their feet, and the rich are in for it!"

Resting during the midday siesta under the trees, looking across the river and thinking of the flames of vengeance raging on that plain, the peasants would count over on their fingers the names of despots there. When they heard of local tyrants being punished and their property divided up they did not conceal their delight. There had been two trials in their village preliminary to formal land reform and some had had their revenge and received shares of grain. But some were still dissatisfied, bearing grudges in silence because they dared not express their grievances openly. Some were grateful to the Communists and some dissatisfied with the cadres, whom they accused of unfairness and selfishness. They wanted another settling of accounts, hoping to see true justice done this time. They liked to talk like this, group after group drifting together on the land during the midday siesta, and later in the streets and lanes in the cool of the evening.

Other groups, however, were rather afraid, and these were the people who were comparatively well off. They were afraid that once the landlords had fallen the masses would attack the rich peasants, then the middle peasants. So they often gathered in threes and fours to exchange news, hoping for reassurance. If only things were not carried too far, all would be well! They always spoke in low voices. If any newcomer joined them they would turn their heads and start tapping their pipes, or change the conversation to the weather or to women. In a short time all became remarkably sensitive, so that if anyone arrived from the district government or if Yumin, Cheng and the few other cadres disappeared, they would say Nuanshui's land reform was about to start, that the cadres had gone to meetings or training class. They would come back early from the fields, trying every means to find out what was happening, thinking anxiously: "If it must happen, then the sooner the better!" The heat got on everyone's nerves.

With these discussions came rumours that the railway had been cut. The Kuomintang had brought up many divisions of crack troops, armed with big American guns which were even better than Japanese artillery. The Eighth Route Army had never seen the like of them. That American official, Marshall or whatever his name was, had come to mediate, asking the Kuomintang to "take over and reorganise" the Communists. But now he was displeased, so there was no hope of peace. The Americans had brought over countless tanks, big guns and aeroplanes, and were helping the Kuomintang run an officers' training school. The Communists couldn't possibly beat them, their guns weren't good enough and they had too few troops. Thus the Eighth Route Army couldn't last long, any day they might sling their packs over their shoulders and go. Then Nuanshui would change hands again, and those who had shown themselves red would have to risk their necks or abandon their families and go with the Eighth Route Army. . . .

By whom were these rumours spread? Apparently by the peasants themselves. They did not want the Communists to be defeated or the Eighth Route Army to leave, yet they spread these rumours on the sly.

Even after Yumin and Cheng came back from the district, nothing happened. They went to work on their land as usual and people settled down again. About the third time for hoeing, rain had made the weeds grow very quickly. The peasants found their work cut out for them and turned all their attention to their rice, millet, kaoliang, flax, orchards and vegetable gardens. They had been humming like bees, but now all their hopes and fears passed away like a summer shower. Since their wishes had come to nothing, they turned all their energy again to their daily tasks. Joy and fear alike abated. Rumours were no longer listened to, nor spread. If the railway were cut, it was a long way from Nuanshui. If Kuomintang troops came, there was the Eighth Route Army to stop them, and anyway the Kuomintang were Chinese too. The peasants lived by the sweat of their brows, not wanting to be officials. They had better carry on as common people and farmers. For now there was peace, there had been enough rain that year, their crops and fruit trees were not doing badly. Better wait for the prosperous autumn which lay ahead.

## CHAPTER IX

Two years before this, when the Japanese still occupied fortified garrisons, one snowy evening in 1944 just after the lunar New Year, Chiang the ward chief had crept out of his house wearing a new sheepskin jacket. With shoulders huddled in the biting wind only his darting eyes were visible. When he saw the street was empty he went stealthily to the door of White Snake\* as the villagers called her behind her back. The door was unbolted, and softly pushing it open he went in. A bright light in the western room made him pause in the courtyard to listen to the sound of dice rattling in a bowl, and a harsh man's voice bawling: "Flush! Flush! Two, three, flush!" At the same time a husky voice called: "Three into six, three into six . . . Aha! . . . Seven, seven!" As the dicing stopped there was a moment's clamour followed by the sound of money being counted, and human shadows moved on the window. Then Chiang hurried to the northern room which was quite still. He could smell the familiar odour which he loved seeping out from under the wadded cotton curtain of the door.

White Snake was lying on the *kang* straightening out the opium smoking utensils under a small lamp, but when the ward chief burst in she immediately got up and invited him to be seated. Taking his new sheepskin jacket and assuming a look of pleased surprise she asked, "What, is it still snowing? Are you cold? Do get on the *kang* and warm yourself. Did you go to the west room? It's so cold not many people have come. There are only a few cheap paupers there."

Chiang removed his cap to wipe the snow off the fur, and sat down on the warm *kang*. White Snake brought a tea-pot from the little stove at the head of the *kang*, slowly poured out a cup of strong tea, and suggested, "Let me prepare a pipe for you."

"Is Yumin in the west room?" asked Chiang as he lay down.

"He's just come in. He's been drinking somewhere."

"Fetch him here." He took the needle from her, speared a small piece of opium, and held it over the lamp flame while White Snake went out.

When she came back she was preceded through the door by the sturdy figure of Yumin. His wadded gown was unbuttoned, and

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\* After a character in Chinese mythology who could change herself from a snake into a seductive woman.

he held an old fur cap in his hand. Afraid he was in for trouble, he put a bold face on it.

"Ah, elder brother! Come on the *kang* here! I'll prepare a pipe for you." The ward chief actually greeted him first, convincing Yumin that something was up.

"Thanks, I don't go in for that. I'll have a cigarette." Yumin sat cross-legged on the edge of the *kang*, his head against the wall. Taking a cigarette from his pocket he put the cigarette White Snake had given him back on the tray.

Chiang had to sit up. He took the cigarette Yumin had declined and lit it over the lamp, then said smiling, "Well, elder brother! We're old friends, we can talk frankly. So you come here too to amuse yourself, eh! How has your luck been the last few days?"

Yumin's impulse was to pull his leg and say the bed at home was so cold that he came here to sleep. However feeling this would not be proper, he replied half in jest and half in earnest: "The last two days unfortunately I've had a bad stomach. People say 'Lord White' answers the wishes of his worshippers, so I came to consult him. I don't know whether he really answers or not." He laughed.

On the chest opposite the *kang* was a red silk shrine. In the dim lamplight the image behind the silent curtains looked embarrassed.

White Snake pretended not to have heard, but raising her head reached for a water pipe from beside the shrine, and having lit it leaned against the chest and pulled on the pipe until it gurgled.

"Seriously," said the ward chief becoming grave, "I need your help. You'll just have to help me."

"Right, say the word!" answered Yumin cheerfully.

Chiang gave White Snake a look and waited till she had gone out, then cleared his throat and explained the difficulty that had recently arisen.

A month ago he had received a polite letter from the Eighth Route Army, but before he could report it to the Japanese some Eighth Route Army men had come to his house. They were fairly young, but hard to deal with, being polite one moment and firm the next. What they said sounded very fine: "You can't be blamed for being ward chief but you're Chinese and should have your heart in the right place. All we want is to borrow a little grain from your village. If you let us have it, well and good . . ."

Frightened almost out of his wits for fear they would kill him, Chiang signed an agreement promising them grain; and after they had gone he felt he could breathe again. But what was to be done? He could not report it, because they had an agreement in his own writing in their hands. Yet if he did not report it he was afraid the Japanese would find out and kill him. Chien, whom he consulted, said they were only bluffing and he need pay no attention. However another letter had come from the Eighth Route Army and he had been visited again. Something must be done. Now Chien was blackmailing him, threatening to inform the *hsiang* government that he had dealings with the Eighth Route Army, so he had to give him money. He had also had to collect a few bushels of millet and a few dozen catties of flour to send to the Eighth Route Army — but who could act as messenger for him? It must be someone with his wits about him, who wouldn't let the garrison know, and it must be someone brave to confront the murderous incendiaries of the Eighth Route Army! If the job were bungled it would mean at the least prison, and nobody wanted to get into trouble. He had thought it over for several days before thinking of Yumin. Yumin, having just had a disagreement with landlord Li and lost his place, must be very hard up. He was brave but at the same time cautious, just the man for the job. So Chiang had come to White Snake's today specially to see him. While telling this story Chiang naturally enlarged on the evils of the Eighth Route Army, saying it was right to send grain in order to avert calamity from the village, for otherwise the Eighth Route Army would certainly come to burn and massacre.

As he listened in silence Yumin understood the ward chief's scheme, and formed his own plan. But instead of saying anything he just punctuated Chiang's narration with "Oh", "Really?", "Ah", "That's too bad!"

"You're the only one, elder brother! You're the only one who can do it, so please make this trip as a favour to me! I'll see you have everything you need. We're pals, how could I let you down!" The ward chief raised the question quite frankly.

"Well —" Yumin accepted another cigarette then shook his head, saying, "It's not that I don't want to help, but I really couldn't pull it off. I'm a rough fellow, I can't read a word and don't know how to talk. Sending grain oughtn't to be so difficult, but then it's like relations between two different countries. Just can't be done. There are plenty of clever people in the village with the gift of the

gab. You've picked the wrong person. If you wanted someone for rough work, to use a hoe, carry wood or drive a plough, I wouldn't mind helping you out. Hah! . . ."

Chiang told White Snake to bring wine dishes, and she sat by them to keep the guest company and help flattering him. All this time Yumin was laughing up his sleeve, because as soon as he heard of this errand he was delighted. To visit the Eighth Route Army was just what this hero-worshipping youngster wanted. He did not believe that talk about burning and killing, and as a poor bachelor he was not afraid. He knew even bandits worked for justice sometimes. Nevertheless he made himself appear very reluctant, realising that Chiang was not to be trusted, and would shift all the blame onto him if anything went wrong. Beside, this was a fine opportunity to make him eat humble pie. Finally Chiang had to write a letter in his own hand and seal it with his private seal. He also had to give Yumin sufficient travelling expenses, and even fetch his uncle Chuan to witness that if there were any trouble he guaranteed to ransom him. Only then did Yumin consent, with every show of reluctance.

That same evening Yumin, wearing Chiang's new sheepskin jacket and driving two big mules, set out for Nanshan. Late the next evening he reached a village of some forty odd families and found the man he was looking for. The Eighth Route Army soldiers were dressed just like the peasants, with the addition of a short gun in their belts and a corner of red silk showing. They were very friendly and kind. After greeting him they gave him wine to warm him up while they prepared noodles. He listened carefully as they talked, and felt that they had a sense of justice — to fight Japan and overthrow traitors was right. They also attacked the rich and helped the poor, which he entirely approved. And they advocated equality and showed themselves very friendly. Accordingly he told them how things were in the village, cursed Chiang as a running dog of the Japanese and one of the village 'sharpsters', and warned them to be on their guard against him.

This trip made a great impression on him, but he said very little about it to Chiang, whom he forced to come time and again to beg him to go, until gradually he became very friendly with the Eighth Route Army. When Yumin was eight his parents had died and he had gone with his little brother to live with their grandmother. Since then nobody had shown him any affection. All day long he



worked on the land with his uncle, Chuan, a simple soul, ground down by poverty, who knew how to endure hardships but had no idea how to look after his nephew. It was simply a working relationship between them, like that of plough and harrow. His grandmother could not look after him either, as she often went with his brother on her back to beg in the neighbouring villages. Since all the grain his uncle harvested went in rent, even if it was a good year and other families ate meat, flour and millet, they were lucky to have a few square meals of kaoliang. He grew up like a little ox, able to thrive as long as he had grass to eat. When a youngster of seventeen he set up house for himself and his brother, and the latter, a lanky boy, became responsible for gathering firewood, cooking and other jobs. He recognised only one rule: Poor people must rely on their own strength to make a living. If a day came when they couldn't take it any longer, they would fall in their tracks and that would be the end of them. Hardened by sun and wind, he had grown strong. Rich farmers liked to hire him, and he was able to make a living by his hands.

When he met the Eighth Route Army, they induced him to tell the story of his life. As he described to them the past that he seldom liked to think about, he realised for the first time how unhappy he had been, how lonely, oppressed and down-trodden! It was very comforting to have found friends for the first time in his life, and friends who were so concerned about him. Knowing that he was loved he felt happy and eager to live a better life. The fact that others had confidence in him made him want to live more purposefully. Especially when he realised that his difficulties and those of his uncle and many other poor people were all owing to the oppression of the rich.

After this Yumin stopped going to White Snake's. He had only gone there in the first place because he was depressed after losing his job. But now whenever he felt low he went to see the poor youngsters who were his friends, and would tell them how he had seen the comrades of the Eighth Route Army, whom he was proud to know. He emulated the Eighth Route Army in arousing their indignation at the injustice of their lot. Why should the poor have such a hard time of it? Was it decreed by fate that they should toil like beasts all their lives? In him Nuanshui had its first Communist that summer, and later he persuaded Lichang and Kuo to join the Party. That winter he had procured one blunderbuss and

one local-made rifle, and secretly formed a militia. Then the Eighth Route Army began to visit the village more often. Sometimes they called on the ward chief, and Chiang was forced to protect them. Sometimes they stayed in the western quarter, where the militia stood guard for them.

But the work did not go forward easily. There were eight notorious 'sharpsters' in the village, whom the common people hated and feared. Chiang, a representative of the eight sharpsters, was only allowed to hold office because he flattered them, and by now he had acquired quite a fortune. He used the Japanese as a pretext to oppress the people, and the Eighth Route Army as a pretext to extort money. There might be more sinister characters than he in the village, but for the present he was the most obvious. The Eighth Route Army comrades helped Yumin arrange for a reduction of rents and rates of interest. The people accepted their propaganda, but dared not put it into practice. It was not until the summer of 1945 that a meeting was finally called to reorganise the village government. One evening the militia and comrades of the Eighth Route Army sewed up the village, setting a watch, while they assembled all the villagers in the school for a mass meeting. When people saw Chiang was tied up they felt bold. Because it was night-time and faces could not be seen clearly they dared speak out, and for the first time expressed their hatred, shaking their fists. Chiang was overthrown and Chao elected.

Chao was a poor man but an able one, who knew how to deal with the Japanese. At first he did not want to be ward chief for fear the old powers would make trouble for him, but when he saw how many people raised their hands he was pleased at being elected. After his election the Eighth Route Army cadres from the district helped him, and he discussed with Yumin and others how to cope with the Japanese. The latter had no idea of the real situation in the village, and believed Chao implicitly. The rich and powerful families in the village were given different treatment, the villagers cooperating with some while isolating, dividing or warning others so that they dared not make a move. Thus for the time being not even Hsu or Chien could think of a way to retaliate, and from this time on the power in Nuanshui was in the hands of the people. Soon after this the Japanese surrendered and Yumin, Chairman of the Resistance Union against Japan, came out into the open as a responsible figure in the village. Twice he headed mass trials, and poor

people brought their difficulties to him, saying delightedly: "He's done well, the Eighth Route Army has made an able man of him!"

Some secretly despised him, because they had known him as a poor child, and wanted to make trouble. But when they met him they called him 'elder brother'. In the past the only people to do this were those who wanted a job done, or his gambling friends when he won money. Now however this form of address sounded quite natural.

## CHAPTER X

Yumin and Cheng brought back from the district a lithographed booklet published by the propaganda department of the county branch committee of the Communist Party. Neither of them knew many characters, but late at night they would get hold of Lichang and the three of them sitting round a little oil lamp would read line by line aloud. Lichang also copied out the chief facts in a small note-book. He had many precious things in that note-book: the oath on entering the Party and the minimum qualifications for membership, such as 1) To devote one's life to serving the poor. 2) To face danger together and obey all orders instantly. 3) To pay party fees. 4) To reveal no secrets to non-Party members, not even to parents, wife or children. . . . All this was copied out. Whenever any problem cropped up Lichang would look up his note-book, and could often find an answer there. This freckled, homely looking young Communist was a good talker and a gifted singer.

The three of them studied "Questions and Answers on Land Reform" together, but each had his own views. Lichang found it easy to accept new ideas. His interest grew as he read. He often applied his new ideas to the actual members of their village, classifying landlords, rich peasants and middle peasants, and declaring which should be attacked and which aided. A cheerful smile never left his lips, and his unceasing admiration for the Party and for Chairman Mao made him exclaim: "This is a fine method. This way those rich people can be pushed down and the poor really stand on their feet!" Not a serious thinker, he felt land reform was only too easy to carry out, and was quite confident of success.

Cheng, who had joined in the work for fair tax allocation that spring, was well-informed about the land in the village. He looked

through the file of households which contained detailed figures as to land owned, and paid special attention to the determination of status. "Heaven!" he would say, "Tahai has thirty *mou* of land, but can you call him a rich or middle peasant? Just think what land it is. Nobody would take it as a gift!" Or else, "Don't think Chentung's hard up for land. A young fellow with three *mou* of good irrigated land!" Or again, "Judging by land, Tsengshan is a poor peasant, but he has a craft. He's been able to get married and his wife wears a new padded gown." The division of land seemed to him no easy problem. Only if they satisfied the whole village that justice had been done could they be considered to have succeeded. Otherwise there would be disagreement among their own people, and the work would be held up.

Yumin had less to say on the subject than the other two. He was only concerned over the actual extent of their strength, the amount of strength they could muster, and whether they could completely overthrow the old forces in the village. He believed most of the decisions of their superiors would be easy to implement, for with the backing of the Party and Eighth Route Army no one in the village would publicly oppose them. But to carry the work through conscientiously and overthrow the forces of feudalism once and for all, the people must organise voluntarily to emancipate themselves. And that was no easy matter. He took a poor view of the people's judgment, finding them hard to convince, wavering and easily deceived, only concerned with immediate profit, and accustomed to curse the cadres if they were at all dissatisfied. Yumin knew they must keep close to the masses to have strength, but felt the masses were often unreliable, swinging from one extreme to another. To gain their entire confidence was still impossible. So he looked forward to land reform with a mixture of enthusiasm and anxiety, hoping that capable cadres would be sent early from the district to settle this important business successfully.

Soon after this a mass trial was held at the village of Meng Chia - some two miles away, to try the local despot Chen Wu. He was a notorious scoundrel who beat up anyone who crossed his fields, who thought nothing of beating people and raping women. It was common knowledge that he sold opium and concealed weapons. On the day of his trial all the cadres of Nuanshui went to watch, as well as some of the peasants. Some forty or fifty people had prepared to accuse him at the trial, but before it was half-way through there was no

stopping the peasants rushing up to spit in his face and beat him. Women stood out and cursed him too, waving their braceleted arms and striking him over the head.

The villagers from Nuanshui were staggered, then joined in the shouting. With hearts aflame, they hoped Nuanshui would have its day of reckoning soon, but feared they might not manage things so well. Yumin went again to ask the district authorities to send workers quickly, and the villagers, realising that it would not be much longer, could scarcely contain themselves. Sure enough, two days later some men in uniform carrying simple packs on their backs came to the village.

## CHAPTER XI

Late one afternoon in the middle of August Old Tung and three men from the district entered the village by the wooden gate in the northeast. Old Tung, Chairman of the district Workers' Union, went to the cooperative to find Yumin. Tung's companions, comparatively spruce young men, quite well dressed, stopped outside the primary school to rest, putting down their packs to wipe their perspiring heads, then strolling about to look at the slogans in the street or glance inside the school where classes were about to be dismissed. The gossips under the trees opposite started discussing them in low tones, devouring them with their eyes as if to take stock of their ability. Peasants just back from the fields looked on from a distance too. A high spirited youngster of medium build attracted the most attention. He was joking with a child nearby, but the child was shy of strangers and walked sulkily away. The shortest of the men strolled over to the cooperative, and turned to ask the villagers. "Is Yumin in the co-op, folks?" Only the thin youngster stood still at the gate of the primary school, cheerfully joining in the song being sung inside:

*Red in the east rises the sun,  
China has brought forth a Mao Tse-tung. . . .*

Old Tung returned preceded by Yumin and followed by Lichang and Liuman who walked swiftly over, seized the packs and slung them over their shoulders, then, calling the strangers, set off toward the

south street. The thin youngster hurried to take his pack himself, but stumbled on a stone and nearly fell, staggering some distance before he came to a stop. Seeing everybody in the street looking at him, he smiled foolishly, and a roar of laughter went up. He hurried forward again to take his pack, but Lichang and Liuman were now some distance ahead. They walked along laughing while he called after them: "Hey! Let me take that myself! Hey! This won't do, this won't do!"

Yumin took them to Old Han's house, the western wing of which was empty. The old man was a poverty-stricken hard worker who had joined the Party that spring, and Yumin had proposed giving him this house which had belonged to landlord Hsu. It was very clean and quiet here. Old Han's son had just returned from Shantung after being demobbed, and there was only one eight-year-old grandson who was at school. Yumin thought it would be a good lodgings for the men from the district, because Old Han could easily make them tea and look after them.

As soon as they had all arrived Lichang acting like a host invited everybody to sit on the *kang*, surveying the guests with enthusiastic eyes. He was surprised to see a fiddle strapped to one of the packs.

"This is the Chairman of the Resistance Union, Yumin," said Old Tung by way of introduction. He himself had been thirty years a hired labourer. Then pointing to the stout man carrying a pistol, he said, "This is Comrade Wen, this thin one is Comrade Hu, and that is Comrade Yang." Then he handed Yumin a letter of introduction from the Party secretary in the district, giving the credentials of the three comrades and explaining that they represented the district Party committee to carry out the work of land reform.

"How many Party members do you have here?" Wen started at once as if conducting an investigation. Yang shot him a warning glance which he ignored.

All Yumin said was, "Comrades, you must be hungry, we'll prepare a meal. Ting, you help your *dyeh*. Hurry up and get food ready. Liuman, you go to the co-op for a few catties of noodles." He paid no attention to Yang's request that they should use their meal tickets, but went to Ting's room to fetch a long-legged oil lamp for them, then told Old Tung: "You rest for a while. I'm going out, but I'll be back soon." Leaving the new arrivals he hurried off.

Lichang was loath to leave. He picked up the fiddle and tuned it, asking Hu, "Can you sing Shansi tunes?"

Wen walked to the door and looked out. The dark courtyard was very quiet. In the kitchen opposite bellows were being used, and steam could be seen rising in the lamplight, while old men, women and children bustled about in busy confusion. He turned round for a few words with Old Tung, eager to efface the impression of slyness Yumin had made on him.

Old Tung, however, was writing on the table on the *kang*. After three years in the Party this ex-labourer had learned to write simple letters. He was delighted when people praised his keenness in study, and he never forgot to carry in his pack his own seal together with letterheads and envelopes with the district Workers' Union seal. He seized every chance to write letters and make long, high-sounding speeches.

By the time supper was ready Yumin had come back and sat down quietly beside them smoking. Yang said in the future they must not eat white flour and need not have meals specially prepared for them; but each should use his meal tickets. He criticised Yumin for taking so much trouble. Yumin's jacket was unbuttoned, revealing his hairy chest. Wen was conscious of the smell of sweat and something like liquor too. He remembered the secretary of the district Party committee had told him that the branch secretary at Nuanshui had for a short period been imbued with bad habits. His mind kept running on this to the exclusion of the Party secretary's next, more positive statement: "He is a sincere and able cadre from the ranks of the hired labourers."

After the meal Yang and Hu wanted to learn more about conditions in the village, for although the secretary of the district Party committee and Old Tung had given them a general picture, they were still unclear about certain points. Yumin and Lichang approved their proposal. Just as they were about to start talking, Comrade Wen said he felt there were too few people present. He decided to call a meeting of all the village cadres, and explained that this would be taking the mass line. Yumin and Lichang accordingly had to go out at a moment's notice to search for the cadres.

After a long time Vice Ward Chief Chao arrived, followed by Security Officer Chang, Captain of the Militia Kuo, Chairman of the Peasants' Association Cheng, Chairman of the Workers' Union Wenhu and Party Organisation Officer Kung. Lichang was Propaganda Officer of the Party branch, and with him and Yumin this

made a total of eight. Only the ward chief had not come. The ward chief was no other than Chiang who had been overthrown the previous year. This spring, acting on Chao's proposal, they had reinstated him, on the grounds that someone was needed to do the leg work, and since he was rich he could afford to put off his own work. As long as they didn't let him have any real power no harm would be done. All the village cadres felt the force of this argument, and acted upon it.

None of the eight men had made any preparations. Although all extremely pleased, they were at a loss for words, and afraid of saying the wrong thing before these strangers. Kuo, a straightforward fellow, stood shyly and awkwardly by the door, not even willing to sit on the *kang*. He was excited and seething with ideas which he could not express. Since joining Nuanshui's militia he had shown himself completely fearless and ready to risk his life for the cause, but talking was not in his line.

Garrulous Old Tung started expounding to the group the significance of land reform, beginning with the cliché: "Land reform is to do away with the feudalistic landlords who exploit the people. . . ." He declared they must get rid of three fears, and spoke on and on, dragging in the strikes of Canadian workers and Italian sailors, and other stories he had heard. His listeners could not make head or tail of it, but he imagined they must find it very interesting, and if Comrade Wen had not stopped him he would probably have gone on all night.

Comrade Wen wanted to rescue the meeting from boredom, and felt the first thing to do was to see that the cadres' ideology was correct, so he explained point by point the directives for carrying out land reform, most of which he could recite by heart.

They talked very late until it was certain that everyone present understood. Then Comrade Wen decided to call simultaneous meetings of all the people's organisations the next evening to expound this policy. At these meetings the newly-arrived comrades could preside. Notice of this would have to be sent out the next morning before the peasants went to the fields. In Wen's opinion, because of the situation on the Peiping-Suiyuan railway and the possibility that the Kuomintang might attack at any time, the work must be finished in a week to ten days at the latest.

When the others had gone Yumin lingered behind as if he had something to say, but Comrade Wen did not notice this. Wen just repeated that they must remain close to the masses and not keep



everything in their own hands, and that there were too few Party members. Yumin accepted his criticism without a word. Although he still had something on his mind Yumin saw they were desperately tired, so he had to leave. As he left he told them he had set a guard and that all the inhabitants of the lane outside the rear courtyard, which led to the west of the village, were their own people. There was not much chance of trouble in the village.

After his departure Comrade Wen summed him up in these words: "Timid. Reminds me of a member of one of the old secret societies."

## CHAPTER XII

Yumin left the west room with the feeling that something was amiss. Old Han, who was still sitting at the kitchen door enjoying the cool of the evening, asked him: "Will you be coming back?"

"No. Bar the gate."

Old Han followed him out, and said softly, "The whole village knows, and they've been asking me whether they're from the district or from the county or provincial government."

"Oh, just say from the district." Without looking back Yumin went straight to the south street. Seeing the swarthy figure of Kuo standing with a rifle at the top of the street, he thought, "That's a reliable fellow." He went over to join him.

Inside the room Kuo had felt very sleepy, but when he came out and had taken two turns up and down the cool quiet street, he grew wide-awake again. Now he went to meet Yumin and nudging him with his elbow whispered: "In the co-op." Yumin scanned his face in the faint light, and turned north without a word toward the cooperative.

The door of the cooperative was not locked, and opened at a push. In the courtyard he could hear people talking in the back room, from which came a gust of warm air. Liuman was standing by himself beside the counter in the front room, stripped to the waist, his arms folded and a cigarette in his mouth. He looked sullenly at Yumin as he came in, but Yumin paid no attention to him. He listened to Kung speaking inside: "You call him a working landlord? True, he doesn't hire long-term labourers, but he hires

day labourers. And as for land, he has more than anyone except Li."

"A working landlord?" put in Cheng. "What, do you count him as a landlord too? At any rate he's a different type from Li. Li sits there without lifting a finger, living off the fat of the land, and gambling away. Old Ku has acquired his land by the sweat of his brow, and lives frugally. If we treat him like Li, people are sure to protest!"

Tien, Manager of the Cooperative, joined in: "If we take Li's land this time, he'll have to beg for his living. That fellow is as weak as a kitten. The year Yumin quarreled with him and his cook was ill, he went to the well to fetch two half-buckets of water. He could barely stagger back with them to his gate, and fell down before he could cross the threshold. He was sweating so hard that he caught a chill and was ill for two months."

"Bah! You're always shouting about working for the people, but when it comes to overthrowing landlords you start feeling sorry for them and can't bear to take anyone's land! Cheng! You stink as Chairman of the Peasants' Association! None of you have any guts!"

It was Chang speaking. He had not been active for a long time, but this evening he had stayed in the cooperative and there seemed a good deal of truth in what he said. This made Yumin curious, and he decided not to go in, but sat down beside Liuman on the counter.

In the inner room was the group which had just left Old Han's house. There they had felt drowsy with nothing to say, but as soon as they came out all sorts of questions occurred to them and no one wanted to go home. They had come to the cooperative and woken up Tien who was asleep. But they were very confused and had no idea how to go about this business of land reform. Moreover they did not agree among themselves, almost everyone having a different opinion. Chao in particular was much upset as he sat by himself on a flour case, thinking: "They said letting Chiang be ward chief was a wrong move. Was it really opportunism?" That had been pointed out by Wen in his criticism, and Chao felt very bad about it. "It wasn't only my idea. I'd been ward chief ever since the Japanese were here. For over a year now, I've had no time to work for my living. I'm a poor man with five mouths to feed and only three *mou* of land. I have to work as day labourer for









others from one end of the year to the other, and the last two times they divided provisions I didn't get a thing. Chiang is well off and capable, so why not make him run about? But they say we've given the whip hand to the enemy. That's nonsense, what does Chiang dare do nowadays? Doesn't he have to toe the line? I'm no fool. If anyone is to be fooled, he'll be the one. How can he possibly play tricks on me?" Then he remembered how Chiang, knowing he was hard up and not wanting to embarrass him, had lent him two bushels of grain through a third party. If not for those two bushels of grain his family would have gone hungry.

Wenhu was a straightforward fellow who had worked for other people for more than ten years. After liberation fewer people hired labourers, so he had nothing but day labour. Everybody knew he was a distant cousin of Chien, and knew too that they didn't get on together. In fact none of Chien's relatives had a good word for him.

Lichang did not approve of Tien's suggestion either, but he resented Chang's cursing them for having no guts, so he called out: "Chang! It's up to all of us this time. This won't be like last year. Last year you made a lot of noise, but Hsu had gone to Peking, so nobody was afraid of picking on him. This spring we picked on Old Hou, and got a hundred bushels of grain out of him. Old Hou was ill in bed at the time, and his son is young. People figured it wouldn't matter offending him. But this time — well! Cheng! You're Chairman of the Peasants' Association, who do you think we ought to settle accounts with this year?"

"This year are we just dividing land, or settling accounts with the landlords as well?" asked Kung.

"Land reform is just to divide land, but —" Cheng thought of that mass meeting at the next village, and added, "there must be a public trial to settle accounts."

"Of course, without settling accounts how can there be reform?" assented Lichang confidently.

"But in Meng Chia they had a local despot, whereas here we only have landlords, and not even one big landlord. If we had a big landlord like the one in Paihuai with thousands of *mou*, we could set to work with a will. They say although the land hasn't been divided yet, plenty of silk coverlets have already appeared on the cadres' beds." Chang was gradually growing corrupt, and he

already loved comfort. If it were only a degree of selfishness, that might be excused. He had once said to Chao, who was rather uneasy: "We local Communists are quite different from the others. Though the village is liberated, we're not like fish in the sea, free to swim wherever we please. We've all got homes. Leaves fall by the tree, and there's no getting away from Nuanshui. If we offend all the rich people, just suppose a day should come when — well — who can guarantee the Eighth Route Army will remain here? Others can leave at any moment, but we'd have to face the music. We'd be left high and dry like eels in a drained pool."

Chao despised this kind of cowardly talk. If people were afraid they ought not to join in. He cursed Chang inwardly for wavering, but not wanting to offend him he kept his thoughts to himself.

Chang knew some people disapproved of his marriage, saying he had been led astray by Chien. "They're really too unreasonable," he thought. "Chien isn't a reactionary and can't really be considered as a landlord either. If the Eighth Route Army would take his son as a soldier, why shouldn't I take his daughter as my wife? In a couple of years Yi may be promoted and become a prominent Eighth Route Army cadre. Let's see what they have to say then."

He had formerly been respected in the village, and Yumin had thought a lot of him, but during the last half year he had been turning further away from the community. Feeling the others were prejudiced against him, he seldom assumed responsibility in public affairs, and his ideas consequently differed from the rest. Sometimes he was afraid the others would attack him, so pretended to be very left wing. At other times he took a negative stand, and would make defeatist remarks.

Lichang was still pressing the question: "Whom shall we put on trial this time?"

Nobody had an answer. They mentally reviewed the candidates one by one, feeling at one moment the prospects were too numerous, and the next moment they were not qualified. Or else they thought of someone but felt afraid to speak out.

"Do we have to rack our brains for an answer? Of course we must choose rich ones. Humph! Li's sweet steamed bread is pretty good! Are you all dumb? Didn't Chairman Tung say land reform was to do away with the great feudalistic landlords who grind the faces of the poor? In my opinion we should put him

under guard tomorrow, and the day after try him." Again Chang assumed an upright and fearless air.

"If we catch sharpsters, let's catch the foremost," protested Lichang. "Don't think I'm standing up for a rogue like Li. Sure, he had money, but now he's in our power he dares not stir. He's completely under our thumb."

"Do you mean, then, we should leave the landlords alone and not settle accounts?" countered Chang. "Is Hsu the only one who can be tried? Are we to go to Peking to fetch him back? You say I'm afraid of him. All right, just you get him back and see if I dare shoot him or not!"

"Don't talk nonsense!" Kung could not keep quiet either. "All I say is, don't let's shield anybody. Any rich person who's oppressed people and lorded it over the poor can't be let off."

This infuriated the other two. They leapt to their feet to demand an explanation, but Kung retorted: "If the cap fits, wear it."

To save the situation Chao asked if they ought to start a temporary mess. They knew there were some villages where this was done, and it had been done the previous year during the trials in Nuanshui. This facilitated the work. The cadres ate with the militiamen, everybody was on the spot if wanted, and it saved going home to eat. Moreover it made for greater keenness. But opinions were divided again. Chang said since the cadres were busy and the militiamen were on guard day and night, a mess was essential. In Paihuai, sixty people had eaten together, and very lively it was too. There was no need for special expenditure, they could eat the fruits of victory taken from the landlords which were in hand.

Cheng said this was a wasteful proposal. If the cadres had to attend meetings, so did the people. It was the duty of militiamen to stand guard just as it was their duty to fight. Furthermore, the comrades from the district had already said they had meal tickets and could eat in any family they pleased. There was no need to touch the victory provisions which belonged to the people. Should the cadres eat them all up? Would they refuse to attend meetings without victory provisions?

Cheng's view immediately gained the support of the majority, infuriating Chang so that he bit his lip and muttered: "You can talk very finely! Let's see if Cheng wants to get land this time or not!"

Lichang seized this chance to say: "You're just setting yourself against the group. You won't convince me you aren't sheltering someone."

Yumin had wanted to go in for some time, but felt while they were arguing, especially about the question of whom to try, it would be difficult for him to express any opinion without having decided on a line of action with the comrades from the district. He was not yet on familiar terms with them, not yet really united, and he regretted his lack of learning, feeling he was not up to their standard. He thought of Comrade Pin in the county government who was extraordinarily easy to get on with, the more so since he had come to win over this village and therefore understood conditions here and trusted him implicitly. Now the men inside seemed on the verge of a quarrel, and since disunity was what he dreaded most he jumped down from the counter to go in, but was stopped by Liuman.

Liuman had got wind of the meeting here, and hurried along to stand outside and listen. Now he gripped Yumin with one hand and gesticulated with the other, saying very distinctly in warning tones: "Yumin! Let me tell you frankly, if you seize sharpsters you must seize the chief. It's no use catching the small fry! Ha! This time we'll see how you act as Chairman of the Resistance Union, eh!" He dilated his eyes fiercely, beating his bare chest with his fists, then without waiting for Yumin to reply, turned and strode off, still muttering to himself in his peculiar Southern Chahar accent.

Yumin was taken aback at first, then called out loudly after Liuman: "Every grievance should be redressed. If you have courage, speak out. I want to see how you act too."

The men inside could hear them talking, and put their heads out to call: "Yumin! Come on in!"

As soon as he went in he became the centre of the group, everybody looking at him, waiting for him to speak.

"All of us here," said Yumin, "including Tien, are Party members, aren't we?"

"Doesn't that go without saying?" they answered.

"No matter whether we started work under the Japanese or joined after Liberation, we're all sworn brothers, aren't we?"

"We share good luck and bad," they responded. "If we have to jump into the Yellow River we'll do it together."



"In that case, if we have any ideas let's discuss them ourselves, but we shouldn't talk to outsiders."

"Of course!" Lichang confirmed. "That's a rule in the Party Constitution."

"As to how the work should be done, there's Chairman Tung and the comrades from the district to decide. All we Party members have to do is obey them."

"Of course," Lichang expanded the idea again. "That's what you'd call . . ." While he was still reaching for the notebook in his shirt pocket, he remembered: "Oh, that's a rule of organisation."

"Whom should we try this time? Frankly speaking we can't choose according to our individual likes and dislikes, we must follow the wishes of the masses. People they don't hate we can't try even if we want to. People they hate we can't protect even if we want to." His eyes rested for a second on Chang.

"Right, we're working for the people," said Chao. He was tempted to repeat the shameless things Chang had said, but on second thoughts refrained.

"We all took the oath when we joined the Party. If anyone here wants to betray us, we won't spare him. I for one won't stand for it. What do you say?"

"Who'd dare think of such a thing!" they answered. Chao shot another glance at Chang, itching to speak.

In the end, though it was not certain whether everyone agreed or not and they had no idea what they would do the next day, their hearts felt lighter, and they had a feeling of solidarity. All were prepared to go through fire and flood for the people.

They began to realise it was late.

"Better go home! Tomorrow there's a meeting to attend!" someone suggested.

"Right, tomorrow there's a meeting, nobody must go out to the land." Yumin walked out first.

The crescent moon was already in mid-sky and the street was very cool and still. Kung and Wenhui turned south. All the rest skirted the beancurd mill and headed west. As they turned into the lane Yumin looked back, feeling there was someone missing, and saw a man at the north side of the street. He grasped the situation at once, but instead of calling out just whispered a few words to Lichang.

### CHAPTER XIII

Yang had been instructed to attend the women's meeting, so he went out first thing in the morning to see Kuei. He had acted as librarian in the Border Region government library, and although he was only twenty-five or six, and had only had a few years in primary school, during his work as librarian he had read a good deal. In addition to being a book-worm he was painstaking and liked using his brain. Thus although he looked an ordinary, rather quiet cadre, those who were with him for some time realised that he was a youngster who had a mind of his own and was anxious to get on.

In spite of the many advantages to his work in the library, he did not want to go on with it. He often thought he would like to work in some district or village. For at the end of the previous year he had gone to a village to help the peasants settle scores with the landlords, and the experiences of that month had made a deep impression on him. He believed the rural areas were a great living library in which he could study more realistically, and that such a life could inspire him, clarify his view of life and help him to understand Party policy better. What made him particularly eager to go was that there was a directness about country life which would add warmth to his cold theoretical knowledge, and thereby enrich and strengthen him. He came of a farming family himself, but the work had taken him away for over ten years, and now that he was coming back to the country he could appreciate still better the simple sentiments which could not be found in his work as librarian. So when he heard that some comrades were to be sent to work in the land reform teams he seized the opportunity eagerly, hoping to do a good job in the country, and learn a great deal. Thus the previous evening when Comrade Wen had asked him to join the women's meeting and find out their conditions, although he felt unsuited to the job, which might prove embarrassing, he nevertheless accepted gladly, since they had no woman comrade with them. "Take it slowly!" he thought. Now he was going in the cool of the morning to ask where the women's chairman lived.

He turned into the third lane at the west of the village, a narrow lane bounded on either side by mud walls, and littered with dirt and refuse. There was a woman standing at one gate, naked from the waist up, with two stark-naked children clinging

to her. The children's faces were smeared with eye mucus and snot, and covered with flies. When she saw Yang approaching, instead of going inside she turned to look at him, and the children peeped out stupidly from behind their mother. Yang felt embarrassed to look at her, but could scarcely ignore her, so he asked: "Can you tell me which is Chih's house?"

The woman was in no hurry to reply, but smiled as if he were an old acquaintance: "Won't you come in?"

"I'll come later to see you. What's your family? What's your name? Right now I have to find Chih."

Still simpering the woman answered: "Come in and see our poor house. We're the Chao family, the vice ward chief's family. Have you met Chao?"

"Oh, so you're the ward chief's family?" Yang could not help staring at this half-naked woman with the matted hair and dirt-streaked arms, while the children looked even more as if they had just crawled out of a dust-heap. He felt a surge of shame, as if he had in some way treated them unfairly, and patting the two children promised to look in later and call on her husband.

After this he hurried off. The woman called out loudly after him: "It's the next house, in the next courtyard."

Chih had gone to work on the land. Kuei, wearing a patched vest, was hoeing the soil under the grape vine. Seeing a stranger in uniform come in she smiled awkwardly as she moved from under the vine.

"Have you eaten?" She did not know what to say.

"Not yet. Are you Kuei? I came to see you."

"Oh . . ." She came out from under the vine.

"Have you heard about the meeting tonight?"

"Yes. But it's not much use our Women's Association holding a meeting. We've nobody who can speak."

"It doesn't matter if they can't speak. If nobody wants a meeting we needn't necessarily have one. Just exchanging views with a few people will do. What do you think? Let's talk it over now and think of a way, what do you say?" Yang sat down on the mud step outside her door.

"You haven't eaten yet, I'll go and get you something." Ignoring his protests she hurried inside. When she came out again she brought a bowl of kaoliang gruel which she offered Yang, saying: "Our food is very poor. We've nothing good, but

have a bowl of gruel." By this time she had changed the patched vest for her one and only white jacket.

Instead of talking about the Women's Association, he just chatted naturally with her. To begin with she was very shy, confining herself to answering questions, but gradually she began to talk freely. She was from North China and had seen hard times. Her first husband had been conscripted by the Japanese, and was never heard of again. She had a son, and after her husband left, it was even harder for her to make ends meet. They were already at their wits' end when there was a famine and her father-in-law had no choice but to sell her to a merchant. She left her home to go with him, but as ill luck would have it he fell sick and died, and she had come here with some famine refugees. Now she had taken up with Chih, a poor man but a straight one. Her health was not what it had been, but she managed to find time to make shoes to sell. However she couldn't make much money by it because her customers were poor neighbours without a copper to their names, who found the shoes sold in the street not strong enough. She often thought of her son who ought to be in his teens now.

She had no one to talk to like this usually. She found this youngster sympathetic, and he listened patiently while she spoke, and asked repeated questions. Presently she asked him if his parents were alive and whether he was homesick or not, and learned his mother had died when he was a child. His father was a peasant with four or five *mou* of land, but he had not heard from him for several years. Having run away with his uncle to join the revolution, wherever he went he considered his home. He was poor himself, so he was at home with poor people and he wanted them to have a better life, for then his father would have a better life too.

When she heard this she was sorry for him and felt drawn to him. She wanted to heat him up something more to eat, and when he refused she brought out a bowl of cold kaoliang which he ate with appetite because he was really hungry. His praise of the little dish of salted turnips pleased her enormously.

Yang got a general picture of the Women's Association in the village. There was no regular attendance. Before any meeting she had to go from house to house to fetch the women, and most of those who came were members of the Literacy Class. The Association

had organisation and propaganda chiefs beside two chairmen, but none of them knew what they were supposed to do. Whenever there was any business it was Kuei who had to fetch them. The practical work was the Literacy Class, which had done better than in the neighbouring villages. That spring they had given a dancing performance. But the poor women had no time to attend class and didn't like dancing. Attendance at the Literacy Class had been compulsory to begin with, but later they were unable to keep that up and had to make it optional, and most of those who attended were from rather well-to-do families. The women did not speak during meetings but liked to come and listen—some because they were young and could accept new ideas easily, and others because they were told by their families to find out what was going on.

Yang learned that the women were not much interested in village affairs, but had paid considerable attention to the division of the fruits of victory. They would complain that this family had got too much and that too little, while if anyone received one brush more than anyone else it was occasion for her rejoicing. Being shy and afraid of saying the wrong thing, the women dared not talk during meetings for fear of being criticised by the village cadres. But after the meeting they were afraid of nothing and would criticise, squabble and sometimes even come to blows.

"Auntie Kuei," said Yang (for so he had begun to call her), "I think you must be a very good speaker, you talk so clearly and consistently. They chose the right person when they elected you as chairman. Especially since you've had a hard time of it yourself, you can understand other people's difficulties. We are all poor. Only the poor are willing to help the poor."

He told her it was not necessary to call a meeting. She need only call on the poor families, telling them the principles he had explained to her. By chatting with them and listening to their complaints she would see whom in the village they felt most badly about, and what they thought of the village cadres.

Kuei was delighted, and felt he was really a good sort. When he first arrived she had been afraid he would want her to call a meeting and make a speech, which she dreaded. But now he said all she had to do was to make calls and chat with people as he had done with her. She could do this, and knew she would be welcome. When she felt depressed she often called on the shepherd's wife—

they had plenty in common. As she agreed to his proposal she felt a faint pink in her sallow and sunken cheeks, and put it down to the unusual heat that day.

The sun really was blazing hot. Even sitting on the steps in the shade they felt it beating in from all sides. He repeated his instructions again, then started on his way. Kuei saw him outside the gate and pointed out her neighbours' house to him. Only then did he remember his promise to call on Chao. Accordingly he walked into the adjoining courtyard which did not even have a gate.

The tiny courtyard was in great disorder. As no one was in sight Yang called Chao's name, and the half-naked woman he had seen came out from the house and greeted him again eagerly. Yang saw there was another young woman inside, neatly dressed and with glossy hair, who seemed shy and hid herself in a corner, with only her pale face visible as she peeped out. Yang felt he could neither go in nor leave, and asked, "What about the children?"

"They're asleep," said the middle-aged wife of the vice ward chief with assurance. "Won't you come in and sit down? We've only this tiny room. There's hardly room to turn around. These two rooms in the south belong to our cousin. The place is chock full of rags and broken things. Won't you come in and have a look. My husband will be back soon." Then stepping forward she whispered, "She's the wife of the ward chief. Doesn't she dress smartly? Ah, I haven't got a thing to wear." She cast a glance over her naked arms and pendulous breasts.

"The ward chief's wife?" Yang had food for thought, but did not show any surprise, just quietly taking his leave of the good-natured woman. As soon as she was back inside, he could hear her chuckling.

## CHAPTER XIV

Back in the south street Yang noticed a number of people with a mysterious and apprehensive air come out of another lane, whispering warnings to each other. On reaching the top of the lane they stopped and looked back at one particular house. Yang wondered what they were up to. Joining the crowd he found a

young militiaman carrying a home-made rifle, and asked him what had happened. The militiaman was about seventeen or eighteen, and had a white cloth round his head with two corners dangling over his shoulders. He eyed Yang innocently, but only answered with a foolish smile. When Yang pressed him he said with embarrassment: "I'm not sure. People are so superstitious."

At this point another man caught up with them and interrupted to ask: "Did you see it?"

"No," said the youngster regretfully.

"What?" asked Yang again, but the man had already hurried back into the lane.

Yang followed him.

A group of people suddenly burst out of a gate, among them a woman with dishevelled hair and red eyes, carrying a child in her arms. The onlookers held their breath and looked at her sympathetically and fearfully as they followed her out to the street. There some of them watched for a time from a distance, then gradually dispersed. Yang's curiosity was aroused, for all the villagers seemed tongue-tied and unwilling to talk. What could have happened? Looking back he saw that the gate of that house had not been closed, and prompted by curiosity decided to have a look.

The courtyard was so quiet it was hard to believe there had just been such a crowd there, and there was a strange odour in the air. He quietly walked straight in, pressed his face against the window-pane of the north room, and saw a woman lying on the *kang* dressed in white, her small feet in white slippers crossed. She was facing inward, but seemed to have heard some sound outside the window. However instead of turning round she called out calmly in a sophisticated voice: "Aunty! Fetch me the fruit that was brought just now."

Yang beat a rapid and stealthy retreat, thoroughly bewildered, while an old woman came out from the west room, from which the heavy odour was emanating. Acting on impulse Yang rushed over and raised the curtain, and the old woman did not stop him, but pursed her lips and motioned with her head toward the north room. Her face was thin and wizened, her eyes red-rimmed and her expression ambiguous. From her winks and pursed lips it was difficult to make out what she wanted. Yang lifted the bamboo curtain and went in. Candles and incense were burning inside, in a brass vessel on the ground some paper money had just burnt out, on the chest of drawers was a shrine swathed in red silk and white strips of silk embroidered

with characters. The pewter candlesticks and incense-burner were polished so that they shone. Yang was about to pull the red silk curtains when the old woman waddled in again and asked sharply: "Who are you looking for? What are you doing here?" Her back was bent like a bow, and her two feet, not much bigger than donkey's hooves, tottered backward and forward all the time.

"What's this? What do you do here?" Yang looked piercingly at her.

Just then the sophisticated voice was heard again in the courtyard, calling: "Aunty, who are you talking to?"

Yang came out from behind the old woman. The woman who had been lying on the *kang* was standing on the porch outside, dressed in a snow-white gown which fitted her like a glove. From the bottom of her trousers two diminutive white feet peeped out. Her face was dusted with powder, her arms loaded with silver bracelets, her oiled black hair was plastered on her forehead, and her eye-brows plucked in a crescent were blackened too. She stood there frail as a hanged ghost. When Yang came out of the west room she remained as calm as ever, and only asked with a smile: "Whom are you looking for?"

Yang walked quickly out, feeling as if he had unaccountably strayed into an old story book, and hurried to the street as if he had seen a spirit. A pitiless sun burnt overhead. He was hurrying forward, oblivious to everything, mopping his face, when he heard Hu's cheerful laugh behind him.

"Where did you disappear to all morning? I've had a time looking for you."

Yang gripped his hand, smiled uncertainly and was just going to speak when Lichang appeared, roaring with laughter, and said, "Well, comrade, how did you come to visit a place like that?"

"Who lives there? What do they do?" asked Yang rapidly. "They have Buddhas inside!"

"That's the famous White Snake!" Lichang winked and went on, "She's a widow who can cure sickness. That aunt of hers is an old widow who could cure sickness too when she was young, and she taught her niece. Ho, ho!" He couldn't stop laughing, and putting his head close to Yang whispered, "People say she can cure love sickness too! Ha ha!"

Hu burst out laughing too, and slapped Yang on the back.

"It's all nonsense," went on Lichang, as the three of them started toward Old Han's house. "But it really is strange. There was a



snake in her house this morning under the eaves, so she threw a fit. She's a witch, and she said it was Lord White reverting to his original form — the Lord, you understand, is the god she has in the shrine. The god said the emperor born of the real dragon is holding court in Peking, all China will be united and have peace. Only the people must behave themselves in order to be rewarded by Heaven. . . . She often makes up nonsense like that to deceive people. Today a lot of people went to her house to see Lord White. Liu Kuei-sheng's wife took her baby for her to see, but she said Lord White told her the villagers were wicked and the world was going to the dogs, so she refused to go into a trance or prescribe medicine, and the woman was dreadfully upset."

They had now reached Old Han's house. As Wen was still writing at the table, they went on talking about White Snake. Yang asked about her past, Lichang told them a number of jokes and Hu kept chortling with laughter. Later Wen, wearing a serious look, warned Yang that he wanted him to note the people's reactions, not run off wherever he pleased. But Yang had his own ideas, and was not in the least repentant.

## CHAPTER XV

Comrade Wen had quite an air and seemed a good scholar — at least he succeeded in impressing others with his learning. He had also acquired something of the smugness and insolence of the leisure class and was trying hard to do away with these undesirable traits. He wanted to become more revolutionary and behave like a truly educated responsible person or, to put it simply — a high ranking Communist.

He often told people he was a university graduate or even a university professor, without making clear of which university. Probably only his Party branch knew the truth. When doing educational work he hinted that he had formerly studied education. At one period he had seen a good deal of certain writers, and he liked to discuss different fields of literature as if he were well versed in them all. At present he was a bona-fide student of political economy who had published an article in a leading magazine.

Wen was widely read and liked to discuss books. Once he held forth enthusiastically on Mao Tun's *Midnight* and *Spring Festival* and the handicaps to China's industry and its future. When asked why the able and shrewd heroines of these two novels while hating their surroundings still entertained people like prostitutes, he spoke at random, saying this showed the author's view of love and represented the most recent aesthetic thought. At this his listeners grew indignant at what they considered an insult to Mr. Mao Tun, and thinking they were going to hit him he admitted he had not read either book, only a review of *Midnight*, the preface of *Spring Festival* and the news that a play had been made of it.

Another time when he was dining in the house of a committee member of the county Party branch, to make conversation he said, "Your plump face is very like your father's."

Much surprised, his host asked, "Did you know him?"

Wen pointed to a woodcut hanging on the wall, and said, "Isn't that he? Look how alike your eyes are."

At this everybody in the room burst out laughing, the man opposite him who had his mouth full nearly choked. "Heavens! Liu Yu-hou! Don't you know him, Comrade? Didn't you say you'd lived in Yen-an?"

"I've seen many portraits of Liu Yu-hou. This isn't he. Is it really not your father?" Wen made himself appear quite indifferent, and tried to pass it off by saying that this woodcut was not a good likeness, the only good woodcuts were by Ku Yuan who had stayed with him for a long time. Then people pointed out the artist's name at the bottom of the woodcut, and when he looked he read "Ku Yuan". Momentarily taken aback he soon started expatiating on Ku Yuan's fame abroad, and how even Americans knew that among the Chinese Communists was a woodcutting artist of genius, Comrade Ku Yuan. The others were not certain whether he knew Ku Yuan or not, but it was a fact that he liked to visit famous people. Anyone with the least reputation he seemed to know, or at least the story of his life. And he liked to recount his associations with such people to those who had no opportunity or desire to hob-nob with the famous.

This was all past now. He had spent a year in Yen-an studying, during which he had analysed himself many times, in some respects very profoundly, and tried to change some of his unrealistic bad habits. He wanted sincerely to go to the masses and

learn from them, but after leaving Yen-an he still liked to hold forth, to display his learning, dogma and second-hand information. Sometimes he realised this could not help him get close to the masses, but it gained the respect of the less cultured, and that was enough for him.

Now he was joining in land reform, claiming to be researching into China's land problem and village economy. The Party considered more experience would be good for him, and therefore wished him to take part in the work. But after he reached the district the authorities there, not knowing him and impressed by his fine talk and apparent learning, were exceptionally polite to him, and trusted him enough to make him leader of a work team sent by the district Party committee to take charge of the land reform in Nuanshui with its two hundred odd families.

From the very start Wen realised it would not be plain sailing, not because he understood the work in the village but because he found to his dismay that he had not yet established his prestige in the group. He regarded Hu as an ordinary propaganda worker of low cultural level but very conceited, and Yang as a pig-headed youngster. In tackling any problem his chief concern was how to impress them. Without any clear understanding of the women's or the youth association he ordered them off to attend meetings of these groups, while he decided to preside over the Peasants' Association himself. He even spent a whole morning drafting the notes for his speech that evening. This speech was to be rich in content and profound in its views, so that if printed in the Party paper it would make an elegant essay.

Old Tung had been sent to Liku, about a mile away, where there were only fifty families. The district authorities thought it unnecessary to send any one else, since the team in Nuanshui could supervise the work there too. As it happened, Old Tung's elder brother lived at Liku, so he was more than willing to go. Thus the evening's meetings would depend mainly on Comrade Wen.

In the afternoon the two younger comrades went off on their own. Yumin put in an appearance, but left on seeing there was nothing to do. Left to himself Wen felt tired out, and since it was a hot day lay down listlessly on the *kang* to practise his speech. He very soon fell asleep, no doubt to appreciate his own eloquence in his dreams.

## CHAPTER XVI

That evening many families ate earlier than usual, and after the meal, since there was nothing to do, strolled about the streets. There was an atmosphere of expectancy and a smile on every face just as at a festival, and people greeted each other with: "Have you eaten?" "There's going to be a meeting when it's dark!" They went to the compound which had once been Hsu's, but not a cadre was to be seen there. A militiaman, with a locally made rifle slung across his back and a white cloth on his head in spite of the heat, took up his post at the gate, pacing up and down.

"When's the meeting?" he was asked.

"Who knows?" said he. "Many people haven't eaten yet, and some are still in the fields."

So the villagers went out again, some to the orchards to pick apples and others to sit at the gate of the primary school eating slices of water-melon, the juice of which trickled onto their chests. Some cracked melon seeds or smoked. When they saw a cadre coming they called out loudly: "Mr. Chao! Isn't the meeting starting yet? Ask old Red-nosed Wu to sound the gong again and sing something!"

Chao was only a little over thirty, but since he belonged to an older generation everybody called him Mr. Chao. He always looked busy and wore an old white jacket. Now he answered smiling: "Just wait a little longer, we'll start as soon as it's dark."

As soon as Yumin came in sight, someone asked him: "Can I join the meeting this evening?"

"Are you trying to be funny? You ought to know yourself whether you can join or not. Are you a member of the Association? The meeting is for all poor peasants!" All who heard laughed, for only a fool could fail to know whether he belonged to the Peasants' Association or not.

Some children came over on seeing a crowd, but when they had stared for a time and seen there was nothing happening, they found it dull and went into the school. School being over it was very quiet in there too. Both the teachers had disappeared, leaving the cook — the same Red-nosed Wu — washing dishes by the door of the out-house. He was the one who sounded the gong when occasion arose. The children went out again to the fields where some of them started singing the song they had learned that day from Comrade Hu, and the rest joined in: "Unite together — hey!

Tillers of the land!" Their singing attracted several old men who came to sit under the locust tree, their foot-long pipes between their lips, gazing round in silence.

The women were out too. Sheng's mother was sitting on a stone bench on the street leading south. She knew there was to be a meeting that night—nobody had told her to attend but she was inquisitive—and no matter what the meeting was she meant to go and listen. Since Sheng had joined the army the village authorities had only given her twenty catties of grain, and everybody called her a middle peasant. She didn't care a fig what class she was, but since her son had enlisted the cadres ought to treat her with special consideration. They had promised two bushels of grain but only given one-tenth that amount. Yumin and Chao and that lot were selfish and on the make. They pushed an old widow like her to one side, even though she was an 'army dependent'. Sitting on the stone bench, ignored by all, she drummed her cheek as if angry at her own silence.

Just then a merry group of chattering girls and young wives passed by, some of them throwing down fruit cores as they walked. Sheng's mother called to one of them: "Heini! Are you having a meeting tonight? I'm an army dependent too, can I come and listen?"

"If there's a meeting you can listen, why ever not? But I'm not sure if there will be one. We're going to ask the women's chairman!" Heini was wearing a cotton gown with white flowers on a blue ground, her short hair carelessly fastened. Without waiting for further questions she tossed her head and went along with her friends.

Sheng's mother spat angrily in the direction of the pink-stockinged legs, cursing: "See how cocky you are! Who hasn't been young once! Bah, you're just too free for words!"

The group Heini was with went to the western quarter to see Kuei.

These girls all belonged to the Literacy Class. They were young and lively and enjoyed meetings. Although they came from comfortable or even well-to-do homes they were very eager to hear new ideas, and thoroughly approved of Communist principles and practice. Early that morning they were delighted to hear there was to be a women's meeting, for the Literacy Class always participated in the Women's Association meetings. However nobody

had notified them. During class they told each other to attend the meeting and after supper they reminded each other again. It was nearly dark now yet still no one was clear about the situation, so after discussing it for some time they decided to ask their chairman. They laughed and chatted as they went. Before they realised it they had come to Kuei's gate, but nobody wanted to be the first to go in. Each pushed someone else forward, until the whole group poured into the court. Then they all giggled, and it was Heini who called out: "Kuei!"

Without waiting for Kuei to answer, the group pushed its way up to her door. Inside they saw seven or eight women and several children, chattering away nineteen to the dozen, who stopped talking and turned to stare as they appeared.

"What is it?" Kuei did not ask them to come in and sit down, but spoke coldly.

"Kuei!" Heini was still in a cheerful mood. "Kuei, we've come to ask you if we're having a meeting tonight or not."

"What meeting!" Yueh, the shepherd's wife, turned her narrow slits of eyes at them. "Other people are holding the Peasants' Association meeting this evening! For *poor* peasants!" She emphasised the word 'poor', and glanced sideways at each of them in turn.

"We're not asking about the Peasants' Association." Heini felt somewhat put out, but still smiled with good-will. "We're asking about our Women's Association."

"Our Women's Association?" sneered a short woman in the corner.

"Heini, let's go! What's the point of staying here to be snubbed!" said one of the girls.

But now Kuei had come forward and gripped Heini's hand. She was thinking how enthusiastic and conscientious Heini was in teaching the Literacy Class, how she never had to go to fetch her, how Heini had always greeted her warmly and come to see her and make rice gruel for her when she was ill. Heini had also given her dyes, embroidery thread and cloth for her shoes, and Lichang thought highly of her. Kuei went over to soothe her, saying: "Heini, don't take offence. We're not having a meeting this evening. Whenever we do I'll let you know. It's good to want a meeting. There are so many unwilling to come. Most of us women are so muddle-headed."

"Oh . . . ." Heini looked like a discomfited hen. With her head on one side she walked out.

"Won't you stay a little, Heini? I shan't see you out!" Standing at the door to watch the retreating backs of the group and of Heini, Kuei could not help thinking: "She really is a good girl. Her uncle is no good, but you can't blame her for that."

But someone inside the room shouted: "Those creatures . . . Bah! As if we couldn't see through them, coming here to spy on us."

"Come on, let's go to the meeting," said Kuei hurriedly. "This evening we'll attend the Peasants' Association meeting and hear how they mean to go about things. We can't stay away this time. They want to divide the land up for the poor, and we women have our share too. If the poor people don't go, and aren't clear about the business, it will be difficult to go about it. Come on."

"Let's go." The shepherd's wife was the first to stand up, and her face broadened in a smile as she said, "I can't stand those bewitching creatures. They don't do a stroke of work, just strolling about all day long."

She was a thin woman with a long face, fine eye-brows and narrow eyes, who sometimes smiled very sweetly but could also show herself a shrew. The shepherd only came home once every four or five days or sometimes not for two weeks at a time. Living by herself she was lonely, and because she had a hard time and was unhappy she often greeted him with sneers. She would not light the fire or clean the pan, hiding the little food that was left, so that the shepherd had to take out two catties of buckwheat flour or a *sheng* \* of beans from his bag. He would tell her whose ewe had lambed again, but not how a wolf had again stolen two of the flock, just saying their dog was too old and they ought to find a better one. Next year instead of looking after sheep he intended to rent a few *mon* of land and plant wheat. Then if there were a good harvest they would have enough to eat and not need to buy food with prices rising so fearfully. He was nearly fifty but had no land at all, and had become a shepherd through force of necessity. When his pretty young wife nagged or flared up at him he would light the fire himself, while she would stand in the courtyard and abuse him shrilly: "It's because I behaved badly in my last existence that now I'm married to an old pauper who is away from one end of the year to the other! How much longer must I put up with this!"

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\* About a pint.

She would go on cursing till the old shepherd lost his temper, and as if catching a sheep he would pull her inside and give her a beating, scolding: "Devil take you, what good are you anyway? By working hard all my life I managed to get together twenty sheep, and sold them all to buy you — how dare you resent my poverty or my age! You bitch, who knows how you carry on when I'm away from home. . . ."

When beaten his wife cried bitterly to think how he wronged her. But she would gradually calm down, and go meekly to knead the buckwheat flour and prepare food for him. Then he would sit in front of the *kang* stove, smoking and stroking his goatee. Glancing at him from time to time she felt great compassion for him. In the summer it was not so bad, but in winter he still had to lead the flock through wind and rain, looking for a mountain valley where they could find pasture and a flat place out of the wind to pitch his tent, with only some herbs for pillow and a thin quilt for cover. Every year he only earned a little grain and a few bolts of cloth, or a couple of lambs. Now he was no longer young and wanted to take to farming again, but where was the land to come from? Each time he came back she would start a quarrel with him, then come to feel she had treated him badly, and look at him tenderly once more. He also would become his usual self again, and after one night they would seem like a newly-married couple, grown quite inseparable. She would accompany him to the outskirts of the village to see him off, sitting down at the top of the road and watching till he was out of sight before coming back. Such was the hard and lonely life she led.

This thin woman apparently had no cause for fear except her husband's fist, and no source of comfort. Hence she was often bitter and impatient. Of all the village women she was least afraid of trouble. She had quarreled and even fought with people, and during the campaigns to liquidate the landlord class the previous year and that spring, had been the most outspoken of the women. Once her temper was up she feared neither man nor devil, and at such times people would gather round her and unite under her incitement.

As they got down from the *kang*, the children started clamouring, and one old woman said she dared not go.

Kuei tugged at her, saying, "Aunty! If you don't go to the meeting you won't understand anything, and can't stand on your feet!"



"Ah," sighed the old woman. "But I don't dare go. You know how obstinate your uncle is. He's going to the meeting this evening, and if I go he'll see me. He goes without saying a word, and keeps silent when he gets home. It's not that he wants to go, only he's afraid they'll fetch Ching otherwise. He said good or bad he'd shoulder it himself. If he saw me there, there'd be the devil to pay. Ah! What can you do with a man like that. . . ."

This old woman was the wife of Chung who was notorious in the village because he had secretly returned to Hou the one and a half *mou* of land given him that spring. When his son Ching stamped with rage and cursed him for a stubborn old fool he took a broom to beat him. The Peasants' Association learning of it tried to intervene, but since he denied the business they could do nothing about it.

"Well, can't you scold him and tell him things have changed nowadays," said the shepherd's wife, perking up like a sparrow again. "How can anyone be such an old slave, clinging to poverty for dear life!"

But the old woman stuck to her guns and went home by herself, while the others started off toward the meeting place in Hsu's courtyard.

By now it was nearly dark and impossible to distinguish anyone at a distance. Militiamen were patrolling the street and some dozen people were standing outside Hsu's courtyard gate, while militiamen carrying rifles inspected all comers. Sheng's mother was standing outside the gate too, but they would not let her in, and advised her: "Go home, old woman, it's dark."

"If you want anything, go to see the village cadres tomorrow," said someone. "Don't keep standing here."

"Suppose I like standing," she muttered. "Can't a person even stand in the street? If my Sheng were at home you'd—well! You talk about special consideration for army dependents, yet you won't even let me stand in the main street. . . ."

"All right," they were forced to say. "If you want to stand there, do."

The courtyard was already packed. It was supposed to be a meeting of poor peasants, but actually most families had only sent one representative, and there were a good many middle peasants too. They were sitting in groups on the steps on all sides, raising a hubbub. The stars were so bright that the militiamen on the

roof could be seen. Kuo was busy examining one person after another. The militiamen thought a good deal of their captain, though they complained of his strictness. Lichang was busy too, running in and out calling various people. Chao, still with his short white jacket, had lit a lamp and put it on the table on the steps of the north side.

When Kuei and the other women arrived, Sheng's mother went in with them. The women stood in one corner, and Kuei saw Comrade Yang talking in the middle of a crowd of men, and heard occasional roars of laughter from that group.

Hu had appeared on the steps too, and Lichang said loudly: "How about learning a song?" Several young peasants agreed, whereupon Hu struck up the song the children had sung: "Unite together — hey! Tillers of the land. . . ."

Many people, however, had their eyes anxiously on the gate, watching for Yumin and the Chairman of the Peasants' Association. They were looking forward eagerly to this evening's meeting, for they had much to say, although they did not know how to express themselves or even if they dared speak out. They had faith in the Communists, knowing the Communist Party was the poor man's party, but they still had too little understanding of it and too many reservations.

## CHAPTER XVII

At Comrade Wen's entry into the courtyard there was a burst of applause from the dark crowd. Everybody made way for him, closing in again as soon as he had passed, and pressing toward the table in front where the cadres had placed a bench. Comrade Wen made a gesture as if to decline, and then sat down. All eyes were fastened on him, and he smiled slightly at them all.

Cheng, the young Peasants' Association Chairman, wearing a short white jacket, his chest exposed and his head bare, stood in front of the table in the dim lamplight which lit up his thick eyebrows and sparkling eyes. Rather nervous he looked at the crowd and said: "Elders!"

All the audience laughed, and someone said, "Don't laugh!"

He went on: "Today! This meeting today is for discussion of land reform, understand? Is it clear?"

"Quite clear," they all answered.

Red-nosed Wu who was standing by the table stretched his neck and said loudly, "What's not clear about it? We take the rich people's land and divide it up among the peasants, so that those who till the soil have land of their own, and everybody has to work and nobody can live by exploiting others!" Glancing at Wen he sketched a gesture with his hand. "Last year we dealt with one family. We attacked Hsu, and took over eight hundred bushels of grain which, in terms of land, houses and livestock, were divided among the poor. This compound's his, Mr. Chairman! Doesn't that count as land reform as far as he is concerned? Isn't that what you mean?" This was Old Wu who sounded the gong.

Somebody at the back shouted, "Don't talk out of turn! Listen to the chairman."

"I only said a few words, if we mustn't speak I won't," said Old Wu, smiling uncomfortably toward Comrade Wen.

"There are a lot of principles involved in land reform. Let's get them clear today. Now shall we ask Comrade Wen to speak to us?" When Cheng had finished, without waiting for the crowd to say anything, he started clapping.

There was a burst of applause.

As Wen stood up, whispering sounded from the audience. All pressed a little closer.

"Folks!" Wen's northern accent was very easy to follow, and he had a clear voice. "Today is the first time we've met. Possibly —" Feeling the word 'possibly' was too literary he searched frantically for another word, but unable to think of one for the moment he had to go on: "Possibly you feel rather strange, rather unfamiliar. But the Eighth Route Army and the people are one family, we'll soon know each other well, won't we?"

"Yes," answered someone in the crowd.

"Now we're agitating for land reform. What is land reform? It's 'Land to the tiller'. That is to say the man with the plough has his own land, those who don't work won't have. . . ."

Some of the audience were whispering again.

"Silence!" shouted Cheng.

Wen then proceeded to speak according to the draft he had prepared.

First he explained why land reform was necessary, beginning with the history of man and explaining who are the makers of history. He also analysed the situation in China and abroad, proving the timeliness of this policy. To begin with Wen paid great attention to his vocabulary. But all the modern terms it had taken him so long to learn, all the beautiful descriptions phrased in rhetoric, were entirely lost on this audience. Nobody could understand them. And although he tried hard to find words in common use he did not know many such. Then he spoke of how land reform should be carried out, repeating 'mass line' again and again and dividing his speech into numerous headings: firstly, secondly . . . fifthly, and then firstly again, until finally he forgot to pay attention to his vocabulary, carried away by his own eloquence.

The audience listened as hard as they could. They had hoped for something short and simple, a few sentences which would resolve their doubts. They wanted something decisive. They were well able to figure out questions concerning grain, obligations to the government and settling scores with landlords, but they were not interested in historical stages and all the rest of it. They lost interest in the talk, unable to see what connection it had with their life.

Some of them, although they could not understand most of his speech, had to admit: "That's a clever chap, how well he speaks!" But gradually they felt too tired to concentrate. Because of their labours during the day and the fact that they were unusually excited, their eyelids grew heavy and to keep their eyes open required an effort. Someone nudged his neighbour. Then people started stealthily leaving the crowd to sit on the steps at the back, where they put their heads on their knees and went to sleep with their mouths open.

Yang wrote a note and handed it to Wen. After looking at it the latter crumpled it up and stuffed it into his pocket.

Sheng's mother had long ago grown tired of listening and wanted to leave, but the shepherd's wife would not let her. When a baby started crying and its mother insisted on taking it home, Sheng's mother abetted her, saying, "In a meeting they should consider folks' feelings, not force people. This is simply killing! If an old woman over fifty like me gets her clothes wet with dew and falls ill, who'll look after me? My Sheng isn't at home. . . ."

"Tiresome old woman, who asked you to come! Whoever has come will have to sit it out. Just try going, that's all, there are still guards at the gate."

"Ai yaya, how cross you are! Now that you're chairman of the women you look down on everyone! I'm not a traitor, why should I be afraid of you?"

Many people were feeling sleepy standing there, and hearing the women quarreling they turned round and stood on tiptoe to watch. At the same time a young militiaman called out: "Anyone who makes a noise will be tied up."

More people joined in the talking, until there was such a tumult Comrade Wen had to stop. He eyed this unruly audience with annoyance.

"Don't make such a noise! Be quiet please!" a cadre standing behind Wen shouted at the top of his voice.

Several people had to hurry over to act as peacemakers before the two women who wanted to leave were allowed out, and Sheng's mother could be heard exclaiming loudly outside the courtyard: "Tie people up indeed! You talk of tying up to frighten people. Go ahead and tie me up if you dare!"

The cadres hurriedly tried to restore order. Yumin stepped forward and said: "We'll go on with the meeting. Today we're listening to Chairman Wen, and must listen well. If there's anything we don't understand we can ask him tomorrow. We must get this business straight in our heads. We're the Peasants' Association and this is our business, so we must listen patiently."

Some people straggled back to their places, but others stayed at the back, and as the steps were already crowded they lolled against the pillars.

The meeting dragged on. Kuo, Captain of the Militia, always found it hard to sit still, and when he could not understand he went out to inspect the guards, then after a few turns returned to the courtyard. But seeing Wen still talking he went up onto the roof which was bathed in moonlight. There was a breeze, and wearing thin clothes one felt quite cool. He strained his eyes to look all around. On three sides of the village was dark, dense forest over which floated a grey-white layer of moonlight merging in the far distance with the clear sky. The Sangkan River was hidden behind the forest from some points in which thin smoke drifted up and spread fanwise over the surrounding trees, and the moonlight piercing it seemed even more soft and hazy. The smoke was caused by watchers in the orchards who were burning artemesia herbs and moxa leaves to keep off mosquitoes and insects. Amid the bright, thinly scattered stars the Milky Way showed as a smudge of white, the North Star

was sloping down and somebody's donkey nearby was braying for all it was worth.

Kuo turned to look at the three guards sitting under the ridge, holding their rifles upright or horizontal. One of them approached him softly and called quietly:- "Captain! Captain!" Coming closer he whispered: "Folk are tired out, nobody understands a word, the chief's talk is too long and way over their heads — much too literary. Can you remember what he's said, Captain?"

"They're working for us," replied Kuo, "so we must take pains. We must keep a good watch."

The courtyard was pitch dark and the oil in the lamp was nearly exhausted. Cheng had mended the wick several times and Hu had whispered something into Wen's ear before the latter finally brought his speech to a conclusion. Thereupon a great many people woke up and, without waiting for Cheng to announce that the meeting was over, pushed and jostled their way out, while Cheng shouted after them: "Tomorrow everybody come a little earlier!"

Some cadres emerged from the Literacy Class classroom rubbing their eyes, and Lichang asked confusedly, "Is the meeting over?"

Yumin accompanied Comrade Wen and the others back, but on the road no one said a word. A few members of the Peasants' Association walking in front were in low spirits too, yawning loudly, and one of them made the wry remark: "Our bottoms are going to be sore from sitting before we 'stand on our feet'."

Another glanced back at Yumin and the others, then nudged the man who had spoken, so the latter laughed and said no more. They put on speed and drew ahead.

"Who was that?" asked Yang.

"Just two mischief makers," said Yumin. "Returned soldiers, you know. One of them is Old Han's son."

When they got home Old Han was still up, and hurried over, eager to hear what had happened. Hu said solemnly: "Let's have a good talk tonight to decide just how the work should be done!"

All the way back Comrade Wen had been in a tired but excited state, believing the meeting had not gone off badly, hence Hu's dissatisfied tones surprised and upset him. He wanted to put him in his place, but on second thought decided people would know which of them was right and he had better not appear petty. Still in a good humour he asked Yumin: "What's your opinion of the meeting this evening? Don't you think it was necessary to explain things to the peasants, and carry out ideological mobilisation first?"

Before Yumin had thought how to answer, Hu burst out: "What ideological mobilisation! The meeting lasted nearly six hours and all the time it was one person talking. It's a wonder everybody didn't go to sleep! Excuse my frankness, Comrade Wen, but didn't you see a lot of them sleeping? And on top of that your language — why — it was quite over their heads."

A few remarks like this were not enough to destroy Wen's self-confidence, only serving to convince him that Hu was shallow. Taking up a copy of *Northern Culture* which was lying on the table, he said coldly: "Peasants are backward you know. They aren't interested in anything except immediate gains. We can't hurry things. The first step is to get their thinking clear. It's impossible to expect quick results, only the petty-bourgeoisie think like that. As a matter of fact I'm quite satisfied with this evening's meeting, although I admit my language is lacking in folk flavour." With this he opened the book to find an essay he wanted to read.

"You shouldn't underestimate the peasants," said Hu. "Of course their cultural level is low and they can't theorise, but they learned long ago how to fight and how to get land." For confirmation he turned to Yumin: "You belong to the village and know more about conditions here than anyone else, and you've had experience in struggling against the landlords. What do you say? Is it any use holding any more meetings like this?"

Without giving Yumin a chance to speak, Yang broke in: "There must be meetings, and it is necessary to explain to the people just what land reform means. Today's meeting had its uses of course, but — it's too late today, let's say what we have to say tomorrow."

"What does it matter if we talk this evening?" said Hu, still boiling with indignation. "It isn't as if Yumin were an outsider."

"On the contrary Yumin plays the leading role. Of course the village cadres understand the village affairs best, I just meant that we're too tired this evening, so even if we discuss things we won't come to any conclusion. Won't it be better if everybody sleeps on it and we have a discussion tomorrow? What do you think, Yumin?" Yang looked at him confidently.

"Right, Old Yang. We'll do as you say. Comrade Wen, sleep well, I'm going." And Yumin started out very considerably.

"Wait a bit, I'll come and bolt the gate after you." Yang followed him out, slapping him on the back and speaking in a low voice, and as the two of them reached the gate he said, "There are always

obstacles in the work. I know the meeting this evening was a little too long, and the speech was over people's heads, but it doesn't really matter. It is the first day and one has to talk about the nature of land reform. You joined the Party before Liberation and started life as a hired farmhand, tell us more of what you think. Don't talk carelessly in front of the masses, but listen to their views while taking a firm stand. You must take more responsibility in village business. We've only just come and have to consult you about everything. Don't be discouraged if there are difficulties. We'll think of a way out together. Tomorrow we can talk things over at length. We've got to make a good job of this, right?"

Although Yumin was himself reserved, he liked forthrightness, and answered: "Right, Old Yang, we'll talk again tomorrow. Although this is such a small village it isn't going to be an easy business. There are all sorts of people here. Luckily we have you to figure out ways and means, and we'll do as you say. Now that you've come we must learn as much as we can from you."

Last of all Yang said: "So long as we follow Chairman Mao's instructions, take the mass line, enlighten and help the masses, discussing everything with them and making plans for them, success is assured. We must all have this faith, and work harder!"

## CHAPTER XVIII

When the meeting was over Kuei went home with some other women. The moon shone on the foot of the low walls, the middle of the road was sunken and stony. It was hard to walk carrying children, but all the men had gone on ahead, leaving the women to stumble along as best they could behind. One child was crying. His mother had a baby in one arm and was leading the child with her other hand, scolding: "Crying, crying, you are the limit! Mother isn't dead yet. Wait till Mother dies to cry!"

"Little San, don't cry, we're nearly home. Tomorrow I'll buy you a cake," said Kuei, taking his other hand.

"Ah, dragging your child and carrying your baby!" said another woman. "We got up at the crack of dawn and we've been up half the night! What did we do to deserve this! Sister, why don't you let Little San's father carry him?"



"Oh, never mind, his father's worse. He didn't even want to come to the meeting. When the Peasants' Association Chairman came to fetch him he said I could take his place, he was really too sleepy, because for two and a half nights he was up at midnight to go to Shacheng to sell fruit. It's twenty miles there and back, with two rivers to cross."

"Whose fruit did you buy?" asked the shepherd's wife. "The fruit isn't really ripe yet."

"Do you suppose we can afford to buy fruit? We were selling it for Li. Li said he was short of money, so he had some of the riper fruit picked first and sent it to be sold. You little wretch, don't cry."

"It must be nice to have a few *mou* of orchard land," sighed the shepherd's wife. "Just to look at it would make you happy."

"There are so many orchards in the village, yet not one belongs to us poor folk," said Kuei enviously. "If the poor people stand up and each family gets one *mou* that will be fine."

"Yes, and save the children's mouths watering at the sight."\*

Hearing the grown-ups talk about fruit the child cried even more bitterly.

"Heavens! Stand up, stand up, always clamouring about standing up. I think we'll stay this way the rest of our lives. Tomorrow I'm not coming, not on your life."

"Kuei," said the shepherd's wife, as if the thought had suddenly struck her: "If we want to rise to our feet we must catch those rascals. Just talking about principles people don't understand and can't remember is simply futile."

Kuei grunted non-committally. She did not like to say she agreed, thinking that would be letting Comrade Yang down.

When they were nearly at the turning to the lane they heard the sound of a woman mourning from the fields in the west: "Little Pao! Come back!"\*

A man's deep voice followed: "Come back!"

Then the woman chimed in again tearfully: "Little Pao! Come back!"

"Come back!" echoed the other.

"It's really too bad about Little Pao. It doesn't look as if he will get better. Even the Lord of the White Snake wouldn't answer

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\* There was a superstitious belief in the old days that the soul of an ill child was being lured off by an evil spirit. The parents would go out at night to "look" for the soul and "call" it back.

prayers." The woman hugged the baby in her arms more tightly. "Oh, hush up, Little San, in another minute we'll be home."

"The Lord of the White Snake said people are wicked, that the real Dragon Emperor has gone to Peking, his capital since ancient times!" said someone else.

"Oh, who believes that nonsense! I don't!" But no one echoed the shepherd's wife.

As they turned into the lane they could still hear the faint, trembling cries of "Little Pao, come back!" wailing in the infinite empty night.

By the time Kuei got home her husband had already lit the lamp and was sitting on the *kang* smoking. "Aren't you going to bed yet?" she asked. "It's nearly cockcrow." Taking a brush she gently brushed the bed, and from the top of the roll of bedding took down a square pillow stuffed with buckwheat husks. "Better sleep. It's cooler now. The room is too hot in summer after cooking here all day. I wish we could afford to build an additional stove in the courtyard." She got down, changed her white jacket for a ragged vest, then said, "I'm afraid Little Pao won't last long, his father and mother are calling his soul in the fields. The Lord of the White Snake wouldn't answer prayers. What's the matter, are you asleep? Look at you, pursing your lips again. Who's offended you? There's a piece of water-melon in the cupboard, would you like it?"

"Bah, you're in high spirits," said Chih sullenly. Nobody had crossed him, yet he felt put out and wanted to scold his wife, but could think of no pretext. "In future you may have meetings all day."

"Well, didn't you go too? And it's not as if I liked going, the cadres made me."

"Bah, you're one of the cadres too! I'm waiting to see how long you can count on the Communists, and who you'll count on once they've gone. But when that time comes don't drag me into it."

"Oh, when I agreed to be the women's chairman Yumin spoke to you about it, and you didn't disapprove, but now you blame me! I'm only a woman after all, I follow my husband. I've been poor so long. I begged my way here, and if the worst happens I can start begging again. What is there for me to be afraid of? It was for your sake I went to the meeting. You're always saying how you would like to have one or two *mou* of land, but if not for Yumin do you suppose you could have borrowed those ten bushels of grain

this spring? Now that we've got a few *mou* to cultivate you forget the debt we have to pay back this autumn. I shan't get anything under the land reform. For better or worse I have to be dependent on you, and now for no reason at all you lose your temper with me." She blew out the light and lay down angrily on the other end of the *kang* without another word.

Honest Chih did not say any more either. He knocked out the red ashes from his pipe onto the window sill, then refilled and relit it to puff away energetically. Blame his wife? He didn't blame her, he knew what she felt. Still he thought of what his cousin, Shou, had told him during the day. His cousin was poor too. When they happened to meet during the noon siesta he had told Chih with an air of secrecy: "They say Hsu is coming back, have you heard?"

"Really?" Any possibility of Hsu's return made Chih uneasy, because the five *mou* of vineyard he had bought through Yumin had been Hsu's, and he had paid only half the market price.

"I don't know whether it's true or not, but that's what they say. They say too the Eighth Route Army won't be here long. What do you think?" Then bringing his mouth even closer to his cousin's ear: "They say Mr. Chien had a letter from Hsu. They want to attack from within and without."

This took Chih aback.

"He's got a foot in each camp," the cousin went on. "Don't be deceived by his son's joining the Eighth Route Army. A radish is red outside and white within."

The two of them talked for some time, but could not think what to do. Chien was chief of the eight village sharpsters, hated and feared by all the villagers. Since even the cadres dared not offend him, everybody else had better keep quiet. Chien would be sure to have his spies, and would deal with anyone who was against him. Shou had bought three *mou* of vineyard too. The longer the cousins talked the more at a loss they felt. Nobody could guarantee that the Eighth Route Army would remain. The Kuomintang troops had good weapons and the Americans were helping them. However Chih had not lost faith in the Eighth Route Army. He felt they were on the side of the poor and would do what was best for the poor. They always knew what to do, and might even now have arrested Chien. As for Hsu, he couldn't come back. Accordingly Chih went to the meeting.

What he understood of Comrade Wen's long speech he found interesting, but later he understood less and less, and muttered restlessly to himself, "Ah, what are you gassing about! You enjoy talking, but no one enjoys listening. If you don't arrest Chien and seize that gang and their running dogs, even if you give people land no one will dare take it. Let's see how you cope with their attacking from within and without when Hsu comes back." He did not want to stay, but the guards at the gate would not let anyone out, which increased his exasperation.

At last the meeting was adjourned and he could go home. The house was pitch black and while feeling for the lamp he got his hand covered with oil, and could not help feeling annoyed with his wife: "Meetings, meetings all the time, while she neglects the home." Kuei lying on the other end of the *kang* waited a long time for him to speak, and then said: "Better sleep. Tomorrow you have to help Uncle's family cut flax. If you don't want me to attend meetings in future, I won't."

Then he told her, "It's always best not to take the lead, but to leave ourselves a loophole. If we've to be poor, it was decided in an earlier life. If by any chance the Eighth Route Army can't beat the Kuomintang troops and we go back to the old life, that will be hard enough. How can the village sharpsters be overthrown so easily?"

Kuei was a woman after all, and when her husband spoke like this she started worrying too. She thought again of Little Pao and how The Lord of the White Snake had refused to answer prayers because everybody was wicked. And he had said the real Dragon Emperor was in Peking. She hoped this was not really the case. She wanted everything to be as Comrade Yang had said, but her husband's anxiety was justified. They were straightforward people who had had a hard life and couldn't afford to offend anyone! She felt thoroughly upset, being tortured by the anxiety of hope as well as despair. In vain she racked her brains. The memory of her past misfortunes made her feel that all her life she had been like a rotten branch floating on the water, submerging and rising but destined to sink at last. She shed tears secretly, looking in the dark at her good man. Exhaustion had already closed his eyes as he enjoyed his only pleasure in life.

Gradually, however, it began to grow light.

## CHAPTER XIX

Chih did not wake till it was broad daylight. He could hear subdued voices outside, and when he looked through a rent in the paper window he heard his wife saying softly: "Does your father-in-law agree?"

"No, the old man didn't say a word, he just took his hoe and went off." Chih's younger sister, Old Ku's daughter-in-law, was standing with her back to the house. "He didn't come back all night," she went on. "My mother-in-law cried."

"He bought that land *mou* by *mou*, how can he bear parting with it in big slices now? What does your eldest brother-in-law say?"

"He doesn't dare say anything to his father, but behind his back he's clamouring for dividing up." Then she dropped her voice to a whisper to say: "What's really going on, sister-in-law? What was said in your meeting last night?"

"I'm not going to any more meetings. There's no point." Kuei remembered how unpleasant the previous evening had been.

"You didn't talk about making trouble for my father-in-law last night? Shun says all the villagers suspect us and we'll probably be attacked."

"Oh no! Nothing was said last night about making trouble for your father. And Chairman Wen said that people who work themselves, even if they are rich, won't have their land taken away. How could anyone suspect you? There aren't many folk in the village. Everybody knows everybody else's affairs well enough. The last few days there has been all sorts of talk in the village. One doesn't know what to believe. Who was it your Shun heard?"

"I don't know where he heard it. They didn't want him to go to the meeting yesterday, although he always went to meetings before as Vice-Chairman of the Youth Association. And we heard we've been labelled — now what was it — working landlords! Really, who knows what it all means! Suppose we do have a few *mou* more land than most, there are a lot of us. . . ."

"Your family does have a lot of land! Only you act fairly, not like those double-dealing bullies. I'm sure no one will make trouble for you. Don't you worry about it."

"Our family's worked up into such a state, sister-in-law. You go to see them and tell them what Comrade Wen said at the meeting yesterday evening, so that the old man can relax. Giving

up land would be bad enough, you know, but mass trial would finish him. If it didn't kill him it would leave him as good as dead."

"I'll come over presently. Your brother isn't up yet."

"What, not up yet?"

At this point Chih called out to them. Both his sister and wife had dishevelled hair, pale cheeks and swollen eyelids. Chih asked them what they had just been talking about.

It had started when Old Ku and his elder brother were in the courtyard discussing whether they should send Hutai's cart back. Old Ku said since the cart had been entrusted to them they must wait for its owners to fetch it. But his elder brother said: "Our own safety is at stake, better send it back." It so happened that Erh, Chien's daughter-in-law had come home for a chat, and hearing this conversation she asked her father if he were going to sell his sheep or not, because the Chien family was selling sheep. If they didn't sell they'd just have to give them away. Chien had said this reform could only make everybody in the village poor, that anybody who had any property was out of luck, this being the golden age for the poor.

The women had come and stood uneasily in the courtyard, but the two old men did not say a word. They had slaved all their lives—it had been no joke acquiring their present wealth. Now if property was to be "communized", there was nothing they could do about it, but they couldn't bring themselves to sell any land, nor yet divide it between their sons. They had only five or six sheep, not worth worrying about, but this rumour made them anxious and, even more, indignant. They felt providence was really too blind. Later when the gong sounded for the meeting, Shun had gone to pick up news, hurrying along with other members of the Youth Association, but the militiamen on guard would not let him in. When he said he was one of the cadres someone nearby had laughed, "Your family has so much land, you're the very people we're going to reform, yet here you show up yourself."

Another bystander said, "What if you are a village cadre! Even the village head isn't allowed in. How can you come and listen?" And turning to someone beside him he added: "Just coming to find out what's going on."

Shun was young and thin-skinned, and feeling he could not stand there any longer he stole away, wounded to the quick. He

was a primary school graduate, a well behaved youngster who had always been highly thought of in the village. He had proved an enthusiastic member of the Youth Association and sometimes when he wrote slogans would buy paper, pen and ink from the cooperative at his own expense. He admired the Eighth Route Army enormously and often wrote to his elder brother urging him to win glory and not be homesick. He felt it most unjust and humiliating to be excluded from the meeting. What had he done wrong? Wanting to put the blame on someone else he gradually began to feel a grudge against his father, believing this had happened because folk identified him with his father. Why was his father so fond of buying land, so insatiable? It would have been better to have bought less and own only a little, like Lichang. What rankled most was to have been dubbed a spy, going to the meeting only to ferret out information. He was no reactionary, people had no right to consider him as one. Puzzled, he walked home angrily, and arrived just as his sister was talking about working landlords. She hated her father-in-law, but this time she acted as a faithful messenger for Chien who had said that if there were a mass trial in the village this time, it would be Old Ku's turn. This had thrown her into a panic, and she thought it her duty to report it to her family.

What his sister said struck a chord in Shun's mind, and he said, "Go back to your husband's family and don't keep coming here. If you keep coming over every day or so, even if we fall into the Yellow River we shan't be able to wash ourselves clean. With relatives like them we really are out of luck. It's only your father-in-law who likes to snoop about. Go on, if you don't go I'll take my case to the comrades and ask your in-laws to pay damages for our pear tree."

Bursting into tears, his sister protested: "It's not my fault that you have such relatives. It was you who were afraid of their power and threw me away! If the Communists want your land now, it serves you right. Who asked you to get so much land! If you won't give any away go and tell the village cadres. Why pick on me! . . ."

Then Shun said to his father, "Don't take things so hard, *Dyeh*. Better give up something yourself rather than be tried in public. If we've enough to eat we should be satisfied. If you and uncle

will just say the word I'll go and find Yumin. It'll look much better this way."

Old Ku did not scold his son, but neither did he answer him. Taking up his hoe he went out. Their uncle was a simple soul and he kept silent too. Shun's eldest brother however said: "Divide it up. There are a lot of us, and divided up it doesn't amount to anything. Anybody who wants to give his away can."

Shun stamped his foot and fumed, "The whole family is so pig-headed and backward, if there's a trial it'll serve you right. But I'm not going to keep you company when you all parade the streets in tall hats and get beaten. If you insist on being so pig-headed I'll go and join our brother in the Eighth Route Army and get myself an army uniform, without asking for anything else. These few *mou* of land can go with you to your graves! . . ."

Shun's outburst upset everybody even more. His mother cried, at the same time trying to comfort her daughter who was in a rage. The house appeared as if someone had just died there, with all the rooms looking big and empty and all the inmates bottling up their feelings as if bearing a grudge against each other.

After they passed an uneasy night, Mother Ku thought of Kuei who was chairman of the women and a relative of theirs, who must know what was happening. She told her daughter-in-law to go and make enquiries and find out what was really going on, so that they could plan accordingly. At a time like this one really felt like a bride in the decorated sedan-chair, unable to see out and entirely in other people's hands. The daughter-in-law went to call on Chih, her brother, and Kuei, his wife. She plunged into a long recital.

When his sister had finished Chih had no solution to suggest, although he thought it would be good if they were really willing to give up some land. Their family couldn't cultivate it all by themselves in any case, but had to hire day labourers. A man should have just enough to eat. What did they want all that land for? As for the talk of bringing the Ku family to trial, that wouldn't be right. All he said, however, was: "Shun really is enlightened, he uses his brains. One has to change with the times. This is no time for rich and powerful people to lord it over the rest. If your father-in-law would listen to him, that would be fine. But everybody can distinguish between good people and bad. They won't wrong good people! If you treat everyone fairly you needn't



be afraid of a trial. Tell your father-in-law and uncle not to worry. Every road has a turning, this business is bound to be cleared up sooner or later. Your husband has joined the army so you've nothing to be afraid of. Nothing can happen to you, so keep calm. You go back now. After the meal I'll send your sister-in-law over."

When Chih's sister had gone Kuei started lighting the fire. She said nothing to her husband because she was depressed, thinking that if Old Ku's family were to be tried that would be going too far.

## CHAPTER XX

After the meal Kuei had gone to the Ku family. Chih felt so limp that although he had promised to help his uncle harvest flax, he was loath to go. Yet lying there he felt on pins and needles. So he walked to the end of the lane, where several people were standing in the shade of a tree watching a pig being slaughtered. When Chih went over they said to him, smiling, "Take a catty home to make meat dumplings. It's cheaper than at the market: 160 yuan a catty."

"Sick?" asked Chih, not much interested.

"No, it's good pork."

"Whose is it? Killing pigs in the hottest part of summer — if it's not sold in one day it'll go bad."

Nobody said anything. Only after a long pause a youngster said, "It's my elder brother's. My brother heard property would be divided up, so he decided to kill this pig — the only thing he owns. He said we don't taste meat from one end of the year to the other, let everybody have a treat. Sell what can be sold, and what isn't sold we'll eat ourselves. If it's well salted it doesn't matter. He wouldn't even carry it to the market, saying it wasn't worth the trouble."

At this everybody laughed, and one said, "It'll be a long time before your brother's considered one of the rich villagers. He's nothing to worry about."

"How stingy your brother is," said another. "Suppose they did take your pig, what would it matter? There are only two hundred odd families in the village, all related in some way or another. Why couldn't he treat the rest?"

Not thinking to ask these people why they were not working on the land, Chih walked off. In the main street he met Lichang who was still in high spirits and who called out: "So you aren't out working! There's another poor peasants' meeting tonight! Come in good time!"

Chih grunted apathetically.

"We've got to struggle more energetically. This is the time for us poor folk to rise to our feet. Don't you listen to that nonsense about the Communists not going to be here long. . . ."

"Hmm." Chih thought of what his cousin had told him the previous day. But instead of telling Lichang what was on his mind, he just said, "The Kuomintang troops have American backing. Just take our village, for instance. Well, poor folks are foolish. We're all simple folk while they have a clever schemer. . . ."

"Let's do away with the schemer," broke in Lichang. "What's there to be afraid of? As long as we're united there's nothing to fear. I don't think your attitude is good."

While Chih was wondering whether to speak out or not, Lichang walked off, saying, "If you're afraid, you can't rise to your feet. Be in good time at the meeting this evening. You need to change your ideas."

Chih did not say any more, but thought, "Yes, I do want to change my ideas, only I can't. We shall never rise to our feet. Ah, once you rise, mind you stand firm. It's no good if you fall again."

All his uncle's family had gone to pick flax. The women had disappeared too, and the door was padlocked. People who lived in the same courtyard asked in surprise, "Are you ill? You look very pale."

From there he went to his aunt's home. His aunt's husband was a wizened old man who had just finished plastering his roof with mud and come down from the roof covered from head to foot in dust. But as soon as he saw his nephew he stretched out both arms, urging him to go inside, and saying, "Hullo, aren't you working today? I have to spend quite a bit every year on repairing this house, it's so tumbledown. Last time there was rain it leaked like anything. There was heavy rain in the court and light rain in the house, and when it had stopped outside it still fell pit-pat-pit-pat inside for a long time."

I've always been meaning to move house. If I used the money I spend on repairs to rent a place, we'd certainly have more space. Only, although I'm so old I'm still soft. I can't bring myself to speak. This house belongs to Hou too. I've worked on his land for scores of years and we're the same family. Now that he's having a spell of bad luck too I'm not the one to kick a fellow when he's down. Well, come in and sit down. See what your aunt is up to." He went in himself, took a mouthful of water from the dipper, spat it on his hands and rubbed them together, washing off half the mud and wiping off the rest on his old blue cotton vest. This was Chung. Forty odd years before he had been nicknamed "Sticky Rice", but now he was as dried up as a buckwheat bun, only his twinkling bright eyes remaining unchanged.

Chung's wife got down from the *kang* smiling: "Well, year in year out I'm busy with the same wretched work. I never finish with these rags." She piled a bundle of old cloth of indeterminable colours onto the head of the *kang*, and went on: "Your wife is doing well now, running right and left, busy on proper business."

"Get on the *kang* and sit down. It's not often you're free. First have a smoke." The old man took the pipe from his belt and offered it to his nephew. But seeing the latter looked in no mood for talking and declined the pipe, he lit it himself, and said jokingly: "Ah, this is the one luxury I have. I can't break myself of the habit."

"Last night your wife went to the meeting. Did you go? What did they talk about? I hear there's going to be more settling accounts. The land will be shared out equally. Whoever works a piece of land will own it. It sounds too good to be true." Li's aunt, who had been forbidden by her husband to attend the meeting, could not help questioning him.

But the old man put in hastily: "Ha, a woman like you, and old too, you're still so inquisitive! I tell you this is none of your business. Clamouring all the time to go to the meeting without caring whether you would understand or not, or what use it would be. Better remember your place, and not poke your nose into everything."

"My wife acts like a queen, as if she could really manage affairs. I can't make up my mind whether to let her go or not. Tell me, Uncle, what do you think will come of all this? There's all

kinds of talk in the village." Finding someone he could talk things over with, Chih's heart grew a little lighter.

"Do you ask me?" The old man stroked his short, thin beard, glanced at both their faces, then started laughing: "Ha, it's no use. I'm not keeping up with the times. This is a new world with new ways. Yesterday evening that comrade gave a very fine talk! Everything is for the poor — yes, but — well, my life is finished. Your aunt and cousins are all against me. If not for me they'd have risen to their feet already and become rich. Haha . . . You'd better let your wife have her way, she's a capable woman. Nowadays hens can crow as well as cocks, men and women are equal, haha . . ."

"This is like asking the way from a blind man. Everybody in the village knows your uncle. He gave Hou's one and a half *mou* of land back to him. If you ask him he'll say 'You're destined to be a slave. If you've nothing to eat just tighten your belt.' Oh, what a man, afraid a falling leaf will kill him! Ugh!" His aunt who usually could not stand up to the old man, was emboldened by her nephew's presence to complain, and brought up her greatest grievance.

The old couple's talk disturbed Chih again. He remembered Old Chung's obstinacy and how little patience the villagers had with him, all condemning him for his lack of spirit. Chih told him the villagers had said that if he were willing to stick up for his rights Hou would have had to give him at least ten *mou* of land and a house.

"There you are!" the old woman echoed, and searched her husband's face for signs of hatred or at least remembrance. But she was disappointed. The old man's face was completely expressionless as he cut Chih short with: "Oh, that's an old tale. Don't bring that up again."

With an obvious lack of interest in the conversation he got down from the *kang* to put together the tools with which he had just mended the roof. Hence Chih had to get up too. The old woman was much upset and whispered to her nephew as she saw him out that she meant to go and see Kuei that evening, and that he should pay no attention to his uncle, the old fellow being no good.

## CHAPTER XXI

As a young man Chung had been totally different. Old people in the village could still remember him as a clever and lively youngster in his twenties. His family was quite well off then, with nineteen and a half *mou* of land and three tile roof houses, and he had attended a private school and learned a good many characters. He had been influenced by the plays and operas he read with their stories of loyalty, filial piety and purity, and was carried away by the high sounding sentiments of those heroes, chaste women, loyal ministers and faithful servants. He often retold these to the friends who flocked round him, and he learned to sing and take different parts. At New Year he was in great demand and his father could not forbid him to perform. He also picked the prettiest girl in the village to marry. They had a plump, white baby, and his parents were very pleased. That year, however, there was a famine and they had to borrow three bushels of grain from his grand-uncle, to tide them over the hard times. The following year when they were unable to pay the interest, the grand-uncle sent for Chung's wife to help with sewing for a few days, and since this was between relatives there was nothing they could say. So they let her go. Unfortunately she was fickle, and became involved with Tienkuei the eldest son. Chung fetched her home and gave her a beating, threatening to divorce her, and during the night she jumped into the well. Tienkuei, enraged at the death of his mistress, incited the girl's family to bring a lawsuit against Chung who had to spend two months in gaol and give up six *mou* of land before a settlement was reached.

His father fell ill of rage and died toward the end of the year. There was no money to buy a coffin and his mother wanted him to go to his grand-uncle's family again to borrow, but he refused, and spent the New Year in dudgeon while his mother had to go herself to borrow ten thousand cash for the funeral. Staying in the village he could not master his bitterness, so he left to work with a camel caravan outside the Pass. All year long he travelled in the desert. At first he still dreamed of making a fresh start, saving money and returning home. But under the stretching white clouds on the interminable sandy dunes the moon waxed and then waned, the wild geese flew south and then north again. Five whole years passed. Chung's blue cloth jacket was worn out and his old short sheepskin coat had lost its sleeves when a letter came from

home saying his mother was dying and waiting for him to breathe her last. There was nothing for it but to go home.

Their house was already occupied by another family. His mother had moved into a mud room at the back of the tumbledown temple and his plump white baby had grown into a thin, wizened little monkey. In her pleasure at seeing him back his mother began to recover, but by the time she was able to leave her bed he fell ill himself. His mother nursed him, interceded with spirits, questioned the oracles and found a doctor for him. He did not know where the money had come from, and only after his recovery did he discover that their few *mou* of land had all been made over to his grand-uncle. But this time he could not leave, and had to stay in the village to work as a hired hand.

By now both the grand-uncle and Tienkuei were dead, and the second son, Hou, was head of the family. Hou sent for him and said: "We are still uncle and nephew. What my brother did is past and done with. Let bygones be bygones. It's simply your bad luck that your land was mortgaged to my father. You have to support your mother and son all the same, so you may still cultivate that land that used to be yours. Just give me a few bushels each year as rent as you think fit." Chung bent his head in silent acquiescence and moved into two wretched rooms belonging to Hou. After all they were the same family, and his uncle did not ask for any money.

From that time onward Chung stopped singing operas or telling stories. For years he avoided the villagers, putting all his energy into his work, hoping by dint of hard toil to forget the past and numb his faculties. Many times during the year Hou came to fetch him for odd jobs, and not wanting to make much of trifles he did whatever he could. His mother also often went to help cook and sew. And after the harvest he took the good grain to his uncle, keeping the poorer to eat himself. Hou did allow him arrears in rent, and sometimes gave them old clothes so that they would feel under an obligation. Hou was a Buddhist and often urged Chung to put his trust in the Heavenly King, while whenever Buddhist sutras were read in his house he would send for him. Sometimes Chung drew a little comfort from these, at others he felt even more embittered by the injustice of providence. Just at that time, however, as if to punish his resentment, his child caught small-pox and died, so his life became even

more colourless until his existence was virtually forgotten in the village. Only when his mother found another wife for him did he begin to have anything to do with people again.

This wife was plain and rather tongue-tied. He was not particularly fond of her, but by her industry and kindness the poor woman acquired a hold on him. He had children again and gradually resumed his old peaceful life, no longer avoiding people and sometimes even telling stories. But instead of the tales of the Yang family generals or Su Wu tending his flocks among the Huns, he simply retold the stories he had heard in Hou's house about the reward of good and evil, using the most superstitious and fatalistic arguments to urge men to do good. Resigning himself to fate he pardoned all past injuries, considering all his sufferings as due to fate, and welcoming the future in a spirit of atonement. Whatever his life he would not fret. For years now they had lived like this. All his family worked hard, and although they could not eat their fill neither did they starve. Not only was his labour exploited, even his heart and soul had been ensnared by those blood-suckers. He became a likeable old man, but at the same time a laughable fool.

At the trial of Hou that spring many people urged Chung to settle old scores, but he refused. He said he must have owed his uncle's family something from a former existence, and if he took back what he had paid in his next existence he would become a horse or an ox. Thus later he insisted on returning to Hou the one and a half *mou* of land given him. Now his outlook was unchanged. The Eighth Route Army talked very well, but he knew from all he had read and heard that never once in thousands of years had the poor been masters. Chu Hung-wu was born poor, and set himself up as champion of the poor in the 14th Century. But after he became emperor in the Ming dynasty, although he was all right for the first few years, he changed. He became champion of his own gang while the common people remained as before. Chung saw that many youngsters in the village took a short view, thinking only of the immediate future and echoing the Eighth Route Army, hence he feared for them. He did not allow his son to mix with such people. If his family was required to participate in any activities, he attended himself, thinking it would not matter if anything happened to him. An old man over sixty, who had never injured anyone in his life, need

not fear to face the Judge of the Dead. But he kept his thoughts to himself. When others expressed approval he simply tugged his beard and smiled. He knew of course one hand could not stop the flood destroying the bank, but he had no idea that the flood would reach his threshold and that he himself would be carried away by it.

## CHAPTER XXII

The unhappy evening passed. After Yumin left, the three comrades of the work team had an argument, but it was not a heated one. Comrade Wen accepted their outspokenness calmly. Because of his experience in dealing with people he did not defend his own opinions, but for the sake of the work and mutual solidarity showed himself unprecedentedly tolerant. Thus although the others could not convince him and his prejudice against them remained unchanged, still on the surface they appeared to have reached agreement.

After breakfast the courtyard became lively again. Lichang brought along his manuscript for the Blackboard News together with the script of a folk opera they had prepared in the spring, and while Yang corrected the manuscript, Hu played his one-string fiddle and Lichang started singing the opera. Presently all the village cadres foregathered there. Comrade Wen asked for their views in the belief that all problems could be settled by discussion among the cadres, but he could not tell whether their views were right or wrong, because there was no reliable material to serve as a basis for judgment. He asked them to discuss which opponent to attack. This led to argument and laughter. When they disagreed they argued just as on the previous evening in the cooperative when Chang and Lichang fell out over Li, and Chang and Cheng over Old Ku. But when Hou's brindled cow was mentioned the whole group burst out laughing — Hou had used public funds to buy a brindled cow which he swore was his own.

They also described how Hou had introduced religion into the village, and Kung said he had gone to kotow before the shrine. Hou told people: "In a time of desolation and confusion all men are bound to suffer. But once you become adepts in this religion,



you can ride a swift horse to the Western Paradise!" Kung's account put them all in high spirits, and they asked him to repeat the incantation. Accordingly he chanted: "The connecting link, I am the primal Buddha Mitraya, enfolding the connecting link within myself, Amida Buddha! . . ."

Then Lichang told Wen and the others how Old Hou, when he was about to be tried that spring, said he was ill and would not appear. But later they insisted on his coming, and Kung had given him a slap in the face for injuring him by converting him to his religion.

They went on to speak of Chiang, who had already stood trial once, and some even praised his present attitude. Hsu's running dog, Jung, was mentioned. The previous year they had wanted to try him but had not done so. This spring the comrades from the district had told them not to try too many at once, so they had let him off again. When Hsu was *hsiang* head, Jung ran all his errands for him, and later helped him when he went to Hsin Pao An to do business in charcoal. Jung had eyes like a dog, fawning on superiors and bullying inferiors. Since his brother was disabled he had taken over his property, but he neglected him and had never found a wife for him. They discussed Jung for a long time, but finally when questioned about his property admitted he was only a poor man now, who could by no stretch of the imagination be classed as a middle peasant. Beside he had to support his disabled brother who had only three and a half *mou* of hilly land which he could not cultivate himself. Thus it was out of the question to make him the principal target for attack. Nevertheless they felt they ought to try him properly and settle old scores.

This meeting lasted a long time, and many names were brought up. All who rented out land or owned much land, as well as all former ward chiefs, were mentioned. A great deal was said, but no conclusion reached. All these people deserved punishment, some heavy some light, but it appeared impossible to find among them a single outstanding case, guilty of great crimes, to kindle the anger of the masses. The village cadres mentioned various likely-sounding candidates, but a closer examination left them in a dilemma again.

"There's nobody in our village like Chen Wu of Meng Chia village," they said. "Chen Wu used to oppress and beat people, and rape women, and later he killed one of the cadres from the district. He had several rifles hidden in his house with hundreds of rounds of

bullets, and he held meetings in the fields with spies from Fanpao to plot against the security officer. There was evidence of all his crimes, which were common knowledge. As soon as the people realised he deserved a death sentence, they cast fear to the winds and started trying him for his life. Our village doesn't have any local despot like that. We don't have any big landlords either like the one in Paihuai, who had over a thousand *mou* and who built that big kitchen. If Nuanshui had such a big landlord we could all become middle peasants after division of land. With that incentive the people would be willing to rise."

They discussed the matter backward and forward, but for all their efforts failed to hit on any outstanding evil-doers, and in the afternoon dispersed. Comrade Wen told them to sound out the masses and postpone making any decision for the time being. If there were really no one, there might be no need for a trial. When the cadres heard this their enthusiasm was even more damped, but there was no more to be said, and they went away to prepare for the meeting of the Peasants' Association that evening.

After they had gone Comrade Wen wrote a report to the district asking for advice. But instead of showing it to the others he tucked it inside his note-book, waiting for a chance to ask one of the militiamen to deliver it. Then he set about preparing his Current Events talk for that evening. He felt Hu's disapproval of his speech was simply ridiculous. The peasants were completely ignorant and unless things were explained to them they could not understand, and would be unwilling to rise. All Hu wanted was a sensational trial — that was the superficiality typical of the petty-bourgeois mentality. Although acknowledging his own lack of experience Wen could not believe their views might be sounder than his own or their meagre experience have any value. Their experiences had not been summed up or raised to the theoretical level, therefore they were one-sided and unreliable. Hu and Yang could, he admitted, get closer to the masses than he — they were out all day long, but this by no means meant their views were correct. Steering a movement required skill to guide the thought of the masses, regulate their emotions and satisfy their desires, instead of simply spending the whole day with a few peasants. Chairman Mao thoroughly understood the Chinese people and had proposed all manner of opportune measures, but he could never spend the whole day with the people. As for the mass line,

the main thing was to understand its spirit, rather than plunge about blindly. Only callow youngsters like Hu and Yang would pick up a smattering of knowledge and regard it as canon. However he forgave them. He considered them both as half intellectual and half peasant, and the fact that they were neither one thing nor the other made the work difficult. Wen decided to take good care of them, cooperate with them and help them. And the thought of his concession to them increased his complacency.

Left by himself Wen presently grew lonely. He wondered where the others had gone and what they were up to, also what the village cadres were doing and what they really thought. So he put down his pen and went out.

## CHAPTER XXIII

In the quiet street two women were sitting gossiping at the entrance to a lane. At the sight of Comrade Wen they fell silent and fixed their eyes on him. "Women are great talkers," thought Wen, "but why should they come out in the day-time to the top of the lane to gossip? Why aren't they working?" The two women waited till he had passed, then started chattering again. Although Wen could not hear clearly what they were saying, and could not understand what he heard, he imagined they were discussing him. Passing the top of the lane he walked northwards, ignoring them.

When he reached the street he could see no one he knew. Under the locust tree in front of the stage was a water-melon stall where four or five old men were squatting, not buying water-melon but apparently waiting for someone. A young woman stuck her head out of the beancurd mill to look at him, then turned to speak to someone inside. Wen did not know which way to go and buying water-melon was pointless. He walked over to the Black-board News, and although he had seen the articles in it that morning he read them over again. The characters were well and even elegantly written. To be sure, Lichang had told them the teacher named Liu was not bad and wrote good calligraphy. As Wen was reading he felt the old men's eyes boring into his back

and suspected there were two heads sticking out of the beancurd mill now. He was not afraid of being looked at or discussed by these people, but still it made him uncomfortable. He walked toward the primary school to see whether Hu was there teaching songs or organising a folk dance. Young Hu had been in a dramatic troupe and could not hide where his interest lay. Wen felt if he could find him all would be well.

He crossed the threshold of the school into a quiet courtyard. As he was looking round a man in a short jacket came out from a small building beside the gate, and greeted the unexpected visitor most obsequiously: "Come in and sit down! Ah, do come in, do come in! . . ."

"Are classes still going on?" Wen had to ask.

"Yes, yes, the pupils aren't out yet. They will soon be out."

Wen followed him in to a kind of reception room. On a square table by the window was a musical clock under a glass case, on each side a hat stand, and on the opposite wall a lithographed portrait of Sun Yat-sen and a painted portrait of Chairman Mao. Beside these portraits were pasted two slogans in shiny paper: "Serve the people!" and "Develop the culture and education of New Democracy!" Essays and drawings by the students pasted on different coloured paper underneath made a brave show. On the left was a long low chest with a roll of bedding on it. On the right wall hung two rows of whips used in folk dances, decorated with red and pink paper flowers. The host hastily invited Comrade Wen to be seated, and hastily poured him a cup of tea from the table by the chest.

"Have some tea, have some tea! We're very shabby here, ah, very shabby!"

"You belong to this school?" Wen asked.

"Yes, yes, I work here. Well . . ."

"What's your name?" Wen had to ask.

"My name's Liu."

Wen realised this must be the school teacher, and asked: "Are you the one who writes the Blackboard News?"

"Don't mention it, don't mention it. My writing is so abominable."

Wen took another look at him. He was a man of nearly forty, with a long face and narrow short-sighted eyes. His nose was big, his hair long, his white cloth jacket exceedingly dirty, and his

excessive formality did not please Wen at all, who thought, "Must you act like that?" He asked a few more questions, all of which Liu answered most humbly and respectfully, till Wen lost patience and said: "Are either of our comrades here? I came to look for them."

"Just gone. Comrade Hu has just gone. But if you like I'll go and find him for you."

"No need, no need." Wen went out again. By now classes were over and a crowd of children swarmed out, shouting and singing at the top of their voices. Some pushed forward to look at him, and others crowded behind him, imitating in fun his style of speaking: "Do you understand, folks? Is it clear or not?" Wen was not accustomed to such disorder, but all he could do was to feign indifference and walk out slowly. Mr. Liu the teacher anxiously saw him out, muttering as he followed him: "Please favour us with some instruction. . . ."

Wen emerged from the school with a sense of relief and held his head higher as he started walking back. Suddenly someone called out from the window of the cooperative: "Chairman Wen!"

It was Chang, the security officer, who for some reason always gave him this title.

As Wen hurried over Chang shouted: "Come and have a look at our co-op!"

Through the window could be seen two counters of mixed goods, all daily necessities, beside a counter for flour, a rolling board and an oven. Chang's face was red as if he had just been drinking, and he introduced a short man who hurried out to greet Wen: "This is the chairman of our co-op, Tien, a good business man, very able."

Thinking he ought to discuss the cooperative with him, Wen asked a few questions. Tien did not look in the least like a business man. He seemed straightforward and answered sentence by sentence. Wen remembered Yumin had told him to look in the co-op if he needed him, so he asked, "Is Yumin here much?"

"Yes, he's often here."

Looking from Chang's face to a pot of wine on the counter, Wen felt he knew how things stood.

Seeing that Comrade Wen was unwilling to come in, Chang vaulted out through the window, and said, "Are you looking for

Yumin, Chairman? His home is near here, just over on the west side."

"No, I just asked."

"Yumin is busy with public business and private affairs. People keep calling on him at all hours." He laughed shortly.

"What?" Wen divined some hidden significance in this.

"Chairman, when the fruits of victory are divided up this time, make over three good northern rooms to Yumin. That eastern room he's living in now is too poor, and there's his brother. . . ." He laughed again.

"What is it? Do you mean — ?"

"Yes, it's just that! You must drink some wine at his wedding, Chairman, before you go!"

"What family is the girl? How is it going?"

"Is there any need to ask. She's a widow! She has a lot of land, but no house. . . . Haha. . . ."

Talk like this irritated Wen very much, but at the same time he felt proud to think that after all his sense of discernment was not at fault. So he walked northwards meaning to talk further with Chang.

Chang accompanied him and told him that he had joined the Party before Liberation. Only because he was simple and lacked ability he was just given the title of security officer, while Yumin actually kept everything in his own hands. Chang gave it as his opinion that they could not work up any struggle to settle accounts this time. When Wen insisted on knowing his reasons, he said after much hesitation: "See here, Chairman, why don't the peasants dare settle scores with the feudal landlords? It's all the fault of the cadres. Think for yourself. We all grew up together in the village. If people aren't related by marriage, then they're neighbours. Ah — when people are swayed by private feelings it's hard to get anything done. Don't you understand, Chairman?" But who it was that was swayed by selfish considerations he would not say. So they walked all the way to the end of the village.

When they returned Wen saw a swarthy young man standing by the side of the road with clenched fists, looking at them coldly. His face was familiar and Wen asked him, "Didn't you go to the fields today?"

Before the other could answer Chang said, "I'm off, Chairman. See you later." And passing behind him he vanished.

The dark young man cocked his head and said to the people across the road: "One sees ghosts in broad daylight. Ah, after all, evil cannot overcome good. See . . . he's made off."

Someone across the street said, "Go on home, Liuman, your wife's been looking for you for a long time to go home and eat. What's happened to you these last two days! You'd better settle down to work properly!"

The dark youngster flung out an arm: "Work — eh? Aren't we working on land reform now!" Then he turned to ask Wen, "Isn't that right, comrade?"

But Wen, thinking the fellow must be wrong in the head, said nothing and started back, while Liuman stood with clenched fists watching him walk away.

By the time Wen got back there was still no one in. Old Han was plying his bellows to prepare supper while his grandson was sitting at the threshold playing with a locust whose wings he had torn off.

## CHAPTER XXIV

At this time Yumin and Yang were still in the orchard. More and more fruit was ripening. The two of them walked slowly. Faint sunlight filtering through the leaves chequered the ground and their bodies. They ate fruit as they filled a basket chock full. This land belonged to Yumin's uncle, Chuan, who had been given half a *mou* of Hsu's orchard after the settling of scores the previous year. Yang had never seen a sight so beautiful as these great fruit trees stretching as far as eye could see. In the distance voices could be heard, but not a soul was in sight. The branches of sweet-apple spread out to form a great, dignified awning, and the spread of one tree could have covered a small house. Above hung big juicy fruit, dark red, pale red, dark green and pale green. Sometimes they could pick the fruit by stretching out their hands, sometimes they had to stoop and bend their heads as they passed under the trees for fear of knocking the thickly hanging fruit. Here was a feast for the eyes: you had no sooner discovered the biggest apple you had ever seen in your life than you caught sight of one that was rounder, redder and brighter than all the rest. The sense of smell was fully occupied too, continuously inhaling

and distinguishing between the different scents, which were breathed in with intense enjoyment. There were more sweet-apple here than other fruit trees. Here and there were a few apple and cherry trees. The cherries hanging down in clusters were more red and fascinating than flowers. Yang could not resist picking a small cluster and toying with it. There were quite a few pear trees too, the pears heavy and juicy, weighing down the branches.

Whenever Yang passed a tree he felt like asking to whom it belonged, and when he learned that they belonged to the poor he could not contain his delight. The fruit seemed more radiant with the rosy colour of victory. He started calculating for the owners of the trees, and asked: "I suppose a tree like this must yield at least two hundred catties of fruit?"

"Nothing of the kind. In a bumper year like this, every tree yields at least eight or nine hundred, sometimes over a thousand catties. If the railway isn't cut the price will be higher. If one *mou* of orchard isn't worth ten *mou* of paddy fields, at least it's worth seven or eight *mou*. With hilly land there's even less comparison."

Yang was surprised at this figure and his eyes opened wide. Yumin went on to explain: "Truly poor people still prefer the irrigated land which isn't unpredictable like orchard land. This year the fruit has ripened wonderfully, but last year not a single tree ripened, not even the village children got any to eat. Even when the fruit ripens well, it still isn't like rice that you can eat. See how beautifully this sweet-apple has ripened and how sweet it smells. But it doesn't keep well, not as well as other fruits. It has to be sent off without a moment's delay. Yet if we are too anxious to get rid of it, the fruit dealers will only give a miserable price. It may be true that it costs two or three hundred dollars a catty in Kalgan, but the fruit growers only get a hundred a catty. A little later it'll only fetch seventy or eighty dollars a catty, from which transport costs have to be deducted, while damaged fruit can only be kept to dry for the children to eat."

Yang calculated again how much the income from these ten *mou* of land would be. These ten *mou* which had previously belonged to Hsu, had been divided among twenty poor families the previous year. If the yield from these ten *mou* was at least thirty thousand catties, that would be worth three million dollars, a hundred and fifty thousand for each family, equal to about seven



hundred and fifty catties of millet at the market price. If a small family of three could find a little additional work that would be just about enough to live on, while if they had another small piece of land of course that would be so much the better. Yang felt greatly interested in this orchard. He went on to ask details about the number of trees in the whole village and the names of the owners, all of whom were landlords or rich peasants.

After they had walked for some time they felt the orchard was still very quiet. No one was about but old Chuan hoeing the soil under the trees, breaking the earth up and smoothing it down, so that if anyone were to come and pick fruit from these trees his footprints would betray him.

When they had figured out the probable proceeds from the fruit Yumin reverted to the subject they had been discussing on the road. "Of course I can't bring it up at the meeting. He has his spies among the cadres. Before matters came to a head he would take fright and make off. Another thing, if I brought it up and it wasn't passed, that would be in vain. Everybody has in mind 'The rafters that jut out rot first.' Do you suppose they really don't understand?"

"Haven't you already posted the militia to keep a secret lookout?"

"I don't dare tell everything even to the militia! If they were all like Kuo that would be another matter. He's a stout fellow. He wouldn't care if the enemy belonged to his own family. Living or dying he'll be true to the Party."

"Chao is an ex-village head, but he seems to me a sensible man. His family is so poor his wife hasn't even a vest to wear. Is he unreliable too?"

"He knows what's what, but he's soft. This year he borrowed two bushels of grain from Chiang, and is still carrying on as if no one knew. Because he's in debt to Chiang he can't stand firm. Oh, all these people have their own connections. Whoever we attack, there's always someone against it!"

"Judging by what you say, if the village is to get rid of the bullies, it's got to be Chien. But if you attack him the cadres to begin with aren't to be relied on, is that it?"

"Exactly! I'm not saying they're all of them no good, but if half of them don't say anything do you suppose the others won't watch which way the wind blows? Some things can only be said

among ourselves. Let's just take the case of Cheng. He used to work for Chien as a hired hand, then became his tenant. Now he's the Chairman of the Peasants' Association and ought to be very keen. Well, that fellow takes the lead in everything else, only in this business he pretends to be stupid. He's not as straightforward as he appears, still he's one of the good cadres. Oh, people are only human after all, and he can't forget the feeling that man's niece has for him! Old Yang, when you've been here a little longer you'll understand it all. The people are watching the cadres, but the cadres aren't willing to give a lead. You tell me, what are we to do about it?"

"Isn't there a single person in the village willing to take the lead? Let's try to find one. There must be some seriously injured person who's willing to come out. If the cadres won't take the lead let's look first among the masses. If the masses are willing to make a move the cadres' private feelings won't matter."

Yumin cited the example of Chung and said that before the people's outlook had changed no matter what you told them it was no use. Yumin had led two trials. Both times had been smooth sailing, making him feel that the people would do just as he said. But he realised this time it would be extremely difficult. He knew that it was not enough to get land for the poor peasants. During the process of getting land they must unite in order to stand up properly, and understand that they were now the masters. So he was treading very warily. In addition, a number of difficulties had cropped up, and sometimes he felt thoroughly depressed. Still he was a dogged fellow who would not slacken. After he had explained the situation to Yang he felt more light-hearted, for Yang gave him fresh courage. In particular he felt Yang was not a helpless individual, and that now he had real support. He agreed to Yang's suggestion that after the meeting of the Peasants' Association that evening he should explain the situation again to Comrade Wen. Then they could think out some plan of action together.

It was growing late. Yumin left first with the basket of fruit, while Yang went back to the hut where Chuan lived as watchman of the orchard.

The old man with his drooping moustache was rather a taciturn old fellow. He was leaning complacently against a tree outside the hut.

Yang noticed some dozen rotten fruit in the basket by his knees, and asked, "What use are they?"

The old fellow smiled and muttered: "They're all rotten . . . but still parts of them are all right. If they're dried they'll be good to put in tea. . . ." Then opening his eyes wider to look at Yang he said, "Comrade, in the old days we couldn't even pick up one of these rotten ones! Fifty or sixty years I've just looked at these trees, and now I've got a few of my own. How can I chuck the rotten fruit away? Not me, not me!"

Yang thought of Chuan's generosity when his nephew had come just now to pick fruit. How he had pointed out his trees and told them to take all they wanted, and that when these were eaten he would send over some more. How he told Yumin not to trouble to come because he knew he was busy. "You're really a good sort," Yang could not help saying. "Look how many of yours we picked just now."

"Many? Not a bit of it." And the old fellow went on seriously, "Didn't I get all this from you? You're good people. You divide up rich people's things for us poor folk. Now you're here to do the same thing again. Everybody in the village knows that."

"What sort of people are we? Why do we want to do this kind of thing?" Yang was intrigued by the old fellow.

"You," the old man laughed heartily, "you're the Eighth Route Army. You're Communists. Your leader Chairman Mao tells you to do it!"

"And what does Chairman Mao do it for? Let's see what you say to that, Uncle."

"He does it for us! For the poor! He's the poor people's friend." The old man smiled broadly again.

Yang leant against the tree trunk too and laughed. Then he quietly asked the old man: "Are there any Communists in your village?"

"No, we don't have any."

"How do you know there aren't any?"

"I know everybody in the village. They're all ordinary people. We don't have any."

"Uncle, if there were Communists in the village, would you join or not?" Yang questioned him.

"Why not? If there were any I'd join. But since there aren't I can't join all by myself."

"What are you afraid of by yourself?"

"I'm not afraid of anything, only one old fellow can't get anything done."

"Ah." Yang felt unexpectedly happy, and went on to tell him there had been Party members in the village for some time, only because he was not one no one had told him. He urged him to join the Party. After joining the Party everyone could unite more closely and be even stronger against those rascals. The old man listened chuckling, and finally told Yang that before joining the Party he must first talk it over with someone. "How can you talk over things like this?" asked Yang. "This is something you have to decide yourself! Just suppose you told a bad man!"

The old fellow looked embarrassed and finally Yang had to ask him whom he proposed to discuss it with. He answered in a low voice: "With my nephew! Do you think that's all right?"

At that Yang roared with laughter. Nodding his head again and again, he said, "All right, quite all right."

It was growing dark. Yang found the orchard an enchanting place. He gripped the old man's hand several times, and told him he would come to see him again. The old man too smiled innocently and happily, and wanted to keep him to a meal. But Yang had to leave. On his way back he kept turning back to look at the fruit trees gradually merging into the darkness, and at Chuan deep in the orchard.

## CHAPTER XXV

Coming out of the north street Yang had just reached the wall of the primary school when he heard people talking at the top of their voices in the cooperative opposite. He hurried over and saw that it was quite dark in the co-op. There was a crowd there, many of whom were talking at the same time. Squeezing up to Cheng he heard the latter say: "You people! When we had to assess our taxes, you absolutely refused to register, but now you come one after the other. Look here, what do you say to this: a widower father and an unmarried son can count as two households. There are over a thousand people in the whole village, but does that mean over a thousand households? You want to have infants in arms counted as separate households in order to get two *mou* of irrigated land. You don't use your brains to think how much land there is in the village! Isn't that just making unnecessary trouble!"





KU YUAN: Workers on the Way to Night School



A young peasant of eighteen or nineteen who was standing by the corner of the *kang* went right on complaining: "The land my *dyeh* cultivates is Li's, the land I cultivate is Chiang's. Don't you know that? We sleep on one *kang* but work for two different families. Long ago we started each managing his own affairs."

"Hurry up and choose a wife, and get a son. Won't that be three households then?" joked someone standing by the door.

"That's right. This morning Li Chen-tung's mother was saying their family ought to be counted as five, because her daughter-in-law is seven months pregnant, and the baby ought to be counted in. I said, 'What if she gives birth to a wild cat?' The old woman was hopping mad." This was Pukao, organisation officer of the Peasants' Association. The last day or two group after group of people had come to see him about registration of newly divided households.

There was a roar of laughter.

"Isn't your Peasants' Association going to do anything about it?" The young peasant refused to be crushed, and stayed angrily on.

"Our Peasants' Association has got too much to do. Is it our business whether you're impotent or not?" retorted Pukao complacently. Although his face could not be seen clearly in the darkness, there was a decided note of vengeance in his voice. His last remark set the whole room resounding with shouts of laughter.

The youngster felt he was being made to look a fool. Unable to restrain himself any longer he headed furiously for Pukao: "You bully, taking advantage of the fact you're organiser of the Peasants' Association to bully people. . . ."

Yang felt this joke had gone too far and was just going to interfere when Hu stepped out of the group. Hu grasped the youngster with one hand, restraining Pukao with the other, and said: "Don't be angry, my friend. Old Pukao shouldn't have said what he did. Of course the Peasants' Association ought to mind whether you and your father are counted as one family or two. The Peasants' Association must decide according to what's right, and not shrink from trouble. Mr. Chairman, shouldn't your Peasants' Association discuss and make a set of regulations and act according to them?"

"Right, what Comrade Hu says is right." Cheng too felt that the squabble had taken an ugly turn. Wanting to help keep peace,

he turned to the young man and said: "You go back. When we've discussed this business of you and your father in the Peasants' Association, we'll let you know."

Pukao had taken the opportunity to slip outside, so there was nothing for the youngster to say. But instead of going out at once, he remained standing there.

"What's your name?" asked Hu.

"Fukuei. My *dyeh* is Pojen."

"Are you both tenants?"

"Yes, they both cultivate other people's land. His father works eight *mou* of Li's irrigated land, and he works ten *mou* of Chiang's land, one in the south, the other in the east, about three miles apart."

"If you work Chiang's land, you ought to settle scores with him, while if your father cultivates Li's land he ought to settle scores with him. It doesn't matter whether you're one household or two, do you understand?"

The onlookers endorsed what Hu said: "Yes! You've each got different grudges and a different landlord to settle scores with. Each of you settle his own, isn't that right?"

"I can't settle anything. I'm a member of the Association, and the Peasants' Association doesn't help us. My *dyeh's* even more hopeless."

"To settle scores is easy. If you can't I'll help you. You just have to dare go. All the Peasants' Association can do is to help you, but it can't do the job for you, understand?"

"Go by myself?"

"What are you afraid of?"

"I can't explain things by myself."

"Well then, get some people to go with you. . . ." Hu was just going to ask what other tenants Chiang had, when Cheng walked over and cut him short, saying, "What are you all crowding in here for? Those who don't want to buy anything go out. This is a co-op!" As he was shouting this Cheng nudged Yang secretly and made a sign to the young man. When some men had gone slowly out Tien brought in an oil lamp, and Yang saw a man of over thirty standing by the door, with eyes wide open drinking in everything, and a forced smile on his face. He seemed to want to come in but hesitated. Hu noticed him too, and asked, "Who are you looking for?"



"Er . . . I'm not looking for anyone, Chairman, you . . ."

"This is our village head, Chiang," said Lichang, who was standing next to Hu.

"Er . . . I'm Chiang. Since the year before last Comrade Pin often came to my house and sometimes stayed with us. . . ." He spoke in a small voice.

There were still seven or eight people left in the inner and outer rooms but no one said anything.

Yang cast a meaningful glance at Hu and said, "Let's go back." He led the way out.

"Right." Hu immediately followed him out, and once in the courtyard said in a low voice: "Well! Those bastards certainly get about. That teacher Jen in the primary school isn't up to any good either."

When they reached the street it was already pitch dark, so they hurried towards Old Han's house. At the turning to the house there seemed to be a man squatting, and Hu called out, "Who's there?"

"The sentry," the other answered softly. Yang went over to see, and sure enough it was one of the militiamen who had already stood up. "Have you had your meal?" Yang asked.

"Yes. Yumin is at your place now, and Chairman Tung."

"Oh." They had already reached home, when Yang said again softly: "It's not going to be plain sailing here. We'd better tell Wen and Old Tung, and carefully plan what action to take. Now Old Tung's back that's all to the good. He's more experienced than we are."

## CHAPTER XXVI

It was very lively inside, several peasants who had come with Old Tung from Liku were looking eagerly at Comrade Wen, while Old Tung, seated on the other side of the *kang*, looked flushed as if he had been talking for a long time. He was saying, "That's a small village, and it's no good. They can't fill in forms or use the abacus. There are no landlords there, only a few rich peasants, and rich peasants aren't anything special. There's one rich peasant called Yang who's a bad lot, who might be tried, but no one dares

to speak out. They all say if there aren't enough people it's difficult to have a mass trial. We held a meeting of cadres and they all lacked confidence, and at a meeting of the Peasants' Association I was the only one to speak. When poor clay's put in the kiln nothing good will come out. It's just a waste of effort. Nobody said a word, like so many deaf mutes. . . ."

Wen was sitting on the near end of the *kang*, laughing heartily, while the cadres with Old Tung nodded from time to time and said, "Yes, that's right", to confirm his statements. Now Hu who was also standing there listening interrupted to ask: "Haven't you anyone in your place who can use an abacus? Can't the teacher in your school use one?"

"There's nobody uses it well — of course the teacher can!"

"That'll do, as long as you can add and subtract that's all right. That problem can be solved, can't it?" The cadres just smiled doubtfully.

"We'll make up a specimen form for you. Then with the registration for assessing taxes as the basis you make another investigation, and put down separately the self-cultivated land, land rent out, rented land, mortgaged land, land rented from other villages, and land rented to other villages. You must distinguish between the irrigated land, hillside irrigated land, hilly land, dry land, orchard, vineyards and vegetable gardens. All you need is to make a thorough investigation, not leaving anything out. There are only forty or fifty families, so just the few of you can do it. What's the difficulty? It doesn't matter if you write badly, so long as you know what you write and other people can understand. That's the main thing, don't you agree?"

Catching some of Hu's enthusiasm the cadres took heart a little and said: "You're quite right, comrade. It's just that we've never done this before. If only you'll come and show us how to manage, it will be all right. Won't you come and stay in our village, comrade?" Again they looked eagerly at Wen, waiting for him to speak.

Yumin reminded Wen again that he should go to the meeting, and just as he was leaving he accepted the invitation to Liku, saying he would go the next day and look round himself. This made them overjoyed. They pressed behind Wen, and followed him out, saying: "Come early! Come and have breakfast in our place."

When only three of them were left in the room Yang asked Old Tung whether he had had a meal or not. Old Tung said he had eaten at Liku. Then they started talking about affairs in the village again.

Old Tung was fifty that year. He had a red face, clean shaven, and a powerful chest and shoulders. As soon as the Communists had come from Nanshan to the Third District he had joined them as a guerrilla. Some people thought he was too old, but he said, "Don't just think I'm older than you, let's see who's stronger, let's see whose legs are strongest. I don't let myself get left behind in farming, and still less in guerrilla fighting." At that time Comrade Pin was in charge in the Third District and he kept him on. At first he just kept up with the others. He could not shoot and when he saw the enemy he jumped for fright, unable to advance, while his mouth grew dry, so that all the others laughed at him. However after a few encounters he said, "Dead or alive it's all the same," and stopped being afraid. They gave him a pistol with no bullets. He had to use the wrong size bullets and after each shot he had to clean the barrel. All this area was then occupied by enemy garrisons which had established many strong points, so that when guerrilla warfare was first started it was no joke. Once some twenty of them were holding a meeting with Comrade Pin in a village. Enemy spies learned of it and sent thirty or forty men over with a machine gun. Then all they said was, "We'll be revolutionaries to the end. If we have to jump into the Yellow River we'll jump together!" They left the village and laid an ambush. The enemy who had caught up with them knew exactly what their strength was. They had only six rifles, two pistols and two Hupeh made rifles. They had all only just put down their hoes and taken up guns. Their aim was poor and they were panicky. The enemy made fun of them, shouting: "Guerrillas of the Third District, we'll give up our guns. Look . . . these are all good rifles, do you want them?" The guerrillas were furious. "Don't be afraid," said Pin. "Keep calm and we'll each aim at the same man, the one with the leather cap. When I give the word all fire together, got that?" They did as he said, ten rifles sounded together, and the enemy was wounded. Whereupon they all jumped for joy. They continued in the same way and wounded three or four one after the other, until the enemy beat a hasty retreat. Immediately the country people prepared noodles, the district office bought five

chickens. Later the county office gave them a rifle as a prize. After that Old Tung grew even more resolute. He spent three years that were a hundred times harder than working as a hired hand on the farm, often sleeping without even a mud *kang*, simply digging a trench in the ground and lining it with a little grass, eating dumplings that had frozen hard. He learned how to fire a gun, and became a loyal Party member, braving death to carry out orders. Later they sent him to work in the district Workers' Union, and after the Chairman of the Workers' Union was transferred he was made Chairman.

He was an energetic Communist cadre, but had never got used to using his head. He liked a cut and dried job, not caring if it were hard, only afraid of being on his own and having to make decisions. The district authority had sent him to Nuanshui this time partly because he came from Liku himself and was familiar with conditions there, but largely because Wen and the others were coming, and he could act as a guide and also learn something. The district office respected and trusted Wen implicitly, and Old Tung with his reliance on others came with him. When Wen sent him to Liku it was a chance to go home and see his brother whom he had not seen for many years. He had made no attempt to understand conditions in Nuanshui, and had not even explained to the others what he had known of the village in the past.

When Yang and Hu told him all they had found out during the last two days, and analysed it, he did not feel it worth studying, and wondered if he should tell them a piece of business of his own. On his return to Liku he had found his brother suffering from stomach-ache. His brother urged him to come back to the village and get a few *mou* of land. He was no longer young and had had a rough enough time of it. He should spend a few years peacefully with his brother. Old Tung rejected this proposal, saying that as long as he lived he was a Communist, and he would die a Communist too. He must still work for the people. But his brother said his health was no longer good. Both of them were still bachelors. They'd never had a woman, and even if he was working for the people he ought to leave a descendant for their ancestors. His brother said there was a widow in the village, and although she was already forty she still looked strong enough to bear children, and would do as a wife. He himself was incapable of marrying, but he wanted to fix up a marriage for his younger brother. Now his

brother was a cadre, he need not worry the woman's family would refuse. Old Tung's face turned red with embarrassment. "You're joking," he said; but it unsettled him. The village cadres too said he had worked hard for the revolution, and wanted to give him three *mou* of vineyard. He said nothing. He had worked several dozen years as a hired hand and never even in his dreams hoped to have three *mou* of vineyard. He was very tempted, thinking he could find time to come home to work, and his elder brother could help him to look after it. But suppose by any chance the comrades in the district did not approve? Suppose they said he was selfish and self-seeking, or called him backward? At the same time he felt he could not spend all his life at public expense. If he had a few *mou* of land he could support himself. As for selfishness and self-interest, he had not made money, but he could have some land to work on. Chairman Mao said they should carry out the policy of "land to the tiller". Since he had worked on the land dozens of years why shouldn't he have some? Finally he decided if only he would not be condemned for it he would ask for the land. As for a wife, that could wait for a bit. But he did not know whether he would be criticised or not. He wanted badly to talk it over with the other two, but they had not the slightest inkling of his feelings and did not give him any opening, absorbed as they were in their own subject, talking on and on about the working styles of certain cadres, putting people's thinking straight, extending the organisation and strengthening the armed forces. Finally seeing that Old Tung looked dispirited, they said he had worked too hard the last two days and had better rest. Then they themselves left for the meeting.

Although there were not as many people at the meeting that evening as the previous day, it still ended very late. Because Wen wanted to overcome the peasants' fear that the Kuomintang would come back he felt he had to make a minute analysis of the situation, and spoke of the democratic movement in Kuomintang territory, the hatred of the soldiers for the war, and the mighty strength of the Soviet Union. Then he spoke of Kao Su-hsun and Liu San-pen, described the progressive American correspondent Agnes Smedley and the assassination by Kuomintang agents of the progressive professors Wen Yi-to and Li Kung-pu. Finally he talked about the defence of Ssuningchieh and the fighting outside Tatung. He said the Eighth Route Army had already surrounded Tatung and it would be taken in

two weeks at the latest. All this talk had its significance, and some of the audience found it very interesting. Unfortunately it was rather academic. There were too many terms the peasants could not understand, and it was far too long. The audience felt tired, and by the end many of them were asleep again. But Comrade Wen in his enthusiasm to lay bare his heart to them so that they would understand everything, could not compress his speech. After the meeting broke up he was exhausted and his head reeled, and as soon as he reached home he lay down and went to sleep. Yang and Hu had to postpone their plan to the next day. But the next day Wen had no time. He had promised to go to Liku, and without leaving even the simplest plan of work he left hastily with Old Tung. He stayed at Liku two whole days and one night, holding two meetings at which he repeated all he had said at Nuanshui. Meanwhile Yang and Hu discussed how to go forward with their investigation, in particular how to find evidence of the facts of which Yumin had told them, and how to find people from among the masses to start the struggle.

## CHAPTER XXVII

Ever since the land reform team's arrival in the village, the primary school had become a hive of activity. There were more fights and accusations. You could often hear shouting inside: "Down with the little feudal landlords!" And then a child would cry. Once Hu had taught them a song which the poor children liked particularly. As soon as they left class they would start singing cheerfully: "*Landlords have oppressed us, oppressed us all' these years. . . . Now we must unite to settle our old scores.*" The clear childish treble echoed on every side. When they gathered in groups to play, one or two mischief makers would deliberately bump into the children of landlords' families, who usually dressed better than the rest, and tease them. Then those children would start shrieking, and the teachers often had to settle these disputes. Mr. Liu never scolded the poor children, at the most he would say: "It's no use picking on them, they aren't responsible." And he would comfort those children now so vulnerable: "You must work in the future and earn your own livings. Be good citizens and tell your parents to be too, otherwise sooner or later you'll all be attacked. . . ."

But not so Mr. Jen. He turned threatening eyes on those children who had no socks to wear, and, not daring scold them out loud, would whisper fiercely: "Don't start rejoicing too soon. Wait till the Central Government troops come and punish you creatures!" Some of the children were afraid and dared not make trouble again, but others went and told Mr. Liu who made a mental note of it, but said nothing for the time being. Mr. Jen also expressed sympathy to the children who had been teased, hoping they would repeat his remarks to their parents. He not only busied himself in the school, out of school hours he would make calls too. He called on several landlord families, dropping a few ambiguous remarks to increase their anxiety, and then giving them some hope and courage. Things couldn't go on like this, rich people would have endless suffering in the hands of the Communists. But the Communists couldn't beat old Chiang, or even if they did they couldn't beat America. Sooner or later they would be swept clean.

He himself was not at all rich. He was one of the middle class impoverished intelligentsia, but still he sympathised with the rich and was willing to run their errands, hoping to pick up crumbs from their tables and grow fat. He did not like poor people, and hated the cadres who worked for the poor. He hoped the land reform would be a failure and cause trouble. Or at least that it would not turn out well.

The evening that Old Tung came back from Liku, Jen went to Li's house. This was the only house Li had left. The gate was very high, with two or three steps up to it, the big door covered with iron plates half closed. He pushed straight in, and as he rounded the corner two dogs suddenly started barking fiercely at him from the empty porch, but luckily they were fastened by an iron chain to a pillar. Hurrying into the courtyard he called "Mr. Li!" but no one answered. Only after a long time Li's elder daughter Lanying came out. She was a girl of eleven who had just got back from school and still had a smudge of ink on her face. When she saw that it was one of the teachers she stood to attention and said, "Are you looking for Father? Father isn't at home."

"Your mother?" Jen looked around. All he could see were a few children's clothes hanging on a wire in the courtyard with a woman's red silk brassiere. Outside the eastern room two big baskets of dried fruit were being sunned.

The girl hesitated a moment, then said: "Mother's in the back yard."

Jen understood, but he wanted to see for himself. By now the girl had run down the steps and was hurrying off to the left, saying as she passed him, "Mother's busy." Seeing there was no way of stopping him, she called out loudly: "Ma! Ma! Someone to see you! Mr. Jen's here!"

A plump woman in her thirties hurried out of the shed where hay was kept, still showing traces of alarm, but said smiling: "It's you! Do go back to the northern room and sit down." Hay was sticking to her flowered blouse and hair.

"Mrs. Li, it's no use hiding your property deeds in the hay," said Jen, maliciously jeering at her.

Mrs. Li belonged to the richest family at Wuchia village. Since childhood she had been waited on, and she was known for her fine white complexion. At Jen's remark she involuntarily started, but immediately steadied herself again, and answered smiling: "We took out our deeds of property long ago and put them in the drawer. Did you come for the deeds? All right! Just as long as the Peasants' Association agrees."

"I haven't come for the deeds, but sooner or later someone will." Jen darted an unfathomable look at her.

She did not show him into the northern room, but took him into the east room where there was a big *kang*, in front of it two large pans, and opposite it two dressers covered like the counters in a grocery shop with jars of oil, salt, soya and vinegar, all polished till they shone. Taking a bright copper dipper she ladled water from the water barrel and poured it into a flowered basin to wash her hands which were covered with mud. Jen said again, laughing, "Well, look how you rich wives have been dragged down!"

Li's wife was an enterprising woman. In her mother's house she had never done a stroke of work, only able to embroider grasses and flowers as a pastime. The first few years after she married Li passed quite comfortably, but Li was an opium addict and a gambler. Although he had a good income from rents he was always short of cash, and every year had to sell a little land. One year Chien persuaded him to be the puppet ward chief. Everybody else made money as ward chief, but he was a fool and got cheated by others, so that he had to sell another hundred *mou* of land and a house before he could settle his debts, and asked



people to plead hard for him beside giving a good deal of money to Chien before he could get rid of the job. These last two years his income had not been too little. They could afford a labourer, and if they hired someone to cook, carry water and run errands to town they could have been more comfortable, but his wife did not approve. She saw things were shapping unfavourably for them and advised him: "Just that bit of land is left, and you can't keep money. All the villagers are watching you. Don't put on too much of a show." She decided to do the cooking herself. At first she only thought of the few traitors in the village. Afraid they would cheat Li of the little money he had left she worked very hard, doing everything herself. When rents were collected she came forward and would not let it all fall into her husband's hands, but took some herself to save for a rainy day. After Liberation when Yumin and the others were in control she knew things were going to be even worse. She feigned poverty even more, and was still less willing to hire a servant, eating and dressing simply, smiling whenever she saw the village cadres, saying Li had already stopped smoking opium but was in poor health, their four children were all young, her husband was not reliable, she didn't know what would become of them in future. She had taught her children to be clever too. They never offended people and did well at school, but they understood quite well, and when they came home they never sang the songs they learned in school or talked about their meetings. She hated Chien and his group because they had cheated her husband, but she was even more afraid of Yumin and the rest. Sometimes however she asked Yumin to eat something she had specially prepared. She knew he liked to drink, but he who had been their hired hand now put on airs. He would not give her any face but left without drinking a drop. A couple of weeks previously she had gone home to her own family. Wuchia was in a state of ferment. Her elder brother had fled but had been fetched back by the peasants, and property that had been in the family for a hundred years had all been confiscated. All her relatives were sharing the same fate. The river water was flowing east, and its course could not be changed.

As soon as she got home she told Li to go to Kalgan to lie low for a time while she stayed at home. She was a woman, and Yumin and the rest would hardly make trouble for her. Then if she talked nicely and begged people to help, they might get by. But Li felt it was useless for him to go. He could not spend long

away from home, he was not a resourceful man. He believed he had not too many enemies in the village, so he stayed, waiting to see which way the wind blew. He spent the day in the orchard, sometimes coming home for a while in the evening. His wife tried all day long to hide here a suitcase filled with jewels and clothes, there a barrel of grain, with the idea of burying everything they had under the ground. All the time her heart was in her mouth, but sometimes she went out to take a few turns and find out some news for her husband.

After she had washed her hands she took a key and unlocked the door to the south rooms. The three south rooms were packed with utensils and containers holding grain, beside various baskets of different sizes packed with things. The room had been varnished spick and span, even the boards on the *kang* were carved. But now the room was thick with dust and crammed with things. Reed mats were nailed to the windows for fear people should see the treasures hidden here. During the day not a ray of light got in and the whole room smelt musty. Mrs. Li hastily measured out half a basin of flour, then hurried back to the kitchen to keep her guest company. She knew Jen was only a double-dealing opportunist, but one could always hear some news from him.

"Oh, all that white flour. You eat only good things. If they don't divide up your property whose will they divide!" said Jen deliberately, following her to the kitchen.

"Let them divide it if they must. There's only this little bit. It'll all be finished sooner or later. What are you so pleased about? You won't get a share! What have you heard at the school?"

"Nothing, except that they're going to settle accounts again. The people who weren't tried last year will have their turn this year. This year they specially want to do away with the big exploiting, feudalistic landlords."

Mrs. Li gave another start, but her hands mixing the flour did not pause, and she asked, "What do you mean by big, exploiting feudalistic landlords?"

"It's written up very clearly on the Blackboard News. It means you people who live on rents! You're to be wiped out."

Mrs. Li felt afraid and her hand stopped moving. She was just going to ask how they would be wiped out when she heard

the dogs barking again on the porch of the southern room and someone shouting at the dogs. She realised that the men who sold fruit for them had come for their evening meal. She put her head out and said, "Oh, you've come just in time. You've been busy these last two days. We'll eat pancakes this evening. Haha, just now Mr. Jen here said we had a lot of flour, and was jealous, wanting to divide up our property. All right. Food comes out of the ground, does it matter who eats it? We're all friends, haha. . . ." Three tall stout fellows came in as she was laughing. Their faces could not be seen clearly, but they all seemed to have unbuttoned their jackets.

"Sit down on the *kang*, while I light a lamp." A hand which had once been very delicate carried a lamp to the table on the *kang*, struck a match and lit it. The rosy lamplight danced on her plump face, making her eyes look even more like bright, transparent drops of water.

A man sitting on the end of the *kang* took up the bellows, but she said politely: "You rest, you've been on the move all day. Let me do it. There's water in the pan. Have a drink first."

Jen had no desire to watch this woman flatter these three labouring fools, so he asked, "Where's Mr. Li? When will he be back?"

"I can't say when he'll be back." But after a pause she added: "Did you want to see him about that fruit sale? If so, go into the orchard and you'll find him."

"What fruit sale?" Jen wondered. Immediately he understood. Glancing at the three men he answered hurriedly, "Yes, it's about the fruit. But it doesn't matter if I don't see him. You can tell him when he comes home. It's getting late. I'll be going!" Before the woman could say any more he had hurried out. At the door he met several children who had just come home, each one with fruit in his hand, so he asked: "Is your father still in the orchard?"

Without looking at him the children answered: "Yes, he's still there."

## CHAPTER XXVIII

It was beginning to grow dark now in the street, but Jen walked softly on out of the little alley on the west side. Some

people were talking in their doorways and it seemed unusually quiet because all the dogs in the village were tied up. One heard only the chirr of insects from the fields, the distant croaking of frogs and the buzzing of the mosquitoes that swarmed round. Jen approached an orchard. There was not a glimmer of light there, all was black. He bent his head to look at the ground and groped with his hands to avoid bumping into the fruit trees. But after walking for a while his eyes became slightly more accustomed to the gloom. He saw a bonfire ahead which served as a guide. He could already hear the drip of water in the well and knew that he had not gone astray, so he walked noisily humming an opera.

He grew increasingly cheerful as he approached the fire, all the time marvelling to himself: "How cowardly he is, not even daring to go home! I'm going to give him a fright!"

Fallen leaves and wild mugwort were piled in a heap. A fire smouldered slowly beneath. Dense smoke billowed out till blocked by the thick foliage, then spread horizontally, like a very thin transparent canopy. However just then none of this was visible. Only the acrid smoke could be smelt. The fire threw a faint circle of light to illumine one or two tree trunks in the vicinity, and a small hut at one side. Reaching the fire without having seen a soul Jen groped his way to the hut and called out. No one answered, so he retraced his steps. But there was still not a sound to be heard, only an axe cutting wood in a distant part of the forest. Even the bonfire was screened by the trees so that all was darkness. Jen began to feel a little panicky, and was just considering finding his way home when he suddenly saw the red glow of a cigarette not far off. He called out with joy: "Who's there?" But there was no answer and the red glow disappeared. Growing impatient again he hurried forward, but tripped and fell over something. When he got to his feet again he saw there were some dozen fruit baskets here barring the way. But now a man's voice sounded from the darkness: "Devil take you, what are you crashing about here for? You've crushed the fruit." Jen recognised the voice of Paotang, Li's hired hand who watched the orchard for him. He was rather angry at having fallen, but had to control himself, and called out, "Uncle Paotang, you hide under the trees and watch people fall down, then have the heart to blame them for crushing the fruit! I've come to find Mr. Li. Has he gone home again?"

The old man did not answer, just came out to examine the crushed fruit, and put the baskets in order. Jen had to ask again, "Where's Mr. Li?"

The old man still did not answer, just raising his head to stare over Jen's shoulder. The firelight shone on his vacant and stubborn eyes. He remained motionless and expressionless, causing Jen considerable alarm. He was just going to repeat his question when a tall figure stepped out from behind him, and said slowly: "Is it Old Jen?"

Jen gave a start and gripped the tall thin man, exclaiming loudly, "Oh! I had such a time finding you. Where were you hiding?"

"Don't shout! What's your business?" Li took out cigarettes and offered him one.

"Oh, there's no business. I hadn't seen you for several days and came to see you, knowing you don't feel at ease —" Li poked him in the back to stop him going on.

"Have you had your meal? I haven't eaten yet, I'm not going back this evening. Uncle Paotang, you go back to the village now and fetch me something to eat together with my bedding. It's much cooler here than at home, much more comfortable!" Li leant against a tree, and reached down for a piece of fruit which he passed to Jen. "Here you are. See how big this sweet-apple is!"

"There are a lot of mosquitoes." Jen slapped his forehead hard. "Everybody says your fruit has done very well this year. This orchard is quite a size."

"A lot of fruit's not necessarily so good. Nowadays I sell seven or eight loads a day getting fifty or sixty thousand dollars. But after deducting the labourers' expenses only thirty or forty thousand are left, not enough to pay back the spring wages."

The old man had already gone quietly off.

"You'd better sell this fruit at once, better sell at cut prices rather than have to give it away. Get what you can for it."

They had both squatted down. Li looked around in the dark, then asked softly: "What news is there? Coming to live here I feel like a dead man. I don't know what's going on."

"Mr. Li, why don't you go away to hide? In the village you've got the most land, and you were once ward chief. It's always best to be on the safe side."

"Um!" Li lifted his hand to support his head which kept drooping. Even in the faint firelight one could see how pale he

was. He was silent for a time, then sighed and said: "Ah! As for being ward chief, heaven knows, Hsu and Chien and their group tricked me into it!"

Jen had heard this too. When Li was ward chief he had to pay out subsidies to the big shots in the village, sending grain to each family. When the *hsiang* office demanded fifty thousand dollars the village sharpsters added twenty percent. The villagers couldn't pay and the sharpsters cursed him as incompetent, and if he failed to hand over the grain they put pressure on him by threatening to report him to the *hsiang* office. Group after group of people asked him to gamble and they conspired to swindle money out of him. These people were connected with the Japanese and puppets, so he dared not refuse to gamble. However, Jen had not the least sympathy for him, and said, "Nowadays it's no use blaming other people. Mr. Chien's an army dependent. Chiang made his money as ward chief, and he's now village head. Nobody will touch them. You're different. You have money but no power, so I'm worried about you. You try all the time not to offend people, yet you still have all these enemies. Why don't you think of a way out? Just now your worst enemies are Yümin and that group. He was once your hired hand. Is it possible you never offended him?"

Li could not think of a reply. He lit another cigarette and puffed at it furiously. He was completely at a loss and stared all around as if there were people hidden in the depth of the blackness, just waiting to come out and seize him. Involuntarily he sighed.

Jen too started straining his eyes through the darkness. A cool breeze was blowing in their direction, he leant more closely against the tree, and whispered: "Nowadays it's a lawless society! This is what's called pulling up turnips. Last year they pulled up Hsu. After all he was an able man. He saw what was coming and moved his whole family away. Well, who knows whether he won't come back some day to take his revenge. This spring they pulled out Old Hou, and Old Hou's Buddha couldn't save him. He had to pay up a hundred bushels of grain. And now, mark my words, it's going to be worse than last year. Three of them at once have come from the provincial capital. Chen Wu of Meng Chia has been put to death. Last year at least no one in our village was killed, but who knows what will happen this year? Ah!"

The night breeze ruffled the leaves, and Li's heart was going pit-a-pat too. He was a nervous man to begin with, and listening to Jen he felt even more agitated, and could not help crying from his heart: "Heavens! What can I do! I've a few *mou* of land, but I didn't steal them or seize them by force. They were left by my ancestors, and now I'm to be punished for it! Old Jen! Tell me what I should do!"

"Keep a grip on yourself. Don't talk so loudly." Jen stood up and walked round the fire, but could see nothing amiss. The night was very quiet, so he walked back and whispered comfort to the young landlord who was doubled up with fright: "There's nothing to be afraid of. You're not the only rich man in the village. You should all get together and think of a way out. Take the case of your tenants. There are a lot of people with the same surname, and when all's said and done you're all of the same family. Even if they don't respond to friendship they've got to think of the future—will the Eighth Route Army be here forever? There's bound to be a day when the Kuomintang army comes. You ought to try to win them over. What's the use of hiding here all the time?"

"Ah." It was easy to increase his fear, but very difficult to dispel his anxiety all at once. Li was crouching on the ground, his two hands spread out, looking the picture of despair. After a pause he said: "Oh! Old Jen, what d'you mean by family relationship and friendly feelings. They're all unreliable! I'm afraid it's no use now for me to bow right and left and speak respectfully. Ah!"

"Then just speak to them frankly. Ask them if they want to keep their lives in future or not! Mr. Li, the Peiping-Suiyuan railway's cut again, the Eighth Route Army has surrounded Tatung. Do you suppose the Kuomintang won't come? Hush!"

Suddenly hearing footsteps on the left both men were startled. They stopped talking, Jen recoiling a step to stand in an even darker place. Holding their breath they listened to the approaching steps. It was Paotang, carrying a roll of bedding and a basket, who emerged from the darkness. Without a word he put the basket down in front of Li, then withdrew to the little hut. Li put on a solicitous air and said, "It's not easy walking on a dark night like this. Come and eat some pancakes, Uncle Paotang." He had already uncovered the basket.

"The road's all right. There are militiamen patrolling. They're patrolling outside this orchard as well as others. They say they're afraid some families may have forgotten to tie up their dogs and may let them out to trample the fruit."

The two men exchanged glances in the dark. Jen stood there a little longer until he heard the old man go into the hut, apparently to sleep, then he quietly nudged Li, turned away and was swallowed up in the darkness.

## CHAPTER XXIX

On his way back Jen did not see a single militiaman. He re-entered the village by the same road he had come, and returned to the primary school. Mr. Liu was sitting by the lamp correcting students' compositions. Jen looked at the big pile of exercise books on his own desk, but could not be troubled to read them, and went to look for Old Wu, the cook. However the old fellow had gone to the south end of the village to the poor peasants' meeting. It was stifling hot inside, and he ladled himself some cold water to drink in the kitchen. He went back to the room which he and Mr. Liu shared. The latter was still sitting bolt upright, with his whole mind on his corrections. Jen felt even less like correcting his own pile of compositions, and lay down on the *kang* to think. Mosquitoes, as if deliberately to antagonize him, immediately swarmed humming about, from time to time launching surprise attacks. He felt complacent and even happy to think he had just done a good deed, sympathising with, comforting and helping someone in distress. He and Li had formerly been very friendly. Now Li was in a pitiable condition. All the villagers wanted to vent their anger on him because he had over a hundred *mou* of land which made many of the poor envious, and now he was scared out of his wits, not even daring to go home. The rich had oppressed him and were now avoiding him. Li had not a friend in the world, but he, Jen, a primary school teacher, had at this time stretched out his hand to him — how grateful Li must be! Jen felt he had just accomplished some heroic deed and wished people knew of it so that they could praise him. But now that he was back in the school there was no one there but Mr. Liu whom he heartily despised.



Mr. Liu was not a graduate of the rural normal school. When he corrected compositions he often wrote the wrong words and had to keep thumbing through his dictionary. But because he played up to Lichang the latter always praised him, thought highly of him and always consulted him in difficulties. Liu was a native of the village too, so of course he was in a more favourable position. He was nearly forty, his son would soon be marrying. Yet he still showed such enthusiasm in learning folk dances, and danced so badly it made you want to laugh. He also played the guitar and flute. Jen often thought of leaving and seeing what would happen to Liu then. It was only because Jen could not find a job right away that he had to stay on. Sometimes he had to talk to Liu about their daily life or work, but apart from this they had nothing to say to each other. Occasionally Jen felt so lonely he would forget the old creature's stubbornness and address a few remarks to him, but invariably he gave up after a few words, which proved they had nothing in common. Now Jen was feeling again that he must find someone to talk to, but he could not confide in Liu, for if the latter knew what was in his mind he might tell the village cadres. This being so, Jen hated him all the more, especially when he saw Liu always in high spirits, as if he could never be depressed.

Jen was isolated in the village like floating duckweed without roots, with nothing to support him. But he could not leave yet or his livelihood would become precarious. That was undoubtedly one reason why he could not tear himself away. Another reason was that although Nuanshui fell short of his expectations in every other respect, it nevertheless contained a great attraction. He was twenty-five, and had read a number of sentimental novels, but had never married. He hoped very much to marry in Nuanshui, but the object of his affections had made no response. He would not give up hope, believing that a certain social force was on his side, and this encouraged his dreams.

He tossed and turned on the *kang*, smoking one cigarette after another, while Mr. Liu kept on writing, sometimes reading aloud. Finally Jen could contain himself no longer. He got down from the *kang*, and went to stroll in the courtyard, finally passing out through the gate. The street was refreshingly cool, the leaves of the locust tree rustling in the breeze. He caught sight of a figure in motion, hesitated, then asked: "Who is it?" A man turned to

confront him, and asked very politely: "Are you still up, Mr. Jen?" It was one of the militiamen, carrying a local rifle, who went on with a smile: "Ho! The meetings have gone on pretty late the last two days." Jen knew him, and said: "It must be rather hard on you men."

"It's for our own sake," said the other, "and we can't complain. We just have to do our part. Why don't you go to bed, Mr. Jen?" Saying this he turned south. Jen stood there for a second, then hurried off to the east and turned the corner in a northerly direction.

He had not gone far before he came to a door which was already bolted. After giving two light raps he heard someone coming to open it. The porch was very dark, and a woman's voice said softly: "Is it Mr. Jen?" He recognised Mrs. Chien's voice and answered quietly: "Is Mr. Chien at home?" Without waiting for her reply he walked straight in.

Lamplight shone through the windows of the northern room, the courtyard was grey. Chien, wearing a pongee jacket, stepped out from under the shadow of the oleander tree to greet him, and motioned him into the darkness, saying, "Come and sit here, it's cool."

There were two stools here and cold tea on a *kang* table. Jen saw there was only a light in the northern room on the right, while all the rest were pitch dark. He looked carefully toward the room that was lit up, and hearing sounds of crying there felt misgiving and uneasiness.

Mrs. Chien came over to make tea, and fetched another stool, then sat down beside them and whispered: "Have you heard anything, Mr. Jen? How has the village decided to conduct the trials this time?"

"Do you suppose they'd tell us their plans? You've got a security officer as son-in-law, you ought to know all about it. And the Chairman of the Peasants' Association is a relative of yours —" He stopped to listen carefully again for any sound from the room with the light.

"Our son-in-law says —" began Mrs. Chien, but Chien cut her short to answer: "Old Jen, we two see eye to eye, I can say what I like to you. We two are out of luck, so we have to watch our steps."

"Mr. Chien!" Jen thought of all the villagers who hated Chien unspeakably, and said, "I'm concerned for you too—some people in the village are talking about you." He was struck by Chien's uneasiness, a mood he had never seen him in before.

"Well, of course I'm not afraid." Chien narrowed his eyes to two slits again while his glance darted right and left from behind lowered lids in a way he had whenever he wanted to appear master of the situation. After a pause he went on, "Well! Let's see what that little Yumin can do to me!" Twisting his thin moustache ends, he started chuckling.

Then Jen used Chien's usual arguments, "Of course you're not afraid, you're an army dependent. Don't mind about them. Let them do their worst."

"Right!" Chien immediately regained his normal manner, and paused for a moment to consider this young man who was sitting opposite in the darkness. He had had this primary school teacher under his thumb for a long time. "I've long wanted to persuade you," he said more solicitously, "not to show too much interest in other people's affairs. I heard you went to White Snake's again today. That's a centre of mischief. In difficult times like these other people are trying their best to hide. Another thing, young Chiang is a slippery customer, and if you don't look out he may stab you in the back. Look at all the money he made, starting with nothing. Whom did he depend on? Now he forgets the source of benefits and is like the weed on the wall leaning both ways. White Snake is only a woman after all. What can she have to tell you?"

"White Snake says Chiang still owes her several tens of thousands of dollars, and if he doesn't hurry up and pay, a day will come when she'll tell everything. She'll dissociate herself from him, and not talk nonsense for him any more."

Chien's heart missed a beat, but hiding his feelings he said: "Just as I say, how can women like that be taken into one's confidence? What is Chiang really planning to do?"

Jen knew that Chien liked him to keep in touch with the landlords, although pretending to dissuade him from going, and he thought: "Do you still distrust me? You really are cautious. Jen is not without a sense of loyalty."

Jen knew how many enemies Chien had, but thought they did not matter. Chien's son-in-law and relatives could help him. He

knew too that Chien was afraid, although feigning complete indifference. This suited him. He wanted Chien to be desperate so that he could prove his loyalty and win an unexpected prize. Sometimes he realised that Chien was not a good man to trifle with. No one could expect anything from him. But Jen could find no other friend, to say nothing of his other hopes.

He also told Chien about Li, and Chien alarmed him by saying that if Li really went to his tenants and tried to win them over, and it was discovered, Jen might be involved. Chien said that Jen ought to think of a way to sever relations with Li. He hinted to him that he might write some short articles for the Blackboard News informing against Li. He also said a great many bad things about Li. He said that Li, a graduate of normal college, looked down on other people, and had denounced Jen as not up to normal college standard. He claimed Li did not in the least value friendship. In the past many police and secret service bullies from the *hsiang* had gambled with him, winning his money. They had taken him to the club at Tsolu and done all sorts of things. Li pampered them as if they were his parents. When all his money was spent he sold houses and land, but had no regard for the village. During his period of office as ward chief he had even asked Chien to do some manual labour for the government. Chien said he was busy and didn't want to go, whereupon Li said he could send his hired man. Chien flatly refused, and asked how much money he wanted. Only then did Li realise how foolish he had been, and hurry over to apologise. Chien declared Li was growing very miserly now, pretending to be poor. When he kept people to a meal they only ate millet, while the flour and white rice were kept for him and his wife. Jen remembered how the few times he had eaten at their house they had just had a few vegetable dishes with the wine, not even any fried eggs, although they kept hens themselves.

By now the sound of quarreling could be heard from the house, and Jen longed to go and see what was happening. Chien knew what he was thinking, and explained to him: "It's nothing. It's just that niece of mine who's growing up and isn't married yet. We can't find anyone suitable in the village, but can't keep her quiet at home. I've always said, as long as a man is good, it doesn't matter if he has no property. It's not too late now, but she's not young either. You're one of us so I don't mind telling you: someone came and mentioned the Chairman of the Peasants' Association. But that

would never do. My own daughter's married a security officer, and I'm already regretting it. This is a vital matter. He may be one of the village cadres now, but one must think of the past — what sort of people were they before? And one must take thought for the future, one day the Kuomintang troops will come, and who knows what will happen to this lot then. When that time comes my daughter will come crying home and I as her father will feel very sad. If you can think of someone, of the right age and up to standard, simple and honest, then tell me, and we'll settle the business." After saying this Chien deliberately sighed, then screwed up his eyes again to watch the embarrassed primary school teacher in the dark.

Jen was at a loss for an answer. Not finding anything suitable to say at once, he sipped his tea. He felt unbearably hot, while the mosquitoes under the trees attacked them still more savagely. They were both quiet for a time. Then Jen got up to take his leave. Chien did not ask him to stay and Mrs. Chien saw him out. The street was absolutely silent, and the door closed behind him as soon as he crossed the threshold.

### CHAPTER XXX

After meeting with such a rebuff in Kuei's house, Heini felt a discontent which she could not put into words. She had always behaved very well to everyone. Her elder uncle Wenfu was always warning her to be on her guard, saying: "Heini, your second uncle's done many bad things in the village. We've got to be extra straightforward to make people forget that we belong to the same family, and to avoid being involved in future!" Heini did her best to get on with Kuei. There was some opposition when she was asked to teach the Literacy Class. But her hard work and conscientiousness in teaching won the confidence of Kuei and Lichang. Lichang praised her sense of responsibility, but still she could not altogether avoid cold stares, envy and hatred. Even the instinctive hatred which her youth and beauty aroused was considered reasonable. To many she was a temptress, or monster, something despicable. Whenever she was snubbed and had no way of working off her feelings, she would run to the vegetable garden and under the

melon trellis would complain tearfully of the injustice to her hard-working old uncle. Wenfu would stop his work, sit down beside her and sigh. Or he might say: "Ah! What misfortune! This is all your Uncle Chien's fault! You'd better come and live with me." Sometimes Wenfu was very tempted to urge her to hurry up and get married, but one could scarcely talk like that to a girl. And she was not free to do as she liked. Although Chien was not really fond of her he insisted on taking charge of her, knowing that she was not bad-looking and would serve as a bait. Thus he was not willing for her to be married off so simply. Wenfu understood some of the things on Heini's mind, and felt she was too loyal to Cheng. But if he so much as hinted at this, she would start crying bitterly. Her old uncle did not know what to do or how to help her.

Unable to attend the meeting, Heini went home. Her uncle and aunt were talking again. Her sister had come back several times, hiding in her father's room each time she returned, as if something terribly important were about to happen. When Heini went in, they always stopped talking, and her aunt would tell her to boil some water or else to go to her sister-in-law's room in the western courtyard to fetch a pair of scissors or some sewing. Sometimes she felt curious to discover what they were discussing all this time. Sometimes she spitefully paid no attention to them, leaving them to their underhand doings. Gradually, however, she began to understand that this was probably because land reform was going to start in the village and her uncle was afraid in some way. At the same time he had some kind of scheme. These surmises made her very uneasy. She had no idea what the upshot would be. All she could do was to confide her simple conjecture to her Uncle Wenfu. Honest Wenfu could not solve or explain Heini's problems either, and their vague premonitions of disaster made both of them a prey to anxious fears.

When Heini's sister-in-law, Erh, came back from her home, she was crying bitterly and demanding to have the family split up. She did not dare broach the subject to Chien, but found Heini's elder sister-in-law and passed on her fears to her. They had both been given twenty-five *mou* of land apiece and registered as separate households, but the deeds of property were still in the hands of their father-in-law. All they had was the name of owner without real possession. Now if in the coming trial all the land were confiscated, they would be dragged into trouble. They vented their anger on

the bowls and pans they were washing in the kitchen and spoke bitterly, adding fuel to each other's indignation, and even looked askance at Heini because she was his niece. Chienli was a simple fellow and did not say a word. Seeing the state his wife and sister-in-law were in he left for the orchard. He had three *mou* of vineyard of his own to cultivate. Later on he moved to the orchard altogether. He was afraid of his father, but unable to control his wife. Then Heini's elder sister-in-law went to find Wenhui, Chairman of the Workers' Union, to announce that they had divided up the family's property that spring. Wenhui had not been on friendly terms with them, so he said, "This business of yours has nothing to do with me." Then she went to see Cheng, but he kept out of her way and she could not find him, causing her to feel even more alarmed. But she dared not ask her father-in-law for the deeds. Later Chien found out what they were thinking, but instead of scolding them, said, "You really have no conscience. This land wasn't left me by my ancestors. I earned it inch by inch myself and I shall do what I like with it. In the spring I said I'd give it to you, because I want you to have separate households and settle down. But Chienli is a fool and can't manage property, while Yi has gone to join the army — what can you women do? I hold the property merely to take care of your interests. Now that the village wants to divide up property, you're the first to start clamouring. You're starting the fight at home. Who would have thought you would be the ones to take the lead and strike the first blow! Very well, if you think your wings are strong enough and you don't need rely on the old man any more, that's all right. The deeds are here. If you want them, take them. Only if there's trouble in the future, don't come running to me for help!"

When the women heard this they dared not take the deeds, for fear their father-in-law would injure them later if they did, such was their fear of him. Later it was Chien who comforted them saying there could not be any trouble, they could not possibly be involved, they had registered long ago as separate households, and shared out the land. There was nothing to worry about. The deeds could be left in his place for a few days. Whenever they wanted them he would let them have them. Meanwhile in order that people might know they were really separate households, he told them to prepare their meals separately. They could take some of the store of grain, oil, salt and fuel to use. The women were delighted. Erh

took this opportunity to move into the western courtyard where she would be a little further away from her father-in-law. They got busy with small stoves and small pans, thinking they had triumphed, not realising that this was just a plan arranged by their father-in-law for a safe way out.

After the two young women had moved out, the courtyard was much quieter. While Chien considered this rather fitting, Heini found it lonely. In the past the cordial chatter and laughter of her sisters-in-law could often be heard in the courtyard along with the innocent crying and shouting of children, whereas now all that could be heard was the old people's dry coughs and furtive whispers.

Heini's cousin who had always been down on her now suddenly became very friendly, showed a great interest in the women's Literacy Class and praised Heini, encouraging her to go on doing well, saying she was the only capable one, she was in contact with the village cadres and more useful than her brother-in-law. She also spoke well of Cheng, saying how reliable and promising he was, claiming to have thought well of him while he was their hired man, as if she had never made fun of Heini's friendship with him. In addition she recalled many past incidents in her life with Heini to evoke pleasant memories. However Heini did not enjoy these conversations. She remembered too well how her cousin's family had always been against their marriage. She had sometimes even hated them for it. Moreover Cheng's forgetfulness had changed her hope to bewilderment, her bewilderment to bitterness. The more disillusioned and wretched she felt, the more reserved she became and the more unwilling she was to talk of anything connected with marriage. Her cousin did not understand this, and when Heini was silent or said "Don't talk about it, I'm not interested", she felt this was simply due to girlish shyness. All girls liked to hear people talking about their future marriages, at the same time pretending to be indifferent. Accordingly she went a step further, and put straightforward questions to Heini. This had happened when Jen was in the courtyard, and accounted for the crying and sound of remonstrance he had heard from the northern room.

Heini's cousin wanted her to go and find Cheng, and said, "You used to be on such good terms with him. He must have had some understanding with you. You fell in love with him when you were seventeen. Now you are grown up. You've lost four whole years. How can he be so heartless as to throw you aside? You



ought to remember what was said between you. You go and ask him and see what he says. He'll have to give you an answer. This is the most important thing in your life. You've got to decide it for yourself!"

Heini gritted her teeth and answered: "I could never do a thing like that. I'm not going."

Her cousin goaded her, saying, "Then you just let him take advantage of you?" And tried to worm out of her whether there had been anything between them that she was ashamed of mentioning, saying, "A woman only has one body. Whoever she goes with she ought to stay with to the end. You've studied — doesn't it say in books a woman can't have two husbands?"

Heini was so distressed by the injustice of these improper remarks, she started crying. She wanted to scold her cousin, but an unmarried girl can scarcely quarrel about such things. Angry and humiliated, stamping with rage she thought: "Oh! Even if I jump in the Yellow River I can't wash clean. It would be better to die!" Then she started crying even more bitterly.

At last when she saw Heini was adamant, her cousin urged her again: "Heini! If you don't think of yourself, oughtn't you to think of the old man? Ever since your mother married again you've lived with my father, and he's treated you like his own daughter and brought you up. He likes to poke his nose into other people's affairs, so he can't help offending people. Now there's going to be a day of reckoning in the village. Don't you suppose those wretches will take advantage of the excitement to hit back in the name of public welfare? Luckily Cheng's Chairman of the Peasants' Association. If he wants to make things hot for us the others will have to follow his lead. If he sees our side of things the others won't dare say anything. You might not care about paying your debt of gratitude, but we're all one family. How can you stand by watching the crowd trample on him? If things go badly they'll have all our family up for trial. What shall we do then!"

At this point Heini's aunt came in and sat down beside her to soothe her, patting her body and limbs which were soft and numb after crying. The old woman did not say anything, only with a look of deep sorrow stared at the dimming oil lamp and heaved sigh after sigh. Heini was exhausted and her head ached. All she wanted was to stop thinking and drop everything. But yet this new problem troubled her. She did not like her uncle Chien.

Sometimes she hated him and even thought it would be all right to let him suffer a little. But now that her sister had raised this point and her aunt had come to her, entreating her sadly: "Heini! Save us old folk!" she really did not know what to reply. Could she possibly go to see Cheng, asking him to take her? Unfortunately she was a girl. How could she ever say anything like that? Beside, she did not know what his feelings actually were.

Since Cheng had started playing a leading part in the village Chien had decided to use his niece to win him over. He had often given Heini hints, encouraging her to go boldly forward, but he would not settle this matter which had been dragging on for several years. He had not suspected that this hope would fail him. Cheng was very scrupulous, while Heini was only a girl; and helpless. Now Chien had to bring stronger pressure to bear on her, using family relationships to play on her feelings. If he could win over Cheng it would mean the loss of a niece, but the gain of a strong ally.

After a whole day and night of crying and recriminations, Heini finally took recourse to delaying tactics. She postponed making her decision until the next day when she could go to her Uncle Wenfu for advice.

## CHAPTER XXXI

Getting up in the morning Mr. Liu paced to and fro in the cool courtyard. In another corner Old Wu was sweeping the ground which was littered with bits of paper, shuttlecock feathers, fruit stones and dust. This cheerful old man who beat the gong cocked a mischievous eye at Liu, and said as if to himself: "Ah, dancing Yangko folk dances makes people young again. . . ." His red nose was pointed in Mr. Liu's direction, and with an exaggerated drawl he started singing softly:

*In the middle of the night the door opens wide,  
Full of emotion he creeps inside! Heigh ho!*

Mr. Liu had no idea what he was driving at, so laughed and said: "Old Wu, what was said at the meeting yesterday evening? You seem to be out of your senses again."

The old fellow did not answer, but replied as if giving a formal warning: "In future if you have to go home, you must tell me, I'm the school janitor. You keep strutting about, and muttering and even creep home at night to your wife, thinking I don't know about it. Studying books has spoiled you people."

"Nonsense, you're simply talking nonsense."

The old man's eyes flickered again, as he said, "Have I wronged you? When I got up this morning I found the gate open. I thought to myself: why opened so early? But when I came back from the privy the gate was closed again, and presently you appeared like a crazy fellow. Seeing you like this I guessed what you'd been up to. Humph, did you think you could keep me in the dark?"

"How could that have happened? Couldn't Mr. Jen have gone out?"

"He's sleeping soundly. I just went to have a look. Listen: like a fat pig in a sty."

"Could such a queer thing really have happened? Maybe you forgot to close the gate when you came back last night." Mr. Liu rubbed his head of bristling hair, "We'll have to be more careful in future, Old Wu, this is the time for land reform!"

"Exactly! That's just what I think! When I came back last night I fastened the gate carefully. If you did not go home, could this be the doing of a ghost? Then what are you walking about here for? Composing an essay?"

"See here," said Mr. Liu suddenly looking pleased, "Old Wu, you've got your head screwed on right. You tell me — bombs, bombs, what does that mean? Yesterday Comrade Hu said to me the Blackboard News ought to be like a bomb. What did he mean?"

"Bomb?" The old man took a small tobacco pouch out of his pocket. "Why did Comrade Hu say that? Um, when you educated people talk, it's never clear, as if you didn't want other people to understand. He said the Blackboard News should be like a bomb. Well, let's think. A bomb . . . bombs are to kill people. Can't be that. How could the Blackboard News kill people? That's not the meaning. Bombs explode . . . aha, the Blackboard News ought to be like a burst of flame, setting fire to people's hearts. What do you say to this wild guess of mine?"

"Um, there seems some sense in it, only how can it be like a flame?"

"People say our Blackboard News is like the Heavenly Gospel — nobody understands it. How can it be like a bomb, setting fire to our hearts, since it has nothing to do with us?"

"All the articles on it are explaining what land reform is. Writing just those few words was some job, I can tell you. You see, there's nobody in the village to write. It all falls on my shoulders. I gave it all to Lichang and Comrade Hu to read. I was afraid Comrade Hu would say it was badly written."

Old Wu shook his head and said: "If you want to write a composition, I'm like a rolling pin used as a bellows — no good at all. If the Blackboard News is to be like a bomb, like a fire, well, then all that classical language of yours is like cold water. I've got an idea here. You think it over and see if I'm right. If the Blackboard News is to make people want to read it, you should write a few songs expressing what's in the people's heart. Take my sounding the gong for instance. If I just shouted: 'Meeting, meeting!' that would be no fun. So I make up a few lines and sing at the same time. When people hear the singing they like it and listen. Then they know what's happening."

"Yes, that time you made up some new rhymes and sounded the gong all down the street, there were always people following behind, laughing away. To tell the truth, to make up a few lines out of the daily conversation of the country folk is easier than writing a composition. Only I'm afraid the cadres wouldn't approve."

Looking rather concerned, Old Wu said: "Oh, if Lichang told you to write, that means he thinks you're all right, and wants you to decide things for yourself. Why be afraid of this, that and the other? If he were dissatisfied he could write himself. I say you're a good sort, but a bookworm. If you'll listen to me, I'm not afraid of being laughed at. I'll make up a few lines for you, and while I say it you write. I know everything about the village. We'll make one about Third Chang exploiting Fourth Li, and put in something about Fifth Wang going hungry. When they hear that they're in the news, everybody'll want to read it. If only you can express what's in their mind, they'll feel sad, and once they're angry they'll feel furious with their enemies. Don't you think that's a good idea? Another thing, when the Japanese were here, we peasants were down-trodden. We'll settle all those old scores and make those running dog traitors make it up to us. Wouldn't that

be good? All right, I'll say a piece. You listen, and see if it's all right." Then he stopped a second, swallowed a mouthful of water, and started chanting:

*All of us praise the Communists red,  
Land reform throughout China will spread.  
Poor country peasants stand on their feet;  
Soon our vengeance will be complete.  
We were conscripted, we were oppressed,  
While each traitor landlord feathered his nest;  
Taxes and levies were no end of bother,  
After one land tax we paid out another.  
On public expenses, poll tax and all that  
Our eight chief families soon grew fat.  
Old Li to death was cruelly done,  
Chang Chen at Hungshan lost his son.  
Religion made our Old Hou blind,  
Liuchien was driven out of his mind. . . .*

"What do you say to that?" The old man squatted complacently, struck a light with his flint and started smoking. Then, putting his head on one side, he flickered his eyes, and started guffawing.

Mr. Liu screwed up his short-sighted eyes too and started laughing, then squatted with him and said, gesticulating: "Old Wu! You're really it! Now I see my way, I'll write the Blackboard News for the people! Not for those few cadres! That business of writing a composition in fits and starts really made my head ache. Never mind what we write, whether it can be sung or not, it must be the language we talk, and express the thoughts of everybody. We must state our grievances and recall the injustices done to us. Thirty years the river flows east, then thirty west. Every pebble will come up to the top some time. We must unite to overthrow the gods and break up the temples, rooting up the bullies and securing peace! — Ho, ho, Old Wu! You've been my teacher today. Come on, we'll work along those lines. These damn compositions can go to the devil!" He took some manuscripts from his pocket, tore them into shreds and started roaring with laughter, happy laughter that seemed incongruous with the face ravaged by long years of hardship.

Just then Lichang hurried in, and Mr. Liu looked up happily and greeted him.

Not waiting for him to go on, Lichang said, mopping the sweat from his head, "What d'you think you're up to? Look what you've written in the Blackboard News!"

"Those confounded compositions, those Heavenly Gospels, really are pointless. I was just going to rub them out. Hmm. Today you say they're bad too, but yesterday you were nodding your head and praising them."

"I didn't mean that one," shouted Lichang.

Jen, who had just got up, appeared in the doorway.

"If it wasn't that, did you mean this?" Looking very distressed he indicated the scraps of paper he had torn up.

"Anyone who didn't know you would start feeling suspicious! You say the village cadres are covering up for criminals. What proof do you have of that?"

"What?" Mr. Liu looked completely bewildered and opened wide his short-sighted eyes.

"You say Li is bribing his tenants in order to have land reform in name but not in deed — that doesn't matter much. But then you say the cadres are covering up for people, they've all been bought by the landlords. What did you mean by writing such a thing? Were you quite out of your mind?" Lichang took a towel from his shoulder to fan his bare chest, and went on, shaking his head: "Comrade Hu says if the cadres aren't good the peasants should criticise them. But there must be evidence. The Blackboard News can't just make up things. He also said this was in line with the rumours spread by those bad people, that the Eighth Route Army won't be here long. It has the same bad effect."

"Ai! My god! What are you talking about! I swear by all that's sacred I showed you every single sentence I wrote and got you to pass it before writing it up on the Blackboard News. I've made a living by teaching for over twenty years. I'm supposed to be a scholar, but all my life I've always had to bow to the rich people. When spies and traitors came to the school, like a servant I had to stand listening respectfully to their instructions. At long last we have the Communists who treat the intelligentsia well. This spring they sent me on a trip to Kalgan and I saw many high officials and leaders, all of whom treated us well. For the first time I felt that I too was a man, a useful member of society, and I resolved to listen to their good advice and reform myself to serve the people. How could I write attacking the cadres and undermine

land reform? Oh, Lichang you're wronging me badly. You've got to look into this."

Red-nosed Old Wu had been standing by all this time listening, and now he put in a word: "I think maybe, first thing in the morning, someone may have gone and written there secretly. There is more than just the one teacher in the village who can write."

"Yes! I'm not the only teacher."

"Old Liu, don't bite indiscriminately just because you're driven to the wall. You'd better be careful what you say." Jen put on an indignant air.

"I think we must get to the bottom of this. If a needle's disappeared, it must have been taken by grandmother or grandchild. The people who can write in our village can be counted on two hands. Get their writing to compare it, then won't we know at once? What do you say, Mr. Jen?" Old Wu's glance darted out again.

"Right," Jen was forced to say. Then he immediately contradicted himself: "But not necessarily. It's difficult to distinguish writing in chalk."

"I can't read, so I can't say. But I often clean your writing and Mr. Liu's off the blackboard, and I can see they're quite different. His writing looks square and straight cut like dried bean-curd, while yours is lopsided just like yourself. Do you say they can't be distinguished? I don't believe it. Get some students here and ask them."

"Old Wu's right. There are just the few who can write in our village. Primary school graduates don't count. Take my case, I've studied for a couple of years, but I sometimes can't even read what I write. Don't worry, Old Liu. We'll easily settle this." Lichang had calmed down a little.

"Well then, let's go, we'll look at the writing. I'd know the writing of anyone in the village, even if it was burnt to ashes," said Mr. Liu confidently, pushing Lichang toward the door.

"Let's go," Jen could do nothing but follow them.

"Aiya," Lichang stopped suddenly, stamping and cursing. "Aren't I a fool! As soon as I'd read it I wiped it off. I didn't want everybody to see it and spread it, so I just wiped it off. Ai! What a fool I am! I didn't think of finding out who wrote it."

Jen covertly mopped his forehead.

"Oh! Then this unjust accusation is definitely against me," said Liu on the verge of tears.

"Don't worry, Old Liu, I'm going to follow this up."

"I don't think you need make any search," said Old Wu. "I understand quite well, and presently I'm going to see Yumin to tell him all about it. Ha, I've seen this coming. Someone's been terribly busy recently, getting up early and going to bed late, sneaking about up to no good." He nodded his head and flickered his eyes triumphantly.

"Who do you mean?" Lichang still did not understand.

"You still don't get it?" said the old man mischievously. "If you'll only agree to have these persons arrested, I'll promise to tell you. Do you agree or not?" He laughed as he saw Jen making off. Mr. Liu looked significantly at Lichang too. Lichang did not ask any more questions, only said, "Better go and write it again. Do you have any manuscripts ready?"

"Yes, oh yes," Mr. Liu had recovered his spirits. "Our Old Wu is full of ideas, he can make impromptu verses as well as Tsao Tzu-chien \*, Tsao Tsao's son. Hah . . . If you want compositions, that's difficult, but if you want bombs, that's easy. We manufacture them here. As soon as they're let off they'll explode, ho ho!"

## CHAPTER XXXII

Jen, acting on Chien's advice, had used the Blackboard News to accuse Li, but his plan had miscarried. However Li's sudden flight set many tongues wagging. It was when Lanying had taken food for her father to the orchard that his disappearance was noticed. Old Paotang who looked after the orchard said: "He was here all right at dawn. I didn't see him after the fruit sellers left, but I took it for granted he had gone home. Hasn't he gone back, Lanying?"

The child shook her head vehemently, and ran home like a mad creature.

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\* Tsao Tzu-chien (A.D. 192-232) was a great poet. His brother Wei Wen-ti, founder of the Dynasty of Wei, jealous of his talent, once forced him to make an impromptu verse within the space of a few seconds. The request was complied with successfully.



When Paotang went back to the village he told his nephew, his nephew told the neighbours, and soon the story spread. Some of Li's tenants grew anxious and went secretly to tell the cadres. Groups of idlers again gathered in the street or at the door of the cooperative, but not to buy things. One would say: "All the landlords have fled, so what kind of land reform can there be?" Another would say, "Every day we have meetings, but it's all thunder and no rain. How can there be a revolution without violence." Others would laugh at Kuo: "Old Kuo, have your militiamen been going after women?" Some, however, said covertly: "Li's a weak-kneed coward. Someone must have frightened him, saying that this time in land reform he'd be the first to have his land divided. When he heard that, he was scared stiff."

Others answered: "We've heard that too, that he'd be the first to be tried." And so it came about that popular anger against him increased: "The dirty dog! Who said he was straightforward? Huh! As soon as he heard there'd be land reform he hid himself every day in the orchard selling fruit. He used not to mind giving great packets of money to spies and traitors, and to those rich people. But now he hears there's to be land reform he makes off! Well, if you go, don't hope to come back again! The run-away monk can't take the monastery. Let's see if you're smart enough to keep your land. Now you've gone d'you think we don't dare touch you?" And people went to the Peasants' Association and said: "He may have taken all his deeds of property with him."

At this the Peasants' Association began to be alarmed, and wanted to send tenants at once to ask for the deeds. Fukuei's father Pojen was called too, but he sat quite helplessly on the *kang* in the inner room of the cooperative while Cheng paced up and down, from time to time pouring himself a drink of water from a porcelain jug, and asked: "Uncle Pojen, how long have you cultivated those eight *mou* of his?" Some tenants were still unwilling to go and ask for the title deeds. When the Peasants' Association ordered them they agreed, but then they went back to work on their land. The Association had to talk them round individually.

Pojen crooked his fingers and reckoned for a long time, then answered: "Twelve years."

"How much rent do you pay a year?"

"It's hilly irrigated land I cultivate, so the rent isn't high. It used to be three *tou* \* a *mou*, but the last few years it's been increased to four and a half *tou*."

"Why was the rent increased?"

"The land's better than before. It's a plot by the hill. When I first rented it it was full of stones and the ground was hard, but after I cultivated it I turned over the soil twice a year and put down plenty of manure, often carrying up rich soil to spread over it and weeding it well, so it yields more than before."

Pukao walked in from the outer room, and looking at the simple old fellow, couldn't help saying: "Then I suppose you'd say it was right to increase the rent!"

Pojen just looked at him.

But Cheng went on asking patiently: "How much grain does each *mou* yield?"

"Don't you understand, you can't say for certain. In a good year each *mou* yields six or seven *tou*, but if there's a drought one gets less than four or five *tou*."

"Uncle Pojen, what kind of life do you lead?"

"Oh, so so." He forced a slight smile.

Just then his son Fukuei came in. Fukuei stood in the doorway looking at his father, and said, "*Dyeh!* What year have we ever had enough to eat? You don't taste proper grain from one end of the year to the other, just husks of beans, husks of wheat, husks of rice all the time. That tattered matting of ours is only enough for one side of the bed, yet you can say 'So so'. Why, cattle live better than we do!"

"Ummm . . . see how you talk. . . ." He seemed to be reproving his son, but stopped, his lip trembling.

"Uncle, think it over. You go to work with stars overhead and come home with stars overhead. Where does the grain you grow go to? They sit in the shade without having to stir hand or foot, eating good rice and flour. Do you really think it's right?"

"Well, it's his land." With damp eyes he looked at Cheng.

"You say it's his land? If we didn't work like beasts how could grain come from his land? — *Dyeh's* such a clod. When you wanted him to go to a poor peasants' meeting he complained of backache. — Now that Li is gone what more are you afraid of?"

"Well, but the land's his."

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\* Approximately one peck.

"His, his! Wouldn't the rent you've paid for the last twelve years buy those few *mou*!" Somebody else joined in from the outer room. By now several of Li's tenants were standing outside. They had heard long ago that land reform was to give the land to whoever cultivated it, and had been waiting all this time for the cadres to give them land. Now hearing that Li had run away, they were afraid he had taken the title deeds and nothing could be done about it. They crowded outside to await orders from the Peasants' Association. When Cheng saw them he asked: "Are you all here?"

"Not all," they answered. "Some of them are afraid of trouble, and some are related to him, so they won't go."

"Related to him? What use is being related to him? Does that give them the privilege not to pay any rent?" said Pukao, the organisation officer of the Peasants' Association. He often worked himself up into a state of indignation over the people's backwardness, and he had a quick temper.

"All right, just the few of you will do. You go and ask for the deeds and bring back the deeds for the land each of you cultivate. If she won't give them, then work out the account for her. Be sure to say you were sent by the Peasants' Association." Cheng made this decision, speaking for the Association.

"If the deeds aren't there, don't leave, but tell her to produce Li, do you understand?" put in Pukao.

"Right, we'll do that. Uncle Pojen, let's go."

"Uh. . . ."

"*Dyeh*, you're not the only one. What's there to be afraid of? It's the Peasants' Association told us to go!" Fukuei raised his father to his feet.

"Er, it's a woman. . . ."

"And hasn't the woman sucked your blood too?" Now they were all talking at once. The courtyard was filled with people coming to watch the scene, standing on tiptoe staring. When they saw the tenants come out they hastily made way for them. "Don't be afraid of that woman's sharpness," called out Pukao. And added in a whisper to Cheng: "The title deeds are certain to have been taken to Tsolu. We'll send people to the county government to fetch him back."

"The Peasants' Association tells you to go, you've got to go. Bring back the title deeds and those eight *mou* of land will be ours," said Fukuei pushing his father into the group of tenants.

A band of people came to Li's gate. Those who had come to see the excitement stopped some distance off, while the tenants began to confer with one another. Someone behind shouted: "Don't you dare go in? She's only a woman. What's there to be afraid of?"

They walked quickly in. Pojen was pushed through the door too by his son.

Three children playing under the archway of the gate stopped to stare at the newcomers. Lanying, who was older than the other children, realised what was happening. She turned and hurried in, calling out shrilly: "Ma! They've come! They've come!"

The dogs tied up on the porch started barking.

The few tenants stood in the empty courtyard exchanging glances, not knowing what to say. The bamboo curtain of the northern room rattled and Li's wife came out. She was wearing a blue cotton jacket and trousers, her hair was uncombed, hanging limply. Red rims round her eyes, caused by crying, were conspicuous on her plump white face. In her arms she was carrying a red lacquered box. One of the tenants called out: "Sister Li!"

She hurried down the steps to kneel by the side of a porcelain tub holding an evergreen tree, tears streaming down her face. "Masters," she said, sobbing, "please be kind to us and have pity on a poor woman and children. This is my husband's . . . ai, please take it, it's a hundred and thirty-six *mou* and a half of land altogether and one house. You all know that quite well, good friends and neighbours. My husband's no good, the children and I can't depend on him. Now we're counting on you who've all been our friends for so many years. We're feudalistic landlords and ought to divide our land. I've nothing to say against that. Only please, masters, just see I'm only a woman, and have pity on the children, I'll kotow to you! . . ." Then she kotowed to them all repeatedly and took up the box again, her face streaming with tears. Lanying also knelt at her side, while the two younger children standing among the crowd started howling.

All the tenants who had entered so boldly seemed struck dumb at the sight of the woman kneeling before them. They thought how she had been born into a rich family and never known hard-

ship, and they began to remember her little acts of charity, until some of them pitied her present plight. No one moved to take the box. They forgot what they had come for, completely taken in by the act she had put on. Pojen sighed, then turned round and retreated to the very back of the court.

"Sister Li, get up to talk," said the man who had first addressed her, probably some relative who perhaps had not come with the intention of taking the title deeds.

The woman made as if to get up, but pretended she had not the strength and sat on the ground, just slapping her daughter and saying, "Why don't you pass it to the gentlemen." The child took the box, stood up and started toward the men, and they all fell back a step.

"This is all your father's fault," Mrs. Li started crying again.

One of the tenants slipped out, followed by another. The whole group gradually retreated in disorder till only Pojen was left standing there dazed, wanting to say something, but not knowing how to say it. The woman stood up and said, crying: "Uncle, sit down a little before you go. You've known us for a long time. Please forgive us for the wrongs we have done you. Please, uncle, be generous. And we mother and children will repay you bit by bit. My husband ought to be blamed. See how he's gone off without caring what happens to us, going off like that! I must be fated to be unfortunate! Please uncle take these title deeds to the Peasants' Association, and do say a few good words for me and the children. Our life is in your hands!"

Pojen looked distressed too, and said: "Don't cry, we're all old tenants. We can talk things over. It was the Peasants' Association told us to come. As for the title deeds, you keep them. You'd better have a rest. I'll be going too."

The tenants who had beaten a retreat did not go back to the cooperative, but one by one returned to the fields or to their homes. Cheng and the others waited for a while, and when no one came back they sent to find out what had happened. Outside Li's gate and inside the courtyard all was quiet. The children were sitting by the sieve for drying fruit, eating fresh red fruit as if nothing at all had happened. Greatly surprised, the cadre went to make further enquiries, but when he went to the tenants' houses to ask, they just answered quietly: "If Li were at home it would be all right, but one woman, with her children, crying and pleading, how

could we? How could we look her in the face again? Oh — as for the title deeds, better let the Peasants' Association fetch them."

### CHAPTER XXXIII

When Cheng heard this, Yumin was also in the cooperative. The latter's calm reaction to the news surprised Cheng, who thought, "We're like brothers. We've worked all this time together, both trusting each other absolutely. Why should he behave now as if there were a mountain between us?" He could see that Yumin had something on his mind, but could not guess what it was. He even believed Yumin disapproved of him, but Cheng was unwilling to examine his own shortcomings. He often felt himself surrounded by a special atmosphere. Not only Yumin avoided him. Whenever everybody discussed which landlord to attack, he felt he was being covertly scrutinised. These cold looks made him uneasy, but he had not the courage to force his way out of this miasma. Sometimes he thought: "If you want to have that trial, go ahead. I won't oppose it. I still stand for the Peasants' Association." Sometimes he thought of mentioning this to Yumin, but when it came to the point he never spoke. He had not seen Heini for a long time. He did not want to see her, yet her eyes, so appealing, passionate and resentful, especially of late, made him think of her. He felt he had let her down, and tried to avoid thinking of anything connected with her.

The cooperative was a scene of confusion. There was no office in the village, and the cadres liked to meet here. Now they started discussing this business and Cheng asked Yumin straight out what he thought of it, while others asked too: "How did it happen that none of the peasants wanted the title deeds!"

"The peasants still haven't stood up," said Yumin. "They were afraid and didn't dare take them."

"Afraid of that woman?" they exclaimed.

"Ah, women don't fight with guns but they are resourceful. The proverb says, 'Beautiful women make heroes falter' — well . . . this time she fooled them with her crying and snivelling. That wife of Li's is not so simple as she looks. She's a smiling tiger, much smarter than her husband. In a word, they lost and turned

tail! The Peasants' Association has been too impatient. Before we're united ourselves we send our men out to fight!" He followed this up with another glance at Cheng. Cheng sensed a double meaning in Yumin's remarks. Because there were so many people present he did not say anything, and merely made a calculation on the abacus in front of him. Yumin set his jaw, stood up and went off to find Chao.

Yumin knew the people hoped to get land but were unwilling to take any initiative. They had many reservations. Unless the old powers were overthrown, they were afraid to show enthusiasm. There were several sharpsters in the village, and to suppress them thoroughly would not be easy. That spring they had chosen a comparatively weak opponent to try: Hou, a bed-ridden old man. The cadres felt nobody ought to be afraid of him, but to their surprise only a few enthusiasts got worked up and shook their fists. Members of the Peasants' Association in the crowd shouted: "Speak up! Just one word!" Then people shook their fists and shouted with them, but at the same time they all looked furtively to where Chien was squatting at the back. Hou was fined a hundred bushels of grain, payable in terms of forty *mou* of his land which was divided among some score of families. Some people were pleased, others were afraid after the land was taken and dared not even walk past Hou's gate, while old Chung secretly returned to Hou the land he thus received. The trial took place and representatives from the district government made favourable comments on it. But in this play, as Yumin knew perfectly well, it was the same few characters coming in and going out all the time. And now the cadres still had not made up their minds, while in addition they had a traitor among them. To begin with Yumin had wavered too. Chien was an army dependent and presumably should not be tried, or even if he deserved trial, he could not possibly be held guilty enough for a death sentence — such, very naturally, was Yumin's view based on long experience. That spring the higher authorities had corrected a wrong trend in land reform. A number of landlords whom the people wanted to execute had been sent to the county court. After being imprisoned for two months they were sent back for re-trial with the explanation that the policy was to be lenient, because the previous year it had been implemented too radically. The people were still afraid there might be a change in the political situation. They felt that if a man were tried it must be

for his life, lest he take vengeance in the future. Accordingly people like Chien, under existing conditions, presented quite a problem. However Yumin's mind was made up. He saw that since Wen and the others had come, although the demand for land reform had raised all manner of expectations in the people, still the doubt as to which landlord to choose and the various rumours going about the village had reduced this interest. He felt inexpressibly worried, and had made a clean breast of his anxieties to Yang. Their talk in the orchard had not only strengthened his resolve but also increased his enthusiasm. If they still acted as they had in the spring, land reform could not be carried out. Although owing to Wen's absence the matter had not been discussed and decided upon, he had started persuading and winning over the cadres and had come to an agreement with Lichang and Kuo. Kung would probably not oppose them. He always followed the majority. Their outlook was gradually becoming more uniform. Moreover noticing how Yang and Hu spent all their time in peasants' homes or on the land, he was sure they must have gained a good deal of material which would increase their understanding and make them all the more inclined to accept his view. Now only two important cadres were left with whom he had not had a heart to heart talk—Cheng and Chao. Not sure enough of Cheng, who had given no indication of his attitude, he decided to leave him to the last, afraid of not reaching a satisfactory conclusion, or else to ignore him, leaving him and Chang out of it.

When he went into the lane he saw a crowd of people round Chao's door, and heard shouting, so he hurried over. Some people who saw him coming wanted to tell him something, but he could not stop to listen. The rest made way for him, and he rushed to the open space in front of the house where he heard Chao cursing furiously: ". . . You've really lost face for good and all. How can I ever hold up my head again in the village! . . ." Yumin was just about to go in when a woman burst out of the house. When she saw all the people standing outside, she gave a start, then turned round, pointed to the window and cursed Chao: "Are you human? Do you think you can spit blood on people—making false accusations! You shan't slander people without paying for it, damn you!"

Yumin recognised her as Chiang's wife, a slim little elf-like creature, with dreamy eyes and long hair streaming down her



back, who had been a loose woman in a neighbouring village and had moved over when Chiang was ward chief. She was not married to him, and all day long she gossiped from house to house, acting as go-between for illicit lovers, always up to no good. She went on gesticulating and shouting wildly, but Yumin did not care. In two strides he confronted her, and asked sternly: "What are you up to?"

The woman wanted to go on cursing, but seeing it was Yumin standing in front of her she stopped at once, and turning her head started crying. As she walked out she complained to the onlookers: "The good are never rewarded! We're terribly wronged. How can we live? Heavens! . . ." However, she quickened her pace, crying as she went out, and was soon out of sight.

A sound of banging was heard from the house, and a woman's shrill voice called out, "He's beating me to death, help, help!" Before Yumin could reach the door Chao's wife burst out, looking like a ghost with dishevelled hair, flying as if for her life, still shouting, "Help! Help!" Before anyone had time to intervene, Chao came out in pursuit, his chest bare, and kicked her over. Yumin put out a hand to stop him, but he paid no attention and rushed forward again. There was a tearing sound, and the flowered print jacket his wife was wearing split from top to bottom, disclosing her dingy breasts. His wife seeing that some men had hold of him sat on the ground and started weeping bitterly, her hands repeatedly pulling the tight pretty jacket round her. But try as she would she could not cover her breasts. Held by others Chao exclaimed furiously: "Look at the shameless whore. She's spoilt my good name. After all I'm still vice village head!"

Several neighbouring women crowded round to comfort his wife, with whom they sympathised: Mr. Chao was so fierce, as if you couldn't settle any trouble by talking. Although he was a cadre, he still beat people! She was already the mother of several children. But they could not help laughing when they looked at the flowered jacket fitting her so tightly. This jacket had been given her by Chiang's wife. Chiang sent his cunning wife every day to bribe her with presents of food for the children and a flowered jacket for herself, until Chao's wife thought they were good people. She put on the jacket and felt very pleased, and praised Chiang in the presence of her husband. Now she had been beaten. Looking at her torn jacket she felt sad and complained naively and

tearfully: "Oh . . . all summer I've had nothing to wear. He wouldn't let me make a dress, just kept saying he was vice village head. What if he is vice head? His wife hasn't even a gown to wear. Isn't it a shame!"

Chao went with Yumin to the latter's home. This was an eastern room which he had rented. It was not big but looked spacious. The *kang* was empty except for two grimy pillows and a heap of bedding and clothes piled in one corner. At the head of the *kang* was a little stove, and a pan. Against the wall a dilapidated chest with bowls, chopsticks and the like on top, and in front of the chest a small water container. Chao went to the water container and drank a dipperful of water, then used his bare arm to wipe the sweat from his head. Yumin sitting on the edge of the *kang* said, "Men don't quarrel with women. A fight between husband and wife who have been married a long time doesn't look good. People laugh at you."

"Oh, what's there to say! When people are poor they lack will power. My foolish wife is so damn backward, if you don't beat her she won't behave! And this is the only way to stop that witch from coming any more." Chao sat on the *kang* too, his legs stretched straight out. He accepted a cigarette from Yumin, made sure there was no one outside the window, and said, "Old Yumin, I won't deceive you. This spring I borrowed two bushels of grain from Chiang. Who knew this land reform would crop up again? Wen says we were wrong to let him be village head. Chiang saw us hold meetings without sending for him. He can put two and two together. He invited me to a meal, but I didn't go — does he imagine I can be bought with two bushels of grain? As a matter of fact if I didn't have a backbone my wife needn't be jealous of other people's fancy clothes. I think I've sacrificed quite a bit so far. When we were fighting the Japanese I became village head, but my family never gained anything apart from these few brats. I've got nothing to lose. I say we haven't put in much effort this time. The people may not say anything, but they feel dissatisfied. Don't you agree with me?"

"Right, Mr. Chao, I came to see you about this very thing." Yumin jumped up and started walking up and down, unable to conceal his delight. He was just going to say why he had come, when Chao went on.

"You've come just at the right time. I was going to find you. Ah, so many people have said to me, this is a serious business! Do

you understand? Have you thought of that? There is a big harvest this year in our village. Just think, there are over a hundred *mou* of orchard in the village. If you walk by you'll see all the fruit. Now that we're starting land reform people can't sleep at night for thinking of it. Ai, but the land can't be divided at once, and things are dragging on. By the time the land is divided there'll be nothing but leaves left on the trees! Now the rich people are selling fruit for all they're worth! This throws the poor people into a frenzy. They keep coming to see me about it, wanting us to do something. What do you think we should do? I think from tomorrow onwards we should forbid the rich people to sell, and have all the orchards watched. This is an important business! Think of all the money involved!"

Yumin had thought of this some days before, but having so much to do had forgotten about it again. The last few days he had been busy talking to people, and so it had slipped his memory entirely. Now that Chao reminded him he felt the urgency of the situation, and jumping up said: "Right! This is an important business! But just watching them won't do. These perishable fruits won't wait for us to carry out our land reform slowly! So really what can we do?"

"Let's go and find Cheng. I think it would be better if the Peasants' Association took responsibility in this. Just a few people can't make a good job of it. What do you think?" Seeing Yumin nod, Chao added: "We must find some people who can keep accounts. I think the Peasants' Association had better take charge of selling all the fruit, then later whoever gets the land will get the money."

Yumin said as he was going out: "Better find quite a few, and we'll have to let the group know. Ah, I think we'd better go and talk it over with Old Yang first."

## CHAPTER XXXIV

On their way back the two of them met Sheng's mother, with her glistening coils of hair. She was hobbling on her bound feet from house to house to tell everybody: "Well, what do you think

of Yumin! Those men really are hard! When my Sheng joined the army, they made it sound all very fine, but once he'd gone they changed their tune. They'd promised me two bushels of grain, but only gave me two *tou*, and kept calling us middle peasants. Middle peasants, hah! In that case why ask middle peasants to join the army! . . .” She had this off by heart, in fact most of the others knew it by heart too. When she had said this she laughed, “Oho, but now there's justice. The people who've come this time know what they're about! Comrade Yang said, ‘Middle peasants are on our side. Haven't they suffered just the same? If there's anything good going, the middle peasants must have some share in it too. She's sent a son to the army. She's an army dependent. How can they keep back one bushel and eight *tou* of her grain.’ Ah, Chao still wasn't pleased. He told me to go to the co-op to fetch it, but I said, ‘Mr. Chao, I'll wait till Sheng comes home to carry it for me.’ Yumin said furiously, ‘All right, we'll tell someone to send it to you!’ Ho, it's going to be my turn now!”

People in the street knew the old woman had a sharp tongue and could make things hot for people. Although they were perfectly aware the village cadres ought not to have kept back some of her grain they had all held their tongues, thinking it was none of their business. They were glad for her sake that her problem was solved, and advised her: “Now they've given you the grain, better not go on scolding them.” But to this she replied, “Comrade Yang talks sense, for all he's so short and young. He told me, ‘If you've anything to say, speak out boldly. That's a good thing. Nowadays we want people to speak out. Yumin is working for the people. If the people aren't satisfied they should criticise him. Only we're all friends. Don't scold and be prejudiced. Isn't that right?’ Aiya! That silenced me, I could only say, ‘Oh, I'm only a woman. Sometimes I don't know what's right.’ ‘It doesn't matter,’ he said, ‘If you've any other complaints, speak out.’ I thought, he's come for land reform and it's bad if I continue to be on bad terms with the cadres, so I said, ‘Nothing, nothing else!’ This time I really feel good. It's not so much the bushel and eight *tou* of grain, but now Yumin can't keep saying things against middle peasants all the time. I asked someone to take a letter to Sheng, telling him not to worry, saying the people sent by the district are looking after me. Even though I'm a middle peasant I'm not afraid of anyone!”

There were two other people in the village who were a thorn in the side of the cadres. One was Old Han's son Ting, the other was Chiti, brother of Pukao, organisation officer of the Peasants' Association. They had both been in the army and were rather troublesome. They often criticised the village cadres, despising them. At the same time they felt that the cadres did not appreciate them or look after them properly. The cadres said they did not do productive work, just slacked. But the cadres were afraid of their biting remarks and could not talk them down. The cadres' records were not as good as those of these two men who were able to claim they had shed blood for the revolution. Since it was out of the question to do anything against them, it seemed best to have as little to do with them as possible. Now it had somehow come about that Ting and Yang had become good friends, and Ting had come meekly to the Peasants' Association to help sort out the list of families, carefully checking up on each family in turn, registering the number of *mou* of land and other property they had. He did not smoke a single cigarette belonging to the Association, but took his own pipe and flint. At first Cheng was not too willing to have Ting join the work, afraid that Ting would take advantage of his ignorance. But later Cheng was pleased to find he had got a good helper.

Chiti had been even more active and used to make unpleasant remarks. Now Kuo, Captain of the Militia, came to see him and said, "You give our militia a class every day, I'll get them together at the right time. You're an old soldier. You know more about fighting than we do!" Chiti wanted to show his skill for all to see that his claim of being an old Party member was not an empty boast. (His Party records had not been transferred to the village and Yumin had said there was not enough proof of his membership to include him in the local branch of the Party, which annoyed him exceedingly.) Accordingly he said, "Fine! If I don't teach well, please point out my faults!" After that he lectured to the militiamen every day about warfare and his experience as a guerrilla, giving a very graphic account of the battles he had participated in, and the men listened spellbound. Even Kuo said: "When we've time we must have more exercises. It was really foolish of us not to invite you to speak before. If it came to actual fighting you'd be much better than me even though I'm captain!" Kuo was open-hearted, and at once started being friendly with him,

saying: "With the same surname we're like one family. Let's call each other brother."

So the villagers spread the news that the men sent this time knew what they were doing. People came to Yang and Hu to settle disputes about money, land, marriage or property. They solved some of the simpler cases and started investigating the more complex ones. These disputes brought them in touch with many people. They learned more about conditions in the village, and entered into a new relation with everybody. A few days before, whatever house they visited the host would greet them politely: "How are you?" Or say, "I don't know whether I've understood land reform, but everything you said is right: the poor have got to stand up!" They might say smiling, "Welcome. If we poor people don't support the Communists, who should we support!" Formerly they limited themselves to some such simple remarks, without going deeper. Now there was less formality. People would say, "Old Yang, we've got a problem for you to settle!" Or else edge up to him and whisper, "Come to my house for a meal. I've got a secret to tell you. . . ."

This day Yang had gone into the fields to help hoe the grass. He had just got back to the village and barely rounded the mud wall when he felt a heavy slap on his shoulder. Looking round he saw it was the dark youngster Liuman, his hair unkempt, his eyes wide open and impatient. Liuman was wearing a pair of black trousers, and was naked from the waist up. He said, "Old Yang! I'm the only one you won't see, but I've been waiting for you!"

"That's right," Yang answered, "I've never found your house. Do you live here?" At once he remembered someone had told him Liuman's brother had once been ward chief.

"Come on, come with me. My house is rather dirty, but that won't kill you." He practically pushed Yang into a small alley.

"Why didn't you come to find me?" Yang asked.

"Ah," Liuman fetched a deep sigh, was silent for a long time, and then said, "Here's my house. My brother's out. Come in for a while."

Yang entered the courtyard with him. It was like a long alley, the east and west rooms crowded together. Liuman stood in the middle of the yard and looked all round, not knowing where to ask Yang to go.

A woman with infected eyes came out from the east room carrying a child whose eyes were so filled with mucus it could not open them, while flies swarmed round its head. "Where have you been all day?" she asked. "Your rice is still kept for you. Do you want to eat?"

Liuman paid no attention to her, as if he were unaware of her existence, and said impatiently, "It's hotter inside, let's sit here, Old Yang."

"Is this your house?" Yang walked to the door of the east room and looked in, then added, "Do you still cook inside?"

Flapping at the flies on the child's head the woman said with a sigh: "Ai, he never pays any attention to his family, out all day long and never coming back. I've too much to do. It's terribly hot inside. When he does come home he just looks grim. Ai, won't you have something to eat?"

Just then a young woman came out of the western room, walked over and said timidly, "Brother, go and sit in my room."

Yang followed him into the western room. It was cleaner here. On the wall were pasted a faded pair of scrolls and a picture of a woman. The cover on the *kang* was folded, the matting looked fairly new. There was a pair of not too old blue embroidered pillows, and on the chest of drawers a mirror and two vases. Yang could not help looking surprised and pleased, and was just going to praise the room, when Liuman spoke: "Old Yang, don't think too little of me. I wasn't always so poor. It doesn't matter if people have made me poorer, but I have a grievance which is eating me alive!"

Liuman opened wide his round eyes again and fixed them on Yang who sat on the *kang* and answered, "Take it easy. Tell me all about it. We're the same kind. I won't give away any secrets. You can say what you like to me."

But Liuman fell silent again, not knowing how to start his story, walking up and down the room, clenching his fists, sometimes rumpling his thick dishevelled hair.

His wife brought in a bowl of millet gruel and a dish of salted vegetables, and gave Yang a cigarette and a light. She stood in the doorway, rubbing her inflamed eyes, paying no attention to anyone else, just waiting for her husband to eat.

"Liuman, go on with your meal," said Yang.

But Liuman planted himself in front of Yang and said quickly: "To tell you the truth, ever since the day Nuanshui was liberated, I've been waiting, waiting for the sky to clear. Ai, who could have thought those bad people would get their roots into the Eighth Route Army? Old Yang! Now I'm waiting to see what you're going to do, to see whether you're only picking on the soft ones."

"Take your time if you've something to say. Chairman, don't be hard on him. Our second brother was driven mad . . . ai, eat this bowl of rice now." Although his wife looked rather afraid of him, she could be stubborn too.

"That's right, Liuman, when you've finished your meal we can talk."

"If you don't take it away, I'll break the bowl." Liuman walked over again and glowered at his wife. She did not falter, but looking at him steadily said with unspeakable bitterness and regret: "You just won't think how hard it is for people!" Then she turned and went out, and could be heard sighing again outside.

"Liuman!" said Yang again: "Now is the time when we peasants come up on top. In the past people exploited us and oppressed us, but now we're settling old scores one by one. The worse a man is the more harshly we must thrust him down, — why pick on soft ones? Don't be afraid. If you've any grievance you shall have your revenge. The Communists will back you up."

"Um, Old Yang, you've said it well, but things are not as you say. Frankly, it's no good your just listening to what the cadres say. The cadres are men of straw, they daren't offend anyone. Just think, you come and make things hot for a while. You don't need to be afraid of anyone. You'll be going away again. But the cadres can't look at it like that. They have to stay in the village. They have to figure out whether they'll get the better of those people or not. They've got to think of the future. Yumin isn't a bad chap, but just now he's keeping out of my way, and I know why. He's afraid I'll expose him. Whenever I see him I call out: 'Chairman of the Resistance Union, whose feet are you really going to lick?' One day he wanted to hit me, but he was afraid of what you'd think, so just said: 'Liuman, I've treated you all right. Why are you trying to do me in?' He did treat me all right, even introducing me to join the Party!"



"Join the Party?" Yang felt even more astonished. Since coming to the village he had met all the eighteen Party members, but had never heard Liuman was a Communist, so he questioned him further.

"Oh, I date from long ago. I joined before Liberation. For a time I had a hand in things too; but this spring they expelled me. It was Yumin who spoke up for me and made them change it to suspended membership. Since then I've been left out of the affairs of the village. I've become a non-existent Party member. That's why I feel wronged, because they are on the sharpsters' side and apart from losing my lawsuit I was criticised in the district government. Now, Old Yang! I want to take up the lawsuit again and win, not for the sake of those few *mou* of land, but to settle my grudge, to overthrow Chien! Ah, Chien, do you know him?"

Liuman had poured all this out in a rush, not caring whether the other understood or not, as if others must understand such things naturally, taking advantage of this opportunity to get his grievances off his chest. After saying all this, however, he did not seem relaxed, but rather like a soldier who has just joined battle, standing there in a state of extreme excitement, looking at Yang, not knowing what to do.

Yang breathed a sigh.

Liuman came over again, pouring out another torrent of words. Sometimes his wife hearing the din he made and afraid he would get into trouble hurried over to the door to look, and saw him gesticulating frantically, while Yang watched him quietly, saying from time to time: "Take it easy. And what else?" Finally she saw her husband lie down panting on the *kang*, while Yang said: "I understand, I understand, Liuman! You have a rest. Don't get worked up. We'll gradually think of a way."

Then the woman went in, and standing in the doorway said: "Ai, if only you can help him to win the lawsuit, we'll be able to live properly again! His second brother is mad. Now look at him, he's nearly mad too. Oh, this old grudge is deep-rooted!"

Yang sat with him for a long time, and when he saw Liuman was gradually quietening down, he asked his wife to bring some gruel. Liuman got up to see him off, his eyes as red as his wife's inflamed eyes, the rims even moister, but he was very calm. He put his hand on Yang's shoulder and said clearly: "You said rightly, when it rains the ground is slippery, but anyone who falls down must

get up himself. We can't stand on our feet except by our own efforts. And you said even more rightly, all the peasants in the world are one family. If they don't unite they have no strength and can't stand up. Old Yang, you've shown me the way, and now I won't let you down!"

## CHAPTER XXXV

Yang had no sooner left Liuman's house than he met a peasant who told him Wen had returned and was looking for him everywhere. He hurried back, and as soon as he reached the courtyard he heard Wen describing in cheerful tones the success of his work in Liku. When Yang went in Wen just nodded to him, and went on with what he was saying: "It's very simple. Tomorrow evening we hold a trial, forty-nine families attacking one family. Nothing could be easier. There's only one family of rich peasants. It really is a poor village."

"How much land is involved?" Hu, sitting on the chest of drawers, was listening eagerly.

"He has over thirty *mou* altogether, so he ranks as a rich peasant in Liku. It's intended to leave him twenty *mou*. Old Tung's been given three *mou* of vineyard. Old Tung now you've got those few *mou* of land, who will cultivate them for you?"

Old Tung sitting in front of the *kang* table polishing his pistol looked rather flushed, but it may have been the reflection of the red silk round his pistol. And then Comrade Wen cracked another joke at his expense, saying they must be sure to attend Old Tung's wedding feast before their return to the district. Old Tung hastily protested there would be nothing of the kind.

Judging by these brief remarks, Yang felt that his view of conditions in Liku could not be the same as Wen's. But there was not much he could say, so he just asked: "Then forty-nine families are dividing some dozen *mou* of land, and Old Tung is getting three *mou*?"

"No," said Wen, still very complacently, "don't get excited, Comrade. Of course that's not the case. Some of the land they cultivate belongs to people of other villages — there are over fifty *mou* belonging to Nuanshui landlords, some dozen or more to

Lungwang village. In this way, with the exception of a few middle peasants, each family will get on the average two *mou* of land. They're very pleased, aren't they, Old Tung?"

"Yes, those village cadres are enthusiastic," agreed Old Tung.

"I think their Party branch is better than Nuanshui's. What do you say, Old Tung?"

"About the same. It's a small village there, and easier to manage. Yumin's not bad. Only Nuanshui's affairs are difficult to manage." Old Tung put away his pistol and went to turn over his portfolio.

"I suppose this will only solve matters for tenant farmers," said Yang again. "The poor peasants still won't have their problems solved. When the cadres are enthusiastic it doesn't necessarily mean all the people are pleased. Are forty-nine families attacking one family simply because he's the only rich farmer there?"

Wen felt Yang always liked to find fault. He was rather displeased and answered coldly: "If he didn't qualify would they attack him? If you're interested you go to their meeting tomorrow evening. We've got everything arranged in advance."

Yang thought of saying: "Relying on advance arrangements is not necessarily going to get things done." But before he could speak Wen went on to ask about conditions in Nuanshui during his absence. Hu and Yang made a detailed report. And Hu described how Yumin and Chao had come to discuss the question of selling fruit.

Wen sat there patiently listening, looking as if he were the only one who could decide a policy. He much disliked the way these two had of bluntly displaying their little knowledge and upholding certain views. He thought to himself: "You two can do investigation work, but you've not the ability to decide a far-reaching policy." He always posed as being very experienced and having a thorough understanding of policy, often quoting from books. As a matter of fact he was not particularly able. In his heart of hearts he considered himself a prudent man who could not go far wrong. He often felt he saw the truth of things, and had a way of analysing events after they had happened. In addition, he was very skilled in expressing his views.

Clever people are not easily stumped. Even in mass activity they can often dodge, or come down heavily on others. When things go wrong they tend to make jokes and easily shift the responsibility

to others, and on all occasions pose as infallible. Such people, who often appear very enthusiastic, quick and competent, can for a short time deceive a few people into thinking them comparatively able. But in the eyes of the masses they are hardly better than the opportunists concealed in the revolutionary ranks.

"Oh, that Liunan, I know him," Wen remembered the circumstances under which he had met him in the road. "He seems completely crazy. Since his elder brother is mad, it's quite possible it runs in the family. Old Tung, who else in his family is neurotic?"

"No one that I know of," replied Old Tung. "I heard of his lawsuit this spring. It's possible the village cadres were rather careless in their investigation. Maybe Chien and Chiang were behind this. He really was a Party member before, but as to when he was suspended, not even the people in the district are clear about that."

Wen felt that anyone who was a ward chief must have squeezed money and been a traitor. Now when he heard that a man only became ward chief because he was forced into it by his enemies and that he became an impoverished peasant and was driven mad, Wen simply did not believe it. He had little faith in talk of this kind. That Chien stirred up lawsuits in the village and involved others in intrigues he considered highly probable. But from the economic standpoint, Chien had only a dozen *mou* of land after deducting the fifty *mou* he had divided between his sons. He could at most be counted a middle peasant. Even if he rented out his land, that was not a heinous offence. From the political standpoint, he was an army dependent. Not to improve the social status of a dependent of a revolutionary soldier was already bad enough. How could they attack him? Because of this he felt the cadres were absolutely right not to suggest attacking him. On the other hand he disapproved of the way Yumin neglected to bring this up in meetings but was so voluble outside. What behaviour! It only served to confuse our aim and throw our camp into confusion. And these two workers in his unit, although they did seem able to get close to the masses, had insufficient powers of analysis, so that it was easy for them to be hoodwinked by partial facts. Wen had specially pointed out to them that the business of the Blackboard News clearly expressed the voice of the masses, yet they persisted in believing Lichang's account of it as subversive activity on the party of reactionaries — wasn't Lichang of the same family as Li?

All these cadres were activated to a certain extent by personal feelings! But still these two inexperienced comrades insisted on believing the cadres.

Old Tung with his understanding of the village and his peasants' intuition felt that dividing up the land of either Li or Old Ku, would make everyone happy. But if there was to be a trial very few people would speak up. In fact there might be some who sympathised with Old Ku, while Li's little acts of charity in the past might make people feel he was being treated too harshly. Old Tung's way of thinking was unconsciously much like Yumin's, only he was even more cautious than Yumin, more of a prey to doubt. In face of Wen's profound knowledge of political theory he dared not maintain any definite attitude, and therefore just expressed vague opinions, although this was quite alien to his nature.

The discussion dragged on. The empty references to the mass line and baseless generalisations made Hu unable to contain himself, and jumping to his feet he said: "If we go on quarreling over our work like this, there can only be one outcome — failure! I've taken part in the work of reducing rents and rates of interest in the past, but never seen work done like this!"

"Yes, I feel too that the views of the work team are not sufficiently in harmony," replied Wen slowly and deliberately. "Too many side issues and being too democratic make it difficult to centralise. The main reason is still that our understanding of policy and principles is not the same. But, as for the work, I don't think it will turn out as you hope — or shall I say as you fear — it won't be as bad as that. Hah . . ."

Yang felt only the word "bitterness" could describe his feelings. A feudalistic landlord like Li ought to be settled with and that thoroughly, but before the peasants acquired class consciousness they could not understand the relation between the bullies and the landlords. They hated the bullies even more than the landlords. Until the former were overthrown they would not dare arise. He felt if things remained so confused, it would be better to go back to the district or the county government, and ask them to decide about the work. But he controlled himself, reproaching himself for not being resourceful and being poor at cooperating with others, and thought: "I suppose this is a very good trial for me." And again: "Why quarrel over a matter of procedure? First do something, and let the facts prove that we are right. Let reality determine our

action." So he suggested that since they had failed to obtain the title deeds, they should start an attack in which they might be confident of success, then use that minor victory to stir up fighting spirit, for before a big decisive battle a small victory had its uses.

This proposal was immediately accepted by all since it injured no one's self-esteem and obstructed no other plans. Tired of quarreling they found it comparatively easy to reach agreement on this new question and on the concrete work of preparation. The atmosphere in the room changed, and they discussed the question very cordially together.

The image of Fukuei in the cooperative kept recurring to Hu. He said smiling: "The father was defeated, now tell the son to go in and win."

"Right, he isn't a weakling. He's fit for battle." The others agreed.

Old Tung said Chiang was a slippery customer, they should first tell his tenants how to settle accounts with him, and the reason why. This suggestion was quite correct too. The last time it was because they had not made it clear to the tenants why they should take the title deeds, and that it was not extorting or robbing Li but just recovering what had been extorted from them.

On the question of dividing what they would confiscate from Chiang, Wen also made proposals which the others approved, with amendments. In short, on the matter of getting the title deeds they were all in complete accord. This gave them a delightful feeling of regained confidence, and they decided to reach this objective before going on to anything else. They set out at once to the cooperative to look for Yumin, Cheng and the others to discuss starting this work.

## CHAPTER XXXVI

A great many people were standing in the street outside the cooperative, close to the wall and in the shade, and a good few others were squatting in the shade of the trees by the platform. They all had their heads together. Yang saw Kuei's husband Chih there too. He knew that Chih had something on his mind and would not be enthusiastic until it was settled, so he went over and asked him what he had been doing the last few days, and how soon his grapes

would be picked. Chih replied that he had found a widowed aunt to look after his vineyard. During the day his wife helped there, he said, and the grapes were nearly ripe and would be picked in a couple of weeks. Because they had nothing to eat for the time being, he was doing odd job, making trips to Shacheng to sell fruit.

"Are all of you selling fruit?" asked Yang, including the others in his glance.

"No," answered an old man at their side, "I'm watchman in an orchard."

"Whose orchard?"

"He's Paotang. He's watchman in Li's orchard," Chih answered for him.

"Oh!" Yang looked carefully at the old man, and asked again: "Why did Li run away? Did he say anything?"

"No, he didn't say anything, just sold fruit. After you came he started selling fruit. That was before it was all ripe. Each day seven or eight hundred or even over a thousand catties were sold."

"The night before he left someone from the village went to see him," added Chih.

But the old man just nudged him, and said: "His is not the only family selling fruit. If the village cadres don't do something about it, more than half the victory fruits in the village will be gone. This is a bumper year. There hasn't been anything like it for over ten years."

"If Tatung is taken, fruit will immediately go up in price," said someone else who was squatting nearby. "In the old days we didn't only go west, but to the east too. Every train carried a few car loads of fruit."

"Do you sell fruit too?" Yang saw he was a youngster.

"No, my elder brother has one and a half *mou* of vineyard. They say the Peasants' Association is going to have all the fruit confiscated. My brother's afraid they'll liquidate his vineyard, and is half frantic. He doesn't dare come and ask himself so he sent me to find out. Comrade Yang, my brother only has five *mou* of land altogether, three and a half *mou* of irrigated land. With three in the family we manage all right, but can't be considered well off. Do you think they could take his land?" The youngster seized this opportunity to question Yang.

"Has your brother done anything bad in the village?"

"No, nothing bad or good, he's too busy with his few *mou* of land for anything else. His brother's a straightforward fellow too." Again it was Chih who answered.

"Then what's he afraid of? If he's not a landlord or a bully, there's nothing to worry about. If a peasant who is on the same side as the masses doesn't get a little share of land or some movable property, what good does it do him when the poor seize power? You tell your elder brother not to be afraid, and if anybody ill-treated him before he can even have his revenge. What do you all think, isn't that how it should be?"

"Yes, a few *mou* of land can't count as anything, and it's not as if the land produced crops itself. A man lives by the sweat of his brow," they said smiling.

"His brother was scared stiff. People frightened him by saying he was a middle peasant, saying after the landlords were overthrown it would be the turn of the rich peasants, and after the rich peasants were overthrown it would be the turn of the middle peasants. They said nowadays only the poor people without stick or stone of their own can prosper, that the poor people even if they don't work, just by attacking others and eating the victory fruits, can have good things to eat. His brother won't submit to this and killed a pig, saying he'd rather enjoy it himself than wait to be upset by seeing other people eat it later." Somebody else had squeezed in to speak.

"Will they really not sell his fruit?" the youngster asked again to make sure.

"Oh, listen to him! Didn't the comrade just say it depends on the opinion of the masses?"

"Oh, what opinion do the masses have? If the Peasants' Association says they will sell it then the masses don't dare protest. If the comrade puts in a word, that's the only thing that will be any use. Comrade Yang, please will you speak to the Peasants' Association about it?" The youngster pressed further forward.

"The Peasants' Association belongs to the community, not to a few people, so it has to follow the wishes of the majority. If not, then you shouldn't let it have its way. Speak up. The Communist Party is here to back you. What about that?" This remark of Yang's delighted them all. Some did not altogether believe him, others agreed saying: "With you comrades here we aren't afraid of anything. If not for that how could we sell other people's fruit?"



By now Old Tung, Wen and Hu were surrounded too, all discussing the sale of fruit. "Aren't all the owners of orchards afraid?" Wen asked. "How many people have orchards?"

"Yes, they're all frightened," the crowd answered.

Hu told him that the eleven landlords and fifteen rich peasants all had orchard land, beside five middle peasants and twenty poor peasants. Vineyards were not included, because grapes were not worth much.

"How can they sell poor people's fruit too?" said someone in the crowd. "They must only sell the landlords' and rich farmers'."

"Not all the rich farmers will be dealt with. To control their fruit wouldn't be very good. That way those five middle peasants would be frightened too. Did you think of this, or was it the idea of the Peasants' Association?" Wen felt that it was not good to be so indiscriminate.

Everybody looked at each other, and no one said anything.

"What does it matter?" After a pause someone stepped forward to speak. It was Chung's son Ching. "We're not robbing anyone. Those who oughtn't to have their fruit confiscated can be given their money back. They can come and weigh out their fruit. If we're fair it's all right."

"If we have the fruit watched, surely a few days' delay in selling won't matter? By that time, whoever the land belongs to can go and sell it. Won't that save trouble?" Wen asked again. He spoke naturally in an authoritative tone. When nobody answered he repeated the question.

An old man in the crowd answered: "Of course that would do. We're just waiting for your orders, Chairman. We'll do just what you tell us."

But Old Tung said, "If the land could be divided up very quickly that would be all right. It doesn't matter if fruit is left for a few days. The only danger is prices may drop, if the days drag on. Apples and pears are all right, but there'll be trouble with the sweet-apple. . . ."

"Right!" Without waiting for him to finish the crowd started shouting. "Chairman Tung understands the difficulty. You can see he's a native here!"

Wen could not well say any more, so turned to Hu: "Let's rush the work of dividing land. Let's go and find Cheng and the

others. If we can rush this work, better postpone selling fruit, which if not done well may be very troublesome."

"We can't hurry it. But if even the rich farmers' fruit is controlled that won't look good. I agree with you on that." Hu followed him out of the crowd. Yang joined them, and they could hear Ching saying to Old Tung: "As soon as they heard there was to be land reform, the poor people started eyeing the fruit. Everybody hopes to get a few hundred or even a thousand catties. If all the fruit is gone the bare branches aren't so jolly. Chairman Tung, you put yourself in our place. Even that old die-hard, my *Dyeh*, when he heard they were going to sell fruit, didn't protest, but found out what he could on the sly from my mother."

## CHAPTER XXXVII

All the villagers were saying to each other: "Aha, the orchards of the eleven landlords are being watched. Members of the Poor Peasants' Association are standing guard there." "Ah, who are these eleven landlords? It looks as if they're all going to be dealt with!" "I hear they're only taking fruit from those who rent out land. Rich farmers can still sell their own." "That won't do! Aren't we going to deal with the rich farmers?" "They say they can't all be tried. Some families will be, but by that time it'll be all right if they just pay up. There should be no trouble." "That's right, if the fruit of the whole village were confiscated, the Peasants' Association would have all its time taken up selling fruit, and couldn't do anything for land reform. The land still has to be divided hasn't it?"

Presently old Red-nosed Wu came along sounding his gong again and singing. He announced the members of the Fruit Selling Committee, and the decisions reached by the committee.

"Fine! If Tien's on it, it'll be all right! He's a clever chap. He can look after our interests. Look how well he runs the co-op. Every peasant can buy on credit and yet the co-op makes money."

"Oho, Paotang's on the committee too. He's all right. He knows all about the orchard land. He's walked over it for twenty years and knows exactly how many trees each family has. He can figure out the number of catties of fruit on each tree, good and bad alike they're all printed on his mind."

"It looks as if this time the poor are going to get complete control. Chung's son has come out too. Won't that make his father mad!"

They did not confine themselves merely to talking in the lanes and neighbours' houses, calling on relatives to find out what was happening, or crowding to the door of the cooperative to spread news, but also went to the orchards to have a look. Some of them were assigned work, and women and girls went to watch the fun.

The fifteen rich peasants who had heard that all the fruit in the village would be confiscated, now smiled and encouraged each other, saying: "I always said the Communists wouldn't drive people to death! They wouldn't be unreasonable!" Their whole families went into the orchards to pick all the ripe fruit. They must not delay, but must get the fruit off as soon as possible.

The eleven landlord families who had their fruit under surveillance came to the orchards too to ask the crowd to leave a part and to see if the peasants would give false figures for the amount of their fruit or remove any secretly. The landlords sent their children to take advantage of the general confusion to pick some up and carry it home. Even one apple or pear was good and shouldn't be given away just anyhow!

When the earth was awakening in the thin clear beams of the dawn, gusts of ringing laughter could be heard in the cool, quiet orchards. The merrily chirping sparrows gave way and withdrew. The scaly insects that love to flutter in the morning breeze darted wildly in all directions. The thick leaves on the spreading branches rustled slightly, but could not hide from sight the rich profusion of fruit. Sparkling dewdrops could still be seen, like stars twinkling on a frosty night. And the bloom on the red fruit, or perhaps a film of dew, made it look even softer and more moist. Scarlet tinted clouds mounted into the sky and through gaps in the thick foliage cloudy golden motes appeared, until the orchard reflected innumerable vivid violet and golden rays. Ladders leant against the trees. Men climbed the ladders, fruit dropped into their broad, work-roughened palms, thence into the baskets, while a fresh fragrance was wafted through the translucent rays. Whose orchard was this? Paotang was directing the work. For twenty years he had watched other people picking fruit or himself picked fruit for other people. He was taciturn and continued to work silently as a statue amid all this activity. Judging by his joyless expression he did

not know how fragrant and sweet the fruit was, as if what they were picking were clods of earth or stone. Yet today his sense of smell had woken with the earth, seemingly aware for the first time of this verdant and luxuriant atmosphere. As when a beggar suddenly finds a hoard of gold coins, the gleaming fruit dazzled his eyes. As Paotang directed the work, he said: "There were twenty-eight *mou* to this orchard, seventy sweet-apple trees, fifty pear, nine apple, three cherry-apple, thirty date and one walnut. In the time of Li's father there were even more sweet-apple, but when it came into his son's hands there were some trees which hadn't been well grafted, and he had them cut down and planted pears in their place. Li isn't good for anything else, but he knows how to grow pears. He told us how to manure them and prune them. He read it in a book. It's a pity only these eleven and a half *mou* are left now. Five *mou* in the northwest corner were sold to Chiang, half a *mou* in the south was given to Jung, and he didn't get a cent for it. The three and a half *mou* by the well were sold at good price to Old Ku, and another seven and a half *mou* were sold bit by bit to four or five different families. Those people don't know how to look after them, and since they only have half a *mou* or just over a *mou* they leave everything to luck. But this year I must say they haven't done badly."

Some men's work was to carry the filled baskets to the place where the fruit was being collected. The pickers moved from branch to branch, and as the fruit gradually diminished the leaves seemed to grow more dense. Some of the pickers could not restrain their delight and threw fruit to the men working on the next tree, and if it was caught roared with laughter, while if it fell to the ground the people below raced to pick it up. If anyone bit into it a bystander was sure to shout: "You're breaking the rules. We're not allowed to eat any. This fruit already belongs to us poor people!" "Oh, crushed from falling, can't it be eaten? It doesn't matter eating one of Li's."

Some people teased Paotang, saying: "Uncle Paotang, what makes you so cheerful? I suppose once Li's orchard is divided up you'll lose your job as watchman, and yet you're so happy?"

"Watching the orchard is a good job, quiet and cool. An old fellow can sit here all day smoking, and if you're thirsty you just put out your hand to eat whatever you want. Uncle Paotang won't be able to enjoy that any more."

"Oho!" Paotang suddenly became a talkative old man, and answered smiling: "Quite right, I've enjoyed an easy life long enough. They ought to let me have two *mou* of land this time, and set me working hard too. An old bachelor like me — I've been without a care for dozens of years. If they give me a wife too, and if I have to put up with her nagging, that would be even better. Ho ho . . ."

"We always said you'd been sleeping with the orchard wood nymphs. If not for that why should you despise all the pretty girls in the village, and never ask a go-between to call on one of them? It must be that the wood nymphs bewitched you. Everyone says they like old men!"

There was a roar of laughter and then another, the laughter spreading to all sides. Everybody was in high spirits.

Basket after basket of fruit piled up into a mound. The sun shone on the tree tops. Not a breath of wind could penetrate. Some men took off their jackets and hurried about with bare arms, wiping the sweat from their faces with towels. But no one complained of the heat.

Comparatively the most serious were the fruit weighers led by Tien. They recorded the fruit that had been weighed, at the same time packing it into baskets.

After the meal Li's wife came over. Her hair was combed and shining. She was wearing a clean gown and, smiling broadly, she approached timidly.

Nobody paid any attention to her. Even Paotang pretended not to notice her presence, his face resuming its original dull expression.

She went over to where Tien was, and said with a smile: "Our orchard isn't too big now, only eleven and a half *mou*. Uncle Paotang knows more about it than I do. Every year my husband sold several *mou*."

"Go away," said the bean-mill worker, who held the scales. "If the poor people trust us, why don't you? You've already sold quite a lot of fruit."

"Let her stay," said Tien.

"Ah, we're still in arrears," she went on lamenting, "the spring wages haven't been paid yet. . . ."

One of the pickers said to the men on the next tree: "Well, who said Li could only raise pears, not sweet-apple? Look what a big sweet-apple he's raised, really white and soft and plump and fragrant!"

A bellow of laughter sounded from the next tree.

The woman went to sit down a little further off. She looked at the trees, at the red jewels hanging in the green boughs. This was their property; in the past if anyone walked under the trees, she had only to look at him and he would come smiling to explain. Now how had it happened that none of these people knew her, they had crowded into her orchard and were deliberately climbing her trees and trampling her ground, while she seemed like a beggar woman with no business there to whom nobody would give any fruit as alms. Concealing her humiliation she looked one by one at the men who were gaily showing her contempt. She could not help thinking sadly: "Fine, even that old rogue Paotang is against me. We might just as well have fed a dog all these years! How true it is that one reveals himself only with the turn of tide!"

But not a single person sympathised with her.

She was not a weak character. Since her own family had been dealt with the previous year she had seen the writing on the wall, aware of the danger of impending ruin, and had tried to think out a scheme to escape this sudden onrushing wave. She did not believe things would remain like this forever, so she became generous, often giving away old clothes or lending people grain. She would talk with the hired labourers, and cook them good things to eat. She had also grown friendly. She went out frequently, and whenever she met the cadres she would start talking to them, inviting them to her house for a drink. Even more she became hard working, doing everything in the house herself, often taking food into the fields, helping with weeding or threshing. The villagers said she was not bad, that Li was no use, and some even believed her when she said that they were hard up, claiming that if they did not sell more land that year they simply could not make ends meet! However this calamity was not to be averted. She had to show a stiff upper lip, and dodge and suffer through this storm. Not for a moment did she show that there was implacable hatred between her and these people, or how she was suffering! Instead she employed all her feminine wiles to put them off their guard and appeal to their generosity.

Seeing them extending their field of work, she walked a little farther off, looking round everywhere, reluctant to leave her land, hiding the pain she felt at the sight of these "brigands".





LI K'O-JAN: Model Workers and Peasants Enjoy a Day's Outing in Peihai Park, Peking





At midday the peasants went home for a meal and the orchard seemed much quieter. She walked over again and looked at the green leaves which had lost their lustre, since even the fruit which was not thoroughly ripe had all been picked. She passed the red pile of fruit. In the past such a sight would have gladdened her eyes, but now she looked at it with hate. "Hm! There's someone sitting under that tree watching!"

She walked from her orchard to the well, where the plash of water could be heard against an earthenware container that had been set upside-down at the place where the spring gushed out of the earth. The water sounded very clear and a small stream ran out from under the container. Li's family had made this well, later selling it together with the land to Old Ku. But Old Ku had never changed the course of the water, that is to say he had never stopped their supply of water. The brook ran right round the orchard, and had watered some twenty to thirty *mou* of land. She thought: "Ah, before I always felt it a pity to have sold this land, but now I feel it was just as well!"

There was no one in Old Ku's orchard. The trees were laden with fruit, and some windfalls had fallen to the ground. He had not many pears, but his red sweet-apples were exceptionally large. He did not grudge manuring the trees or working on them! But it only amounted to working for the benefit of others. She imagined this three and a half *mou* of orchard had been taken under control too, and the thought gave her pleasure. If they must sell fruit, then let everyone's be sold. If they must divide land, let them make a mess of the division.

Just as she was thinking this she heard the sound of young women laughing, and saw a figure in light blue flit past. Who was it? Reflecting, she went to the side of a ditch, where a willow tree from the other side of the ditch had fallen on top of a pear tree on this side. Most of the pear was dead, only one branch was left, but that bore an astonishing number of pears. She knew whose orchard it was over there. "Oh, so it's her!"

She could see Heini in her light blue dress hanging on a tree like a woodpecker, nodding to someone below. The orchard seemed like a big cage around her. The fruit beyond her looked like bright stars, and these brilliant stars kept falling from her hands into a basket hung on the branch. Suddenly she slid down the ladder, her white trousers flashing. Her sister-in-law

popped up like a wild rabbit to take the basket, while her cousin could be heard calling: "Heini! You're just playing about!"

Heini was a prisoner who had only just been released. Her uncle Wenfu had warned her: "Everybody in the village hates my brother. Better not go out much, don't get into trouble. You, being a girl, should on no account listen to him. Guard against him. Any slander at all will be too much for you."

Heini had done as he said, refusing to go to see Cheng, replying to other members of her family: "If you keep on forcing me, I'll go and tell Yumin." But whatever she did the family would not relax their pressure on her. They kept her close, not letting her take a breath of fresh air. Just when she found it impossible to free herself, the clouds suddenly parted. Today the whole family was smiling. When Red-nosed Wu beat his gong and made the announcement about the eleven orchards to be taken under control their ears were glued to the door, but none of them heard Chien's name. They exchanged glances and smiled significantly. Her uncle had stopped pacing the courtyard and was lying on the *kang*, blissfully waving a black paper fan. Her aunt ran from the east wing to the west, not knowing how to occupy herself. When all the women had been sent to the orchard, Chienli sent the workman to hire beasts. Heini felt most light-hearted. She thought they would no longer press her. It was not for nothing after all that cousin Yi had joined the Eighth Route Army! And she said privately to Erh: "Don't be afraid of my uncle! Right now it's thanks to Yi he's got off."

Li's wife could not help cursing them to herself: Whore's filly, man-crazy bitch! That devil Chien ought to be slowly hacked to pieces! He makes his girls fawn on the cadres, and those bastards think our Li family easy to bully! What kind of Communists are these? Hell! Talking big all the time, agitating every day to settle old scores and take vengeance, yet protecting a bully and traitor and treating him with honour. Nobody dares lift a finger against him! Our family has a few *mou* of land more than most, but because none of us have joined the army or played the whore we're in trouble. That little stinker Yumin! Some day I'm going to tell him off!"

She could not bear to look any longer and started running home like a demented thing, but saw coming toward her a number of men who had finished their midday meal, and were driving in

beasts. Thereupon she turned her head and darted off to one side, unwilling to face them again. She hated them and was afraid she could no longer conceal her hatred, but she must on no account show her real feelings. So, like a whipped dog, tail between its legs, veiling the hatred and fear in her eyes, she fled precipitately.

People were foregathering again. Ching headed the transport corps. Two big iron-wheeled carts were waiting on the road to be loaded. Even Hutai's rubber-tyred cart and mule were there. Old Ku himself would not accompany the cart, and had not come. Chih had been assigned to stand here grasping the reins and holding a long whip. He showed a smiling face instead of his previous frightened look, feeling things were hopeful. A procession of men carrying baskets came out here from the depth of the orchard. Ching standing at the head of the cart shouted: "Old fellow, you get down! Go and pick fruit in the orchard or find something easy to do! Ah, who told you to come here!"

This remark was addressed to Chuan who was in one of the iron-wheeled carts at the back. The old man was wearing a broken straw hat and an old blue jacket, and without turning he answered: "Nobody told me to come, I came because I wanted to. I've two and a half fruit trees myself I haven't picked yet. What if I am old, isn't an old man any use?" He suddenly caught sight of Yang's short figure carrying a basket of fruit over, and fingering his drooping moustache said loudly: "Can an old man lag behind, Yang? Come over here! There's skill needed in packing a cart, not just brute strength. Isn't that right?"

"Oh! It's you! Have you sold your fruit yet?" Yang rested a moment beside the cart, wiping his face with his sleeve, before looking round.

"No, I haven't much. It can wait a few days." Chuan bent down to take the basket Yang was raising.

Remembering their last conversation Yang asked: "Have you talked things over with your nephew yet? Have you come to a decision or not?"

"About what?" Chuan gazed at him for a minute, then understanding began to smile. "Oh, that business! Ah, he's busy all day long! Look, the youngsters all think I'm too old to be any use! Well, it doesn't matter. I'm old, I'll do less, but each should do what he can!"

Yang saw a young woman had come to his side. She slowly lowered the heavy basket on her shoulder to the ground, calling out urgently: "Uncle Chuan, hurry up and take it!"

She was a thin woman with a dark ruddy complexion and fine arched eyebrows. Her hair was combed back very neatly into a bun on the top of her head. She was wearing a white man's vest, from which stretched her long arms. On one wrist she wore several red artificial pearl bracelets which caught the eye.

"You make my head spin!" A young peasant had come over laughing: "You're really special — like a donkey turd in a sheepfold!"

The woman showed no sign of weakness, but tossed her head and retorted: "You were born with a dirty mouth!"

"Right! My mouth is no good. I can't even sing *Tung Fang Hung*\* . . . Aha . . ." They were not watching the face he made, but everyone burst out laughing. And someone said slyly: "Do sing for us!"

"Oh, you people are the limit! If you're good for anything, go and speak up at the mass trial! But don't let the devil run away with you! I'm not afraid of anyone!" She turned and left with a quick, light step.

"Who's that? She's quite something!" Yang felt he had seen her before, but could not remember her name, and asked Chuan.

Chuan screwed up his eyes in a smile, and said: "That's Yueh the shepherd's wife, famed for her sharp tongue, prickly as a hedgehog, not afraid of heaven or earth. She shouts louder than the men at meetings. She's Vice-Chairman of the Women's Association. All their members are here today."

"Carrying a basket of fruit, staggering and shrieking under the weight, she still thinks she's cock of the walk!"

"She cock of the walk? Not a chance! She's minus the cock's most important part!"

They all started laughing again.

Presently the carts were piled high with fruit, tied firmly on. Ching bursting with pride called to the beasts, Chih cracked his long whip and the carts started slowly off. Three carts rolled, one after the other. Behind the carts came some dozen mules and donkeys which had been loaded in the orchard, forming a long procession. On both sides walked people following the carts and leading the

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\* A popular song which begins with: "Red in the east rises the sun . . ."

beasts. Others stood close to the mud walls at the side of the road, stretching their necks, following the lively troop with their eyes. Some were unwilling to return directly to the orchard, and crowded in the gateway, gesticulating and talking enthusiastically. It was more lively than the lantern festival at the first moon and more novel and welcome than a bridal procession. Chuan was standing by the wall too, twisting his drooping moustache. When he had watched the procession out of sight he asked Yang softly: "Is it all really for the poor?"

Wen had come to the orchard too, but his feelings were entirely different from those of his last visit. Last time he was here he had been enchanted by this dense wood. He felt it was an ideal place for study. He also thought it would make an excellent location for a convalescent home. Wandering among the endless greenery, the fruit had seemed like so many scattered blossoms. Listening to the breeze in the branches and the merry chirping of birds he had been filled with content, reluctant to tear himself away from such a scene. Today however, he had been attracted by the happy peasants. They were agile and skilful, light-hearted and humorous, busy yet orderly, careful yet at ease. Usually he found such people slow, stupid and dull, but today such epithets applied only to himself. At his approach they greeted him, but he could not say anything to evoke a laugh or even to attract attention. He saw Tien who was commander-in-chief, drafting people, inspecting the work, calculating, checking and making a record. Everybody went to him for advice. He attended to each in turn, and each one left him looking satisfied. But he still looked just as he did behind the counter in the cooperative, not putting on any airs at all, appearing quite agreeable and unflustered.

Hu put it even more explicitly, saying: "We couldn't do this in his place could we?"

Of course Wen was able to console himself: — after all this was only a kind of administrative technique. They were only peasants after all, unable to direct policy. However this scene forced him to acknowledge the people's ability which he had never previously suspected, and even more to acknowledge the gulf that still existed between him and the masses. As to the reason, whether it was because he was more capable than the masses or unfamiliar with them, he was not at all clear, and was not willing to inquire into it more deeply.

They went back before long to busy themselves in arranging the business agreed upon the previous day.

The orchard continued as lively as ever, especially when the sun was sinking in the west, when even the old women came hobbling along with their sticks to look. This was something absolutely unheard of, that poor people should take control of rich people's fruit and take it to the city to sell. As numbers increased, those who had been rather afraid to begin with overcame their reservations. Some who had just come to watch the fun now joined in the work too. Since the river had risen so high what did it matter if they got a little wet? If everybody joined in, all would share the responsibility. There was nothing to be afraid of. The only thing to worry about now was that one might get left out, and other people get all the benefit! This business stirred up all the poor villagers, as well as Yumin, Chao and the others. The cadres were pleased with the peasants' determination, pleased that their own prestige was growing, and that the villagers praised their good management. Of course they hoped the work would continue as smoothly as this. At any rate this was a good omen. They hoped there would be no complications or troubles ahead.

## CHAPTER XXXVIII

After breakfast when Fukuei went to Old Han's house, he found only three of Chiang's tenants in the courtyard. There were nine of them altogether, and the previous day they had attended a small meeting here at which Comrade Wen had given them many explanations of principles, which they all appeared to understand, and they had agreed to meet today to go together to ask for the title deeds. But now the others had failed to show up. They separated to search for the missing tenants.

Fukuei was very excited. He cultivated ten *mou* of arid land belonging to Chiang, for which he had to give four bushels as rent each year. Every year he quarreled vainly with Chiang over these four bushels, and burned with frustration. The land was poor. It only yielded four to five bushels altogether, and unless he did odd jobs on the side he would not make enough from one end of the year to the other to even afford drinking water. He had thought

several times of giving up the land, but it would not be easy to find any elsewhere. Other people thought highly of his strength, but were disturbed because he had no property. He thought that if he were given this land after land reform he could have a solid basis. Besides having enough to eat, if he tightened his belt, being young and strong he might earn enough to buy one or two more *mou* of land, with this property he need not be afraid. He longed for land, he was headstrong and not afraid of difficulties. He strode off energetically to look for the others. He wanted to get his hands on a title deed at once. He had never seen this thing which so vitally affected his entire life.

Gradually all the tenants arrived, including a youngster named Hsin only seventeen, and three old men who, in the midst of young men, were not so afraid, but who remained comparatively quiet. After the previous day's meeting they were willing to go to ask for the deeds, but they told Wen that Chiang as a former ward chief was a good talker and experienced, and probably would not give them up!

Yumin said too that Chiang had told White Snake to spread rumours that the emperor born of the real dragon was in Peking. Chiang had sent his wife every day to work on Chao's feelings. The landlord was a slippery customer. Probably these few tenants would be no match for him. To make sure Wen therefore asked them: "Are you still afraid?"

They all answered together: "With you comrades here we're not afraid!"

Cheng told the story of how Chung, when Hou was dealt with the previous year and his land divided, had been forced by the cadres to go too and settle scores with him. Chung had no way out, but had to go. Hou who was lying in bed had asked: "Who's that in the yard?"

"It's me, Uncle," Chung had said.

"Oh, you, what do you want?"

"Nothing," said Chung. "I just came to see you, uncle." Having said this he found a broom and started sweeping the yard.

"Oh! You really are a good sort after all, I thought you'd come to settle scores too. If you want to settle them you'll have to go to the King of Hell, and let him decide whose things these are destined to be! By the way, Chung, you can forget about that ten

thousand dollars you owe me. We're the same family. After all these years we can count on each other's friendship."

"Oh, that won't do, that won't do. . . ."

When Chung went out and people outside had asked him if he had settled accounts, he said, "Yes, it's all settled. I still owe him ten thousand dollars!" Later the Peasants' Association gave him one and a half *mou* of land, and he actually returned it secretly.

"You people won't copy Chung, will you?" asked Cheng. "He is the kind of man who would rather die than rise to his feet."

"We aren't such weaklings," they answered smiling, "to want to make a laughing-stock of ourselves!"

Although they had poured out the sufferings of peasants and made pledges, Wen did not feel altogether assured. Since he could think of nothing else just then, he imitated a landlord asking fiercely: "What are you doing here?"

Fukuei caught on at once, and answered, "We've come to settle accounts with you."

"Settle accounts? Very good!" Wen went on: "You've cultivated ten *mou* of arid land of mine. Was it you who asked to cultivate it, or was it I who forced you? It was put quite clearly then, set down in black and white, the rent would be four bushels a year. Have you never owed me rent? Now you want to settle accounts, fine! First pay me what you owe, and then we'll settle! If you don't want to farm the land, that's that! I can find plenty of people who do. Let me ask you, is it your land or mine?"

"Can the land grow crops for you by itself?" asked Hsin.

And Fukuei went on: "Chiang! Let me tell you! When you were ward chief you used Japanese backing to swallow our rationed cloth, everybody knows that. And that year I repaired your house for you, you agreed to one *sheng* of rice a day. I worked for you one month and three days, and you only gave me ten *sheng* of rice. Think back, am I telling the truth or not?"

"It's true," replied Wen still with an affected air. "Wasn't the rationed cloth used for an awning when we had a play? I didn't take it! When you worked on my house, I didn't underpay you. Wasn't the food you ate for one month and three days to be counted? Another thing, the year before last, before the Japanese left, you accused me, and I paid you then all I ought to pay. Is there no end to your extortions? I worked for the Eighth Route Army too."



This made them all furious, and they started shouting: "Good! You say we extort. If we hadn't sweated you couldn't have had such a soft time of it! How much land did you have before? How much land do you have now? Would you have grown so fat without our blood and sweat? If you don't produce the title deeds today we'll beat you to death. . . ." As they shouted they saw Wen and the rest laughing, and started laughing themselves. One of them said: "Chairman Wen, you really make a good landlord!" Someone else said: "Just like Chiang, he's difficult to deal with!"

Then Wen asked them what they would do if Chiang's wife took a leaf out of Mrs. Li's book, and came out crying and snivelling. They all said they would pay no attention to the whore. And Fukuei said: "The year that tart came, she asked me one day to help them turn their millstone. I didn't dare refuse. After the wheat was ground I ground millet until evening. Then I cleaned up the stone for them, and stabled the mule and fed it hay. Only when I was leaving did she say, 'Have a bowl of gruel before you go.' But just then, Chiang returned and as soon as he came in he said, 'What do you mean by coming here while I'm out? Are you flirting with my wife? Fine! I'll have you sent to the ward office and punished with hard labour!' That woman just sat inside not saying a word. Whatever I said Chiang wouldn't believe it, and finally I had to go to Hsia Garden twice to fetch coal for him before he would let me off. If not for that bitch I wouldn't have got into that trouble. I want to settle accounts with her too. If she cries I'll hit her! I certainly shan't be like my *dye*h!"

Wen asked them some more questions, to which they made satisfactory answers. He wanted to give them more encouragement, but they could not contain themselves any longer, and someone said, "We've got it all straight now, let's go." "We're bound to come off victorious," said Hsin, "don't you worry!" Wen saw them to the street and watched them go, while again some villagers followed behind. Cheng also followed them to see how these peasants would turn out.

The nine of them swept like a gust of wind to Chiang's door. Fukuei was the first through the big gate, the rest followed at his heels. There was no one in the courtyard. From the northern room could be heard the sound of furniture being moved. Fukuei hurried up the steps and pushed his way in. Chiang was standing in the middle of the room. Seeing these poor tenants come in he guessed

they had come for the title deeds, but he was not afraid of them, and said: "Did the Peasants' Association tell you to come? You can ask for anything you want. I've been with the Eighth Route Army too. Of course I understand it all. Only you must get things clear yourselves. Don't let other people cheat you! Hsin, are you here too?"

The others had nothing to say, only Fukuei said loudly: "We understand everything, Chiang! We've come to settle accounts for all these years!"

"Settle what accounts?" Chiang only said a few words, but noticing the expression on their faces, and hearing steps in the courtyard he immediately changed his tune, and went on: "There's going to be land reform in the village, as if I didn't know that! This is a good business. I have a fair amount of land, more than I can cultivate myself. I talked over with the cadres long ago my decision to make a present of the land. Let everyone have land to farm and food to eat. That's only fair!"

Hearing that he was going to make a present of the land Hsin lost his head, and asked impatiently: "What about the title deeds?"

Chiang promptly opened a drawer and took out a package, saying: "I got it ready long ago. I was just thinking of sending this to the Peasants' Association but now you've come just at the right time. There are twelve sheets here, fifty-three point three *mou* of land. It's all pretty good land too. I'm young and can stand hard work, so it doesn't matter my giving so much. Your five *mou* are included, Hsin. You take it to the Peasants' Association. If you still think it's too little, tell them Chiang says he can give some more. After all I'm village head. I ought to set an example for others!"

"Chiang! What game are you up to! . . ." Before Fukuei could finish, Hsin had snatched the package and run out, and the others seeing him run, taking the title deeds with him, followed at his heels. When the people in the court, by the gate-house and outside the gate, saw Hsin rushing out helter-skelter, they could not imagine what had happened. They crowded out too, some of them asking in frightened tones: "What happened?"

As they were rushing pell-mell out of the gate, Cheng hurried over and asked: "What are you doing! Ah, just look at you."

Hsin raised his hand high, unable to restrain his excitement, restless as a cock after a fight, unable to speak.

Another tenant next to him said: "We've got them! We've got the title deeds! As soon as we went in he gave them up!" There was nervous agitation rather than delight in his voice.

By now Wen, Yang and the others had arrived. They thought that the tenants had been frightened and turned back, and asked at once how things had gone.

Hsin was gripping the package firmly, in naive excitement. "Didn't you say anything?" asked Wen. "Did you just take his title deeds and leave without saying anything?"

They looked confusedly at him, wondering what was wrong.

"We want to settle accounts with him. We don't want him to give away land. The land is ours. What right has he to say he'll give it away? We don't want his land. What we want is our own land. For you to run off with the title deeds without settling accounts is no good. He'll say we're unreasonable, won't he?"

When these inexperienced tenants heard this, they said, "Right! We went to ask for what he owes us! How did he manage to stop our mouths so quickly? It was all the fault of that good-for-nothing boy, Hsin. As soon as he ran, everyone followed. Let's go back! Come on!"

"What about Fukuei? Has he gone home?"

"No." They suddenly realised he was still there alone in Chiang's house. Nobody had seen him come out. "Come on!" With renewed courage the group wheeled round and hurried back.

When Hsin and the others rushed out, Fukuei became anxious, and called after them: "We haven't settled scores yet, what are you running off for?" But nobody heard him, and just as he was at his wits' end Chiang's wanton wife darted in from the inner room, threw him a disdainful glance, taking stock of him, then said to her husband in her syrupy voice: "Really, what a gang of brigands! Did they take all the title deeds away?" Fukuei halted and glared at her, asking: "Who are you cursing? Who are brigands?"

The woman's hair was long and dishevelled, framing a small pale face. The bridge of her nose was pinched a purple red, her upper lip was very short, revealing a row of irregular teeth which attracted all the more attention since two of them had gold fillings. Still ignoring Fukuei, she walked wide around him as if he were dog dung, and said in an outburst to her husband: "You hopeless mummy! You let them take the lot, but didn't you buy the land? It wasn't stolen was it? Couldn't you reason with them?"

Communizing, communizing. Your property has all been communized now. If they say share wives, you'll share your wife, see how you like being a cuckold tomorrow!"

"Dammit! Shut your stinking mouth!" Chiang knew it was no use tipping her a wink. He cursed her and turned impatiently toward Fukuei: "What are you still hanging round for? Your ten *mu* of land have been given too. Why don't you go home?"

"We haven't settled properly yet." Fukuei remembered they had said they'd come to settle accounts, but now that he was left all alone his tongue seemed very awkward. He detested that woman. Hit her? He could not raise his hand. Leave? He did not like to show weakness. He was not afraid of Chiang, only he felt awkward. But just then he caught sight of Hsin and the rest coming back, and was as pleased as a released prisoner. He could not help shouting: "Hsin!"

Hsin marched straight into the room, ignoring him, threw the title deeds on a table, and bellowed: "Who wants you to give land! It's our own that we want today!" Then he winked at Fukuei, looking very confident.

At once Fukuei knew what to do, drawing himself up he said, "You, Chiang, we won't count earlier scores. Just since the Japanese came, you say how much that piece of land of yours yields. We won't trouble with reduction of rents we are supposed to have. Just say I should take half the yield. In that case each year you made me pay about a bushel and a half more than I should. Then there was the grain tax I paid for you, for nine years, interest piled up on interest. How much do you think you ought to repay me! And then there's the wages you owe me. You kept making me do this, that and the other for you. That's got to be counted too."

A shout came from behind, "You, Chiang, I'm not going to have farmed your land five or six years for nothing!"

By this time many other villagers, knowing they were settling scores with Chiang over his rent, came to watch the excitement. Finding Chiang still floundering inside they joined in the attack from outside the window: "The bastard! When he was ward chief he made us pay taxes and act as army porters just as he pleased, sending our men to Tangshan and Hungshan, so that some of them never came back. We want his life in exchange!"

When the tenants saw the increased number of people outside, they grew bolder. The three old tenants who had come had not meant to say anything originally, but now they joined in the shouting too. One of them cursed: "You rogue, Chiang, do you remember New Year's Eve the year before last when you brought guards to my house and took away all my pots and pans just because I was three *tau* of rent in arrears. On what charge was my property confiscated? On New Year's Day we didn't even have a mouthful of gruel to eat at home. Old and young were crying. What a heartless brute you are!"

Outside the shouting grew even more savage: "Beat the dog to death, shoot him!"

Seeing things were going badly the tart hid herself inside, afraid of being beaten. Chiang was in a towering rage, but dared not act tough any more, thinking: "Hell! Now I'm in for it! Discretion is the better part of valour." He was afraid to think — all right, let them shoot! Many images upset him. Wasn't Chen Wu an example? Making up his mind he ran inside, brought out another red package, bowed to the ground before them all and with a glum look entreated them: "Good masters, I've let all my neighbours down. Please be generous. I really owe each of you too much. I can't possibly repay. The only thing is to take the land as payment. These are my title deeds. They're all here, a hundred and twenty seven *mou*. If you'll all be generous I'll be a good citizen in future. . . ."

Now that he was humbled and all the title deeds had been produced, the crowd began to subside, for they had not planned any further settlement. Reluctantly they took the title deeds, saying: "Good, we'll work it out and see. If there's too much we'll give you some back, and if there's not enough you will have to think of a way to make it up."

"Let's go." Those inside and out all started leaving together. The trampling of feet could be heard, interspersed with some curses, which, however, were filled with satisfaction. Chiang went into the courtyard to look dejectedly after their retreating figures. He gazed at the grey sky and sighed involuntarily. Inside, his wife burst into bitter wailing.

## CHAPTER XXXIX

The disposition of Chiang's land was entrusted to the nine tenants who had taken his title deeds to the Peasants' Association. This was something they had never hoped for even in their wildest dreams. The nine of them crowded into Fukuei's house, and the Peasants' Association sent Ting to help them write an account. They did not know how to begin, simply feeling they must find a vent for the emotions with which they were overcharged. Their life during the last three days had changed too drastically, especially in the case of the three old men. One of the latter said: "Ah, the day before yesterday when the Peasants' Association asked me to describe all the hardships I've had in my life, I thought, in all these scores of years has one single pleasant thing ever happened to me? Other people's happiness no sooner reached me than it turned to sorrow. That year when my wife was lying in and people came to congratulate me on being a father, I thought, 'Eh, why make this fuss, she's lying in bed waiting for me to go and borrow some millet to make gruel.' All day I tried in vain to borrow some, so the next day I took some bedding to pawn for three *sheng* of rice. . . . Another year I owed Chiang one bushel eight *tou* for rent and he was pressing me for it. We didn't even have husks at home, but I was afraid of him — if he got annoyed he could send you off as a porter for the army. There was nothing I could do, so I sold my eldest girl. Ai, why worry about her, at least she got a way to live. I didn't cry, in fact I felt pleased for her sake — anyhow, I had nothing to say. I'd already stopped being a man, my heart wasn't like other people's. So I didn't say a word. When the Association told me to go for the title deeds, I didn't dare go. I'm old, why make enemies for the young folk? But I didn't dare say I wouldn't go, so I followed along with the rest. My, who could have believed that the world really has changed. Fine, Chiang's hundred and twenty-seven *mou* of land are in our hands now! The power's changed hands! The poor are masters now! Who could have imagined it! Ah, this time we ought to be pleased, but strangely enough I actually feel sad! I'm remembering all my past troubles!"

Another said: "I always used to think that I was indebted to Chiang, that I must have owed him something in an earlier life as well as in this life, so that I could never pay it all back. But

yesterday when everybody reckoned things up like that, why, I've cultivated his land for him for six years, paying eight bushels rent a year, while he didn't lift a finger except to use his abacus. Six eights are forty-eight bushels, plus interest upon interest. With that, I could have bought fifty *mou*, not fifteen! We were poor, too poor ever to rise to our feet. Our children and grand-children had to work like beasts just because the landlords lived on our rent. The more we provided them with the tighter they clutched us. But we're not beasts after all, we're men! Why should we live like horses in harness, working without respite till our hair is white! Now at last we see things clearly. Ah, our sons and grandsons won't be oppressed like our generation!"

The third old man said: "We've got Chiang's land in our hands but he's still village head. There are still people who're afraid of him, who have to obey him. This time we've got to take that job away from him! Another thing, he's not the only rich person to have exploited us. It's no good unless we overthrow them all together. So I say this is only the beginning."

Someone else said: "Chiang usually gives himself airs. Look how when he first saw us he tried to browbeat us, and then how suddenly he went soft, like wax exposed to the heat, cringing and scraping. I think it was just because there were so many of us. There's strength in numbers, and he knows we've got powerful support with the Eighth Route Army and Communists backing us up!"

Ting had been in the Eighth Route Army, so now he encouraged them by saying how good the Eighth Route Army was, always working only for the poor. Hsin was a youngster, and when he heard this he became very enthusiastic, and leapt to his feet saying, "Tomorrow I'm going to tell the comrades everything you've said. If we don't rise up to attack Chien properly, I shan't be satisfied. The year I was fourteen he sent me to the garrison at Kuang An to join the corvee in building defence works, then accused me of shirking work, and wanted to send me to Tsolu to join the Youth Corps \*. My *Dyeh* was nearly frantic. Joining the Youth Corps meant joining the puppet army! My *Dyeh* went to find Liuchien who was ward chief then. My *Dyeh* was always hot tempered and he cursed Liuchien saying he had no heart.

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\* An organisation for training young fascists.

Liuchien did not say a word but the next day he brought two guards to tie me up, and they beat my *Dyeh*. *Dyeh* wanted to have it out with Liuchien but Liuchien knelt down before him and said: 'Even if you kill me, there's nothing I can do. You don't look for the King of Hell, you only come to one of his little imps. How can I cancel your son's name from the list of dead?' Later other people told my *Dyeh* to go to Chien. Chien hemmed and hawed. Finally we had to mortgage our house for six bushels of grain and send it to the ward office before the trouble was at an end. But my *Dyeh* kept bearing Liuchien a grudge for bullying us out of six bushels of grain. Only after Liuchien had sold land to repay his debt and then gone mad did my *Dyeh* understand who was behind it all. *Dyeh* didn't dare say any more. Chien's not a person you can cross! Ah! If we attack him, if only the group's willing, my *Dyeh* can settle accounts with him, and get that house of ours back!"

Most of them started recalling their past sufferings, and Fukuei had a good deal to say. He felt it was better to divide up Chiang's land at once, remembering how Wen had said by this means they could stir up other tenants and make them go themselves to settle scores with their landlords. It was easy to stir up the struggle this way. So he urged them all, saying: "Now that we've come into the open, don't let's collapse. The comrades and cadres all say this is serving the poor. I don't mean to ask for this land myself. Let's divide it up among the very poorest. Let the villagers see how fair and unselfish we are, and everything will be all right. I'm young and I've no wife or children, I shall manage somehow. I don't want this land. You who've got old people and children at home ought to keep some, but don't keep too much. We'll keep not too much nor too little. There are so many people he injured in the village, we've got to think of their suffering too. The Association said most of the land is cultivated by us. We'll have to see what can be spared, then take our proposal to the meeting to be discussed. It'll have to be approved by everybody."

On returning to the Peasants' Association the previous day, Wen, Yang, Yumin and the others had talked things over and decided to divide up Chiang's land first, since at the moment it was not possible to hold a mass meeting to elect a committee for dividing up the land, it was temporarily decided that the tenants should make a preliminary division, to be discussed by the masses, in order



to increase the village/s' mounting enthusiasm and to strengthen the confidence of the victors. Accordingly these nine men were made a temporary land division committee.

When this news spread a number of people grew very excited. Group after group went to the cooperative to lodge complaints with the Peasants' Association against Chiang, demanding to go and settle scores with him too. They asked for his property to be confiscated, saying he had no right to go on living in such a good house. It was a house he'd built when he was ward chief, built out of the people's sweat and blood! Why should he be allowed to store so much grain? He had a double wall full of grain. They all knew there was a narrow lane at the back of his house. That was where he stored his grain. Why should he be allowed to keep so many clothes in his wardrobe, now that so many people had nothing to wear? They raised pandemonium, and some pushed their way into Chiang's house, just at the time he was busy pulling all the strings he could, calling on the cadres, hoping they would leave him a little more land. When the villagers saw he was out they were afraid the cadres would be deceived by him and listen to him, so even more of them went to find Yang and Wen, asking to have all his property moved out. Wen, who was afraid of going too far and mechanically clung fast to a few "policies", felt that such a proceeding would be beyond the scope of land reform. He wanted to have nothing to do with it, even urging the villagers to hold off. But the people refused to leave, some wanting to move the things themselves. When the militia came over they said sarcastically, "What are you doing here? Have you come to keep a watch on us?"

Yang had a long talk with Wen and finally won his consent to have all Chiang's movable property confiscated for the time being by the Peasants' Association. Wen realised that as matters stood some action must be taken, so he turned the matter over to the Peasants' Association.

Cheng headed the militia to paste up notices of the property being sealed, and to seal up all chests, containers and unoccupied rooms, leaving only one bedroom and kitchen for Chiang to use for the time being. But crowds of people, still not believing, followed to look, and shouted: "We won't lift a finger, only watch. It's all right now that the Association is taking charge of this! As long as you are not keeping these things for Chiang that'll do!"

Standing at the side they made suggestions and supervised the work, until finally even the containers of oil and salt for daily use were all sealed up. Chiang had returned by now, and bowing repeatedly to them all he begged them not to seal up so much. The tart, her eyes red from weeping, sat sullenly on the millstone in the courtyard. Seeing her someone said, "This millstone should be sealed up too." But another answered, "They can't move it away. No need to seal it!"

That afternoon White Snake had gone to the cooperative too to the Association to accuse Chiang of forcing her to be a charlatan. Since her husband had died she had no way of making a living. She wanted to marry again but Chiang would not allow it, only letting her claim to be a medium. He often took people there to gamble, who would give her a certain percentage from the winnings. Sometimes he pocketed the money himself. Now he owed her seventy to eighty thousand dollars. The members of the Peasants' Association were up to their ears in work. Nobody would pay any attention to her, and people who were looking on said: "Go home. Your scores are so many, better settle them on the bed." White Snake said too it was Chiang who had made her spread rumours that Lord White had told her in a vision that the real Dragon Emperor was in Peking, to keep the villagers from agitating. Then they all laughed at her and cursed: "You people killed Liu Kuei-sheng's Little Pao! Just because you said people were wicked and god was punishing them, Liu Kuei-sheng's wife nearly cried herself sick and Little Pao's illness was neglected. Otherwise by going to Hsin Pao An or Tsolu to consult the doctor the child could have been saved. 'People are wicked' indeed! It's you people who are wicked!"

Seeing they would pay no attention to her White Snake, who was afraid her seventy to eighty thousand dollars would melt away, and even more afraid she might be involved, sat some distance from the door outside, and whenever she saw a cadre coming she went over to make a garrulous complaint. Finally they had to say: "You can say all this at the mass meeting, and if the people believe you, you may be given two *mou* of victory land. Now don't hang around complaining in the street."

Although these events were not enough to prove that the people had risen, they were none-the-less evidence that some had shown initial political consciousness. They had begun to reflect.

back as to why they had suffered. They spontaneously wanted to settle accounts. This was something which had never happened before in the village. Wen with his limited experience naturally felt this was already a great deal, and that in certain respects they were even going too far. He derived great satisfaction from the victory which he considered was all thanks to his planning.

Even Yumin found himself out in his calculations. Although they had held public trials before, they had never been disorderly like this, but carried out according to instructions. Now everybody was shouting at once, the cadres were ordered about by the people, and even Wen had to follow the masses. If they had not sent immediately to seal up Chiang's property, the people might possibly have taken matters into their own hands. Sparks can start a conflagration, and although their light is small, it may foreshadow the brightness of the future. In the prevailing excitement the team was doubly anxious to press forward with the work, and to reach agreement over the issues which they had temporarily shelved. Accordingly the conflict became keener.

Yang acted on knowledge derived from his intimacy with the masses, most of whom were poor peasants. They had all made suggestions regarding Chien who was regarded as the most dangerous leader of the landlord class. In order for the people to rise to their feet the most important thing was to overthrow him. Yumin had started life as a hired labourer. Even now he did not know where his next meal was coming from. He was still close to the poorest of the poor among whom he had his prestige. How could he be regarded as being in opposition to the masses? The relation between the cadres and the masses cannot be interpreted mechanically, any more than what constitutes an army dependent. Yet Comrade Wen felt that Yang had succumbed to the cadres. For no reason whatsoever Wen mistrusted Yumin still more, but he would not go deep into the masses to get to know the facts. He only listened to slander like that told him by Chang, and emphasised it. Because Yumin had formerly gone once or twice to White Snake's to gamble, he considered him a rogue or Chiang's hireling. Hence it was impossible for him, with his way of looking at things, to distinguish between black and white. Although Yang also lacked experience, he could look at things comparatively dispassionately. Because he had drawn close to some of the poor peasants he had an intimate understanding of the masses, and was thus better able

to comprehend their problems. But because he was young he had not yet acquired sufficient drive or keenness of analysis with which to convince people. Particularly because Wen was in charge here, he could not decide questions. He found Wen very difficult to deal with and sometimes even regretted having to work with such a man. His original intention had been to take all opportunity of going to the masses and learning from them, little thinking that working with his own team would be much more involved and difficult than arousing the masses.

However even as Wen was patting himself on the back for the victory over Chiang, he failed to realise this was just a sign that the people were stirred, but that it could not yet be said that the masses were all politically conscious and had launched into a movement. Nevertheless he overestimated it. He was already fearing that once the movement started it was bound to go to extremes, persuaded that at a time like this the leaders must be more prudent in handling the state of affairs, and more careful, while listening to all sorts of voices coming from the masses. They must at all costs avoid jumping down into the tide themselves and letting the water blind their eyes. Because of this he was more obstinate in refusing to accept suggestions, only trying to arrange struggles along the old lines. He was searching eagerly for those who had acted as hired labourers to Old Ku, because the latter had no tenants, only short-time labourers. Although there were many of these, at the moment it was not easy to find strong ones. A good many of the village cadres had worked for Old Ku, but even they lacked enthusiasm. Wen believed they had been deceived by little favours and flattery from the rich. They had actually chosen Ku's son Shun to be Vice-Chairman of the Youth Association. From this fact alone he passed the judgment that the cadres' class consciousness was defective and required careful study. Yumin said very impressively that he and other cadres had not shared in the victory fruits. Yet they did not go into the fields all day. What were they living on? Did not Chao borrow grain from Chiang? Wen longed to call a mass meeting right away to give a good lecture to these selfish, self-seeking cadres, these childish political workers. He felt the time had come and there should be no further delay.

Of course Hu took Yang's side, but he could not settle anything either. They argued until evening, and in the evening some-

thing unexpected happened. Although the desire to settle scores with Chiang had reached a high pitch, in the busy orchard excitement ebbed, and many people went home. The control of the orchards and sale of fruit, which had raised such pleasurable excitement, now seemed to have palled. It was said that Liuman and Chang had quarreled over some personal trifle and even come to blows. Nobody had tried to mediate or take sides, just quietly watching the security officer's attitude, waiting to see what the outcome would be. This seemed on the face of it a very commonplace incident, but it was clear that the effort of several days was now virtually undone, and unless they quickly regained the ground lost still more people would be influenced. This was an immediate warning to their shallow complacency. Light was still far off, and the road was fraught with difficulties.

## CHAPTER XL

Chang had two *mou* of irrigated land by the river, and Liuman had one and a half *mou* there too, downstream on the ditch which watered the plots of both. Chang wanted to exchange three *mou* of hilly land he had for this one and a half *mou* of Liuman, so that all his land would be in one place. When he went to talk it over with Liuman, Liuman calculated that the two pieces of land yielded about the same amount, in fact the three *mou* yielded two or three *tou* more than his one and a half *mou*. But it meant harder work and a higher tax, so he refused. After this when Liuman went to irrigate his fields, Chang often diverted the water for his own use. Chang did not irrigate his own fields at the proper time, and would use the water when it was Liuman's turn. As a result, the two were always quarreling.

Chang passed the word that he still wanted this piece of land and some people advised Liuman to let it go. He would not lose out by the exchange, and there was no point in antagonizing the security officer. After thinking it over for some time Liuman was convinced his best course would be to agree to the transaction. However at this point Chang suddenly showed himself unwilling to exchange, saying Liuman wanted to take advantage of him, exchanging one and a half *mou* for three *mou*, and he would not be

such a fool. When Liuman heard this he flew into a rage and made some biting remarks, whereupon Chang cut off his water, intending that Liuman should find the situation intolerable and give up the land more cheaply in exchange for one and a half or two *mou*.

Liuman's fury knew no bounds. He took the matter to the cadres saying he was willing to exchange the land. Not knowing the inside story the cadres said if Chang was not willing to exchange they could not compel him, this was none of their business. Liuman in desperation started a scene and made certain scathing remarks, at which some people said he was a trouble-maker and wanted to tie him up, while others, who had only heard Chang's side of the story, thought Liuman wanted to force an exchange of the land. Unable to get the better of Chang, Liuman felt very injured. One day in the fields he started cursing again about the water. Chang came over and the two of them had a fight. Chang reported that Liuman had assaulted him. The village cadres reprimanded Liuman again and even suspended him from membership of the Party.

After this Liuman kept quiet, but resentment smouldered in his heart. Later people told him that Chang originally had wanted to exchange his three *mou* of land for Liuman's one and a half and had no bad intentions. But later he listened to his father-in-law and thought he would try to drive a bargain, taking advantage of his position as security officer to bully Liuman. This made Liuman even more disheartened. Because he could not irrigate his land properly the crops were not growing well. Other people's kaoliang stood over ten feet high, with thick, heavy ears, while his kaoliang looked like his wife who was always falling ill, thin and weak as if a high wind would blow it down. The sight of his land made him angry as if people were bullying a child he had brought up, so sometimes he kept away. His feud with Chang dated from this time, and he kept hoping that some day there could be a fair judgment.

At first Chang did not take Liuman seriously. But when the cadres came from the district government to start land reform he felt Liuman was a bad enemy to have. He was often conscious of being followed, often felt Liuman's revengeful eyes boring into him, or was goaded by his cutting remarks. To begin with he was afraid he would be dragged into the whirlpool of struggle, knowing that on account of his marriage and various differences of

opinion he had lost the support of a number of the cadres, and the peasants were not satisfied with him. At first he had unconsciously felt sympathetic with Chien simply on account of his wife and their relationship by marriage. As a matter of fact also because he was young and inexperienced and lacked class consciousness he was deceived by his father-in-law. However now for his own safety he felt he must find some means of crushing Liuman, so that he could not rise up. The question was what support could he find? Hence he grew increasingly anxious, and pulled all the strings he could to maintain his father-in-law's power in the village. So he had to betray Yumin and be cautious in his dealings with the cadres, reporting all he knew or surmised to Chien, discussing the implications with him, and then carrying out his instructions.

Chang was not rich. His few *mou* of land were just enough to support himself and he was used to eating and dressing poorly and being ill-treated like the others by the rich people, running dogs, and traitor ward chiefs. He had been to school for two years, was strong and could stand hardships, but was hot tempered and could not tolerate being crossed. He dared raise his hand against the rich, and soon after a Party branch was organised in the village Yumin recruited him. He was enthusiastic and a better speaker than Yumin. In public he always took a more leading part than Yumin. Soon he became security officer. The previous year when Nuanshui village was liberated their group had become even more powerful.

Chien saw that power was changing hands, so he became quieter. But he hated this group, and tried to think of how to bring it under his control. As a first step he sent his son to join the army. With him in the Eighth Route Army, Chien had someone to lean on, making it difficult for the village cadres to do anything to him. In fact when Yi left he said he'd shoot anyone who offended his father. Yumin and the others regretted having asked Chien's son to go, but there was nothing they could do about it, and the villagers became indeed more hesitant about Chien. Chien also wanted to utilise his daughter to gain a foothold in village politics. Thanks to his ready tongue, the dowry he gave his daughter and the fact that Heini's cousin was quite ready to fall in with his plan, the security officer was captured. Of course this had its effect, since the cadres, for fear of offending Chang, could not very well

say anything, while the peasants dared even less speak up. But this by no means entirely satisfied Chien. All at once the security officer lost the confidence of the cadres and became estranged from them. Although during the present land reform Chang was active again and did his best to protect his father-in-law, Chien saw that he was still isolated, and therefore he had to make plans regarding Cheng. If Cheng were to show the least sign of wavering, he could use the security officer to stir up the masses to turn and overthrow the Chairman of the Peasants' Association. This would throw things into confusion, of which the security officer might take advantage to win over the masses and the cadres. But unexpectedly he was up against an obstinate girl who could be moved neither by kindness nor sternness. Chien was really worried for a few days, until the disposition of the fruit set his mind at rest a little. The fact that his name was not among those of the eleven families, seemed to indicate clearly enough what the cadres' attitude to him was.

However he had not foreseen Chang's quarrel with Liuman, which arose precisely out of the fact that Chien's orchard had not been taken into custody. Liuman remarked loudly and scathingly in the orchard that the cadres were all hiding behind their wives' skirts and had become dogs' tails, and added that the security officer had been recruited by the traitors' camp. Nobody dared agreed openly but some people gave him secret encouragement, so he spoke out more boldly. Pointing to Chien's orchard he started cursing, making sure Chang should hear every word he said. Chang was not a good person to offend. Because he was afraid of being involved himself he had done his best to keep quiet, but he could not stand these insults in front of practically the whole village. Emboldened by the fact that Chien's name was not among those of the landlords, he started cursing back. Liuman seemed to be fully prepared, confident that plenty of people would back him up, so he let himself go. Chang's answer to his curses was just what he had been hoping for and he heaped abuse on him till Chang tried to stop him by force. Liuman was glad of a chance to start a bigger row, but Tien and others managed to persuade Chang to leave. Beside, the latter was afraid of coming off worst, and wanted to enlist the help of the cadres again to suppress Liuman. This quarrel not only attracted the attention of the peasants, but made Chien start worrying again. The more so since the ominous



quiet in the orchard made him feel there was some plot against him afoot. He waited restlessly for Chang's return, planning to make a redistribution of his forces. This time he was forced to utilise his wife, which showed that he was at the end of his resources.

During this time Chang was cursing away in the cooperative where he had found Yumin, Cheng and the rest of the cadres. He declared that he would have Liuman arrested, saying this was his duty as security officer, because Liuman was sabotaging the land reform. He spoke very loudly as if the other cadres were in some way to blame. But the others answered him coolly and sternly, until gradually he lowered his voice. Nobody sympathised with him, nobody opposed him, however he saw they all disagreed with him. At last Yumin said: "You go home now. No need to arrest anyone. We won't make any arrests. The Association will look into this business. Let the Association take complete charge of it."

Chang wanted to protest, to argue that he was security officer, but everyone advised him to go home, so he had to leave, thoroughly exasperated and with nowhere to go. Without thinking he turned in the direction of Chien's house. Now that he was acutely aware of his isolation from the masses, he had to stick closer to his father-in-law, so he went there to find out what to do.

## CHAPTER XLI

Though nobody said anything during this quarrel, all understood its nature, and did not want to discuss the rights and wrongs of the squabble itself. They felt that Liuman was in the right. Day after day he neither ate nor worked, busy as an ant on a hot griddle. All the villagers knew what it was about, and assumed the village cadres must understand the matter too. And since they all understood it there was no need to talk about it, just wait and see how the cadres would deal with the situation. When they went home they talked to each other, with meaningful glances. But they were unwilling to discuss the orchard any further, just talking sarcastically to dispel their feeling of unhappiness and injustice.

Outwardly nothing seemed to have happened in the village, but things were not really so peaceful. Whispered arguments had started in a number of households, quarrels without words. Many people were torn between two conflicting feelings. Their hopes were high, but they had to control them, perhaps even pour cold water on them. However there were others who could never stand quietly as bystanders again, who could no longer worry about themselves but went urgently to find Yumin and Lichang. Then the militiamen told their captain they would undertake to keep a stricter watch, for fear anyone else should run away. They felt badly about Li's case.

Prompted by his wife, Chih persuaded his cousin Shou to go along with him to Lichang and tell him all he had heard about Chang's intention to cooperate with the Kuomintang. He said reproachfully: "It's not fair not to confiscate his fruit! How can you count him as a middle peasant? Aren't you afraid the peasants will call you his running dogs? Are you really going to listen to the security officer and arrest Liuman? Don't you realise everybody's on Liuman's side? . . ."

Lichang, that cheerful young Communist, jumped up, stamped his foot and exclaimed impatiently: "Why didn't you say this before? You hear such important things and don't tell us. Aiya! This won't do, I must go and find Yumin, ai!"

Ching's father shut him up in his room, but he threatened him saying: "If you don't let me out I'll set fire to your house, and see how you like that." Chung walked up and down the courtyard with a hunched back, sighing, his daughter following behind, asking for the key of the door, while his wife sat pursing her lips on a hassock outside the door, not knowing with whom to sympathise.

"I'm not going out to kill anyone. What are you afraid of! You're such a die-hard, *Dyeh!* We've only just risen to our feet, and must still make an effort. We can't lie down to let people trample on us again. You're such a die-hard, you can never see things straight. If you still won't open the door, I'm really going to set fire to the room!"

The old man stubbornly ignored him. He felt he saw things much more clearly than his son. He was a fatalist. No matter what happened now, he believed that in a few days, once the cadres from the district left, the village would go its old way again, while very soon, if Tatung were not retaken and the Kuomintang troops

advanced towards Huailai in this direction, all would be up. Even Yumin would have to fly. Ching was his only son. He had never done a wrong thing all his life. He must look after him and control him at all costs. But his son seemed to have changed: he would not keep quiet. He was a young man. It was easy for him to accept new ideas, and since he had acted as transport chief and felt the power of the masses, his outlook had changed. He had held the whip and shouted orders, moving the landlords' treasures of fruit, which normally they scarcely dared look at. No one dared stop him. The poor along the road asked him where he was going, and when he told them he was taking away the victory fruit they all smiled broadly, following him and the procession he led with envious looks. Then he laughed like a triumphant warrior. He felt he had power, as long as the masses were united there was nothing they could not do, nothing they need fear. He was very concerned too about the cadres' treatment of Liuman, but he did not want to wait. He wanted to go, go and state his own views and describe the dissatisfaction and reservations of the masses. He wanted to see Yang and the others and thought anxiously: "These cadres have only been here a dozen days or so. How can they be clear about everything in the village?" But his father had taken him by surprise and locked him inside the house. Actually his father had been in the orchard too, and had smiled, but he was timid. After the quarrel he reverted to his old position. Ching was furious with his father, and true to his word went to the stove, took some wood and started a fire in the middle of the room to frighten the old man. When his mother and sister saw the light of the fire they shouted wildly, laid hold of Chung, snatched the key from his pocket and opened the door. Then the youngster bounded joyfully off, his father pursuing him like a madman, until he stumbled and fell, panting with rage.

Jen the primary school teacher hurried right and left in search of news. He walked to the top of the street and stood there. When he heard voices he edged over, but people stopped talking as soon as they saw him. He dared not call on Chien or Chiang now. The only thing was to see White Snake. However White Snake was doing all she could to sever connections with Chiang. When she saw him she shouted: "Mr. Jen! If you've no business don't come. I'm only a woman with no husband to rely on. I can't afford to be involved. People say I'm lazy and want to reform me. In the

future I'm even going to send away Lord White. I daren't call the spirits. You're a trouble maker too, so better not come here!"

Jen felt like cursing her angrily: "You've grown very particular all of a sudden. Let's see how you manage to live!" But he restrained himself and went back to the street. He had no intention of going home. Old Wu kept making biting remarks in his hearing, Mr. Liu did not use the articles he wrote, instead asking Old Wu to make up verses for him. He detested the pair of them, and longed for a day of reckoning.

Then he met Shun, Vice-Chairman of the Youth Association. In the past Shun had often come to the school to write slogans, so they knew each other, but Jen had not seen him for a long time. He knew their fruit had all been picked by the villagers, so he tried to incite him: "Liu was attacking the unfairness of your treatment. It's a pity he'll get into trouble. Cadres always back each other up! I bet you a feast your vice-chairmanship will be taken away and you'll be given a tall white hat to parade the streets. Don't you agree?"

Recently Shun had been at loggerheads with his father. Smouldering with rage, he could not tolerate other people's nonsense. He turned on Jen fiercely, quite unlike his usual gentle self: "We can look after our own affairs. No need for you to butt in. If you say another word I swear I'll knock you down!" Saying this he glared at him, and Jen had to make off as fast as he could, muttering to himself: "All right, let's see! You'll be tried, sure as fate. Let's see if you're still so fierce then."

Rejected on all sides Jen could not find a single person to talk to. He wanted to do something but was unable to. He knew Old Wu had said many bad things about him to the village cadres. A number of people were eyeing him askance and avoiding him like the plague. This only frightened him more. Chien was still trying to encourage him with Heini, but his ambiguous remarks make Jen feel hope was slight and sometimes he could not take much interest. Now he felt inexpressibly bitter, hating the whole village, and feeling there was nowhere to spend his time he walked outside the village. On either side of the road were low mud walls. The orchards were not entirely quiet, from time to time could be heard the loud calling of cicadas. The sun fell on him, and although it was already not very hot it increased his exasperation. Passing this section he reached the plain by the river where

kaoliang was grown. Here kaoliang was grown over at least forty *mon*, the tall stems, big leaves, thick heavy ears, looking from a distance like a sea, dazzling the eyes under the sun; the bright red ears clustered so close together swayed slightly in the breeze like waves in the sea. He knew this had belonged to Li Kung-te, a landlord in Paihuai, and had been allotted to Nuanshui, — what cause for rejoicing! But this rich scene gave Jen no pleasure, only a feeling of resentment and contempt. This poor teacher who was the friend of landlords constantly tried to bolster up his self esteem, even if behind was nothing but emptiness.

"Jen!" He suddenly heard his name called, and apprehensively looking round saw coming from the field opposite a man in a white shirt with bare head, a blue cloth jacket thrown over his shoulders and trousers rolled high up his leg, who had just waded across the Sangkan River. Jen recognised him, hesitated a moment, then called back: "Oh! Comrade Pin! So you've come. Where have you been?"

Comrade Pin had already come over. His young face was always smiling, his long almond eyes did not give the impression that they were small, only that he was intelligent and shrewd. Giving Jen a friendly pat on the shoulder he asked: "Been busy at the school recently? Tell me what's been happening in the village, how is the land reform going?" He spoke with a good southern Chahar accent, only the natives could tell it was not the true Tsolu accent.

Jen had to walk back with him, and said listlessly: "I'm not very clear about things, ah . . ." But suddenly a happy thought struck him, looking at that young innocent face he felt it would be easy to deceive him, so said: "Things aren't going well. They've let off the chief landlord, and all the peasants are saying he must have bribed the village cadres. They've made up a song: 'You only hold meetings, you don't divide the land. . . .' I hear now they're going to attack army dependents! Tell me, can army dependents be attacked or not?"

The youngster did not have any definite expression on his face except the encouragement for him to go on. Then the foolish rascal at once forgot his past worries, confident his lies would bear fruit, feeling as happy as if he had found a treasure, and began ingratiating himself with him while blowing his own trumpet. However just then they came to the top of the street. The youngster

wanted to see Yumin and as they were separating he said to the teacher: "Old Jen! Don't go talking so carelessly in future. Just stick to your teaching. The intelligentsia ought to have brains. Oh, you wait for me in the school this evening. I have something to say to you!"

Jen lowered his head and cooled down. This youngster was Comrade Pin, propaganda commissar for the county.

## CHAPTER XLII

Pin had worked on land reform in the Sixth District which formed an isocles triangle between the north bank of the Sangkan and the south bank of the Yang, comprising about a dozen villages with some comparatively big landlords beside Roman Catholic power, so there were various problems. Now that the work of land reform had to be speeded up on account of the military situation, the county government had decided it must be completed by the end of August or the beginning of September. A meeting of all the Peasants' Associations in the county was to be held early September, so Pin was very busy, every day going from one village to another, making a thorough investigation of each and urging a speed up of the work. The secretary of the county Party branch had told him time and again: "Look how quickly it's been done in Huailai. They've already finished two-thirds, and are getting ready to hold the over-all Peasants' Association meeting. We must remedy the cautious methods of the past and have a free hand in rousing the masses. The authorities have directed us to finish as quickly as possible. The Peiping-Suiyuan railway can't remain quiet forever. . . ." Pin had been a political worker among the youth and had come to southern Chahar three years before. Now he was taller than when he first came, grown to a considerable height, with long legs and a quick silent stride. When he would suddenly appear among the villagers they would never realise that he had been away, asking: "Old Pin! Where are you going?"

He was very good at his job. Although he had not been in any village long he was quick at solving problems. He realised

that this district had not been well equipped with cadres, many of whom were new at their jobs. He had certain misgivings about the comrades of the work teams, and often disagreed with them. Sometimes he felt they left too much land to the landlords, and then he would shout: "This won't do! At the most leave him an 'upper poor peasant'!" The work team cadres might say: "The central committee sent a telegram, instructing us to leave enlightened landlords land equal to the share of two middle peasants or even four."

Then he would grow more impatient and rub his cropped head, shaking his head repeatedly and saying: "What, two middle peasants! You're talking nonsense, comrade! Don't go taking the name of the central committee to scare people! Where did you hear that rumour — the central committee, the central committee of the Communist Party! Impossible, I'm not going to believe your rumour! I can only work according to the conditions of the people!" If anyone else demurred he would say decisively: "Never mind, if there's any mistake I'll take the blame. The one rule in land reform is to satisfy the peasants who have little or no land, to enable them to truly rise to their feet. If we can't satisfy them, what the hell is land reform for!" Sometimes a rich peasant came to make a present of land and someone might say that this rich peasant wasn't bad, they mustn't take too much for fear of frightening the middle peasants, but he would always retort: "We will take it, why not? And we'll take good land too." He was a very firm character, although this firmness did not match his youthful appearance.

Those who worked with him often joked with him and parodied his way of rubbing his head or the nape of his neck, his long thin neck projecting from a collarless shirt. They mimicked his voice which was rather impatient but at the same time firm. They imitated his laugh, his innocent laugh, his laugh of satisfaction when a problem had been solved. But no one could look down on him, not because he was a commissar but because of his understanding of the masses and being an old hand in solving problems.

His experience and skill had been acquired the hard way. When he left his work among the youth to come to southern Chahar he was still not nineteen. To begin with he did not even have a rifle, often only two hand grenades. The puppet ward chief despised him, thinking it would be easy to deal with a boy

like this, and often cross-examined him as to whether he had attended school, how many characters he knew, whether he could shoot or not. He had to learn how to deal with people, to evade snares, using all his faculties to this end. Each time before he went into a village, he had to sense the conditions there. At that time there were traps everywhere, — a heavier step, a louder cough or a sounder sleep might cost him his life. He had been here three years. At first he had worked under others, later he had been responsible himself for several villages, and then by degrees for a district. His work was to extend the Party, build up armed forces and cover the areas unreached by Communist influence. He suffered untold hardships, so much that he was reluctant to speak of the past. Several times he went without cooked food for over a month, living on raw pumpkin and raw maize. Sometimes people who worked with him were killed. At other times guerrillas who had come over from the enemy turned traitors again and tried to catch him. He had escaped over walls — if he had not had eyes like a hawk and the speed of a deer the enemy would have caught him as easily as a chicken.

Once he went to a village near a Japanese garrison. It was his first visit, and he did not know a soul in the village. He asked the way to the house of a puppet ward chief who was a big landlord. As soon as he went in he seized hold of him. Just then the enemy entered the village, looking for the ward chief. The puppet hastily took Pin to the back door and said, "You clear out. I won't hurt you!"

But Pin refused to go, saying, "I don't care if I die here. There'll be people coming to avenge me. First call your son here, and then you go. I warn you that the moment the enemy come into the courtyard I'll kill him." Then he took hold of the boy and crouched behind the window of the room, holding his rifle, waiting. The ward chief did not dare do anything. After some time he got rid of the Japanese and came back. Pin had not turned a hair, but the boy had wet the whole *kang*.

Later when this became known the people said "Hot stuff!" and all wanted to see him. If all the Eighth Route Army were so bold, why be afraid of the Japanese? China wasn't finished by a long chalk. And so amid these difficulties he learned the only thing was to struggle, only the firm could succeed. He learned how to get the upper hand of the enemy, understood still better on whom



to rely for everything, how only among the people could he find absolutely reliable friends — the poor!

From Hungku near the county of Laishui he had worked north until he came to the south bank of the lower reaches of the Sangkan. He opened up one village after another. At that time the old Third District was the scene of his greatest activity and the guerrillas of the Third District became famous. Even now the militiamen in this area were comparatively better organised, and could be responsible for their own work.

Naturally he was the first of the Eighth Route Army to come to Nuanshui. He often made his home in the row of vineyards by the mountain. On winter nights he slept in the vineyard watcher's hut or in a pit in the ground, in his left hand a frozen muffin, in his right a frozen salted turnip. He would sleep for a while then jump for a while to prevent his feet becoming frozen stiff. Then as the work in the village attained a sounder footing he often went to the mud houses in the western end. At first not many people knew him although many knew of his existence, and whenever they heard Comrade Pin had come to the village they would spontaneously keep guard for him. Later he showed himself in the village and more people came to know him. They called him Captain Pin, District Head Pin, sometimes Old Pin. Now they called him Commissar Pin. But no matter what they called him, they were all always friendly, because they had come through trouble together. It was only since his arrival that the peasants had resisted the forces of darkness and hoped for light, beginning to struggle against tyranny, and gaining victory. They saw clearly the difficulties and dangers of his work, and knew he was working for the people, that only for the sake of the poor he was taking his life in his hands and risking death. They had fought and lived through mutual help, so they had greater understanding and more feeling for each other, and in this they differed from the majority of people.

Two days before Pin had received a letter from the Secretary of the county Party branch, enclosing a report from Nuanshui. The county Secretary told him that the district had sent an intellectual who lacked experience there to do the work. Now after more than two weeks they had not started the struggle. There were also some inside problems. The comrades of the district did not know how to deal with these rather better educated people, and

hoped the county would send someone to help settle matters. They wanted him to cross the river to have a look. He knew more than anyone else about the situation there.

After receiving this letter Pin could not leave at once. He availed himself of the opportunity to make inquiries in the neighbourhood, but everybody said: "Nuanshui is getting on fine. Perhaps this year it is the best in land reform. The peasants there all go in groups to Shacheng and Tsolu to sell victory fruit. The fruit this year has grown well. Each family will be able to get several hundreds of thousands. Our Sixth District soil is rich, but we don't have a single fruit tree. There are big landlords, and when land is concentrated things should be easy to handle. But most of the land is outside the village. That makes it hard to settle accounts, and when the land is divided it may not fall to our share. . . ."

This news delighted him, so he delayed another day before crossing the river, planning to return the same evening to the Sixth District. He felt the cadres in the village were comparatively reliable and had a fairly good mass foundation. Although it was a newly liberated area they had worked there during the war against Japan building up political power in the village, and there had never been any trouble. He had no idea as he went there of the confusion the village was in, especially where the cadres were concerned. They had all kinds of talks, but these talks were merely whispering behind other people's backs, which increased the mutual suspicion and made it difficult to reach a decision. Because of this Pin's arrival was easily seen to be most timely and useful.

## CHAPTER XLIII

Pin was standing in the street looking to see if there was anyone he knew, when suddenly a man came up from behind, slapped him on the shoulder, and said laughing: "Where are your eyes since you went to work in the county! Here I've been following you all this time, and you didn't recognise me." This was the swarthy Kuo, who was carrying a rifle. He laughed cheerfully, and

went on: "Do you still travel by yourself now you're a county cadre? You should be escorted by a man with a Mauser to lend you an air." Kuo was usually too shy to speak in front of people, but he was not afraid of the young commissar, thinking his collarless shirt and shaved head a good joke.

The young commissar punched him and said! "You dog, what's the idea, frightening people like that!"

But Kuo said seriously: "I saw you a long time ago from the fields, and saw that rascal muttering away to you, so I didn't call out. Let me tell you, you can't believe what he says." Drawing close he whispered, "I'm not worrying about anything else, only that *that* wily bird may fly away."

"Old Pin! When did you get here! Why sneak in without letting anyone know? Oh! Yesterday the village was in a hubbub, you've come too late." Several people came over, and Pin greeted them.

And they said smiling: "Look how high you've rolled up your trousers. After going to the county town you still look so countrified. You must at least be able to smoke. Here, have a cigarette."

When they saw there were no outsiders, one said very softly: "Old Pin! There was a fight here yesterday. It's not settled yet. They say there'll be a meeting of the Association tonight to settle it. Do you think Liuman will win?" Not stopping to think whether Pin understood or not, he brought up their problem.

"Whether he wins or not depends on whether we dare speak or not. Old Pin! Let's go and find Yumin." Kuo hastily led the way.

Pin, standing to one side, was saying to the others: "One man's strength is small, but the strength of the group is great. One handful of wheat straw is no use, but a pile of wheat stalk is. Liuman's struck the first blow. It's for you to follow up. You elected the cadres. It was you who gave them power. If any of them don't want to work for you and won't follow your advice, you can have a new election! . . ."

Rounding the corner they came to the gate of the primary school, Old Wu rushed out, greeted him and said: "How I've been longing for you to come! You don't even wear a hat, look how sunburnt you are! Come in and have a drink." Pin went over and said something to him in a low voice which made Old Wu nod his head repeatedly; but in the presence of so many people he

made no comment. Only when Pin was going he said, "Old Pin! Take a look at the Blackboard News."

"Ho!" said one of the bystanders. "Read our Old Wu's rhymes. Every other day he has a piece in the News. It's very interesting. He knows everything that's going on in the village."

Pin went over and had a look.

More and more people gathered round. In the distance an old man was sitting at the foot of a wall, sunning himself. Kuo nudged Pin who saw it was that old religious imposter Hou, and asked, "Is he better yet?"

"Long ago. He came to the Association today to ask if we still want to deal with him or not. Says he's only got forty or fifty *mou* of land, if there isn't enough land to go round he can give a little more. The Association is urging Ching to go and ask him for the title deeds. He sits here all day long sunning himself, watching what's in the wind, while everybody laughs at him behind his back, saying 'Aren't you going to Heaven?' . . ." As Kuo was speaking, bystanders who heard started laughing. The old man pretended not to have noticed, sitting motionless there like an old monk engaged in contemplation.

Tien stuck his head out from the cooperative window. He had just returned from the orchard where everything was very quiet; there were only a dozen old men there packing the fruit which was piled on the ground into baskets. Tien had looked everywhere for helpers, doing his best to get the job finished as soon as possible. He had made time too to hurry back and write up the account for the fruit for the last two days, planning to make a report that evening at the meeting of the Peasants' Association.

"Old Tien! Who's in the co-op?" asked Kuo.

"Only me," answered Tien, and called out, "Old Pin! Come in and have some tea. I'll send someone to find them for you."

"I'll be back presently." Then Pin asked where Wen and the others were.

A child of twelve or thirteen who was standing nearby said: "I know where Yumin is. I'll take you there."

"Good. Better find Yumin first." Kuo pushed the child forward, and then pushed Pin, who said, "All right, let's go and see him first. If you've got something to do you go back." Kuo

went with him part of the way, then turned off, saying, "We have to be more careful."

Pin and the child chatted all the way. When he met people he knew on the road he greeted them, and even those he did not know all called his name. Realising he was busy, they did not stop him. After some time the two of them reached Chih's house next to Chao's. The child explained, "This is the woman chairman's house."

Kuei, wearing an old cotton jacket, was sitting on the doorstep sewing. She got up at once, and called into the house: "Lichang! Here's Old Pin from the county."

Several faces appeared behind a small pane of glass, then people could be heard jumping off the *kang* and running outside. Kuei went on: "Come in. Yumin's inside." But she herself went and stood at the courtyard gate.

They met him at the door and hurriedly pulled him inside, all saying, "Ah! You've come just in the nick of time!"

Pin saw that in addition to Yumin and Lichang there were two men he did not know well, but Lichang said: "These are two elder cousins of mine. They're both straightforward people. This is Chih, husband of the women's chairman, and this is his cousin Shou."

"Go on with your business, I'll just listen." Pin asked them to sit on the *kang* again, while he sat down by the wall.

The two men were timid by nature, and now looked even more awkward. Chih said: "This morning I told Lichang, for my wife said that we must report it. Whether it really happened or not, I can't say, only that's what he told me."

And Shou said: "Really, that's all, but it's still pretty important. I wouldn't dare add anything. But if you question Chien, don't say I told you. I heard a child in the school say it, and what children say isn't always reliable. . . ."

Pin asked: "How many sharpsters in your village?"

"I don't know," said Chih. "Everybody says eight big ones."

"Of the eight there are only a few fierce ones," said Lichang.

"Right!" And Pin went on: "Last year Hsu ran away, this spring you tackled Hou. Now Hou sits sunning himself every day in front of the stage and nobody pays any attention to him. When Li learned that his land was to be divided he ran away. Does it look as if they're afraid of us, or we're afraid of them?"

"They're scared stiff: Chen Wu of Meng Chia being killed frightened the life out of them. They're afraid of the Eighth Route Army and the Communists," said Chih.

"Aren't they afraid of you?" asked Pin.

"Afraid of us? Hoho . . . No, they're not afraid of us."

"Of course they're not afraid of any one of you, but if all the poor people in the village get together, aren't they afraid? If you don't say they're bad, how can the Eighth Route Army know? There's strength in numbers, do you understand that?"

"Yes, I understand. Only the people won't get together. Even the cadres don't get together. If you don't believe me ask Yumin. All the peasants curse the security officer for marrying that man's daughter. It's blinded him, otherwise wouldn't he be working for us instead of his father-in-law? Didn't he quarrel with Liuman yesterday just for this?" Chih brought it all out.

At once Yumin argued. "That's just the business of the security officer. Aren't we going to settle it this evening at the meeting of the Association? If you say he's wrong how can we say he's right? We're not covering up for him!"

Pin explained, "Those bad eggs aren't afraid of a few cadres, they're only afraid of the poor people uniting. Cadres can always be changed. If anybody's spineless and can't take the lead, don't have him as cadre. When the Japanese were here, we could manage to elect Chiang. How's it that our hands are tied now? Whoever serves as a running dog of the rich, we'll pull down together with the rich. If all the poor people in the village are united, there's nothing the rich people can do. The poor are masters now, if they dare speak out. Not to mention these few sharpsters, if Chiang Kai-shek came we'd tell him to get out."

The two cousins laughed again, and Chih said: "That's what Comrade Yang said too. Ah, we're so set in our ideas, it's impossible to change all at once. I keep thinking: a poor man can't afford to offend anyone. That's what my uncle says too. Actually it's my wife who's the more enlightened one. I understand all right, only I'm afraid. I'm not man enough to shoulder the responsibility."

"His uncle's Chung," put in Lichang.

"If there was someone to give the lead that would be good, don't you agree? If someone else led the way you wouldn't be afraid would you?"

"Now nobody will lead the way."

"If only the masses would rise, nobody would be afraid." Chih looked more alive. His eyes flashed and he had heightened colour.

"Why isn't there anyone? There's Liuman to begin with, those who went to get the title deeds from Chiang, those who wanted to divide up his houses and sealed up his chests—aren't they all leaders? Now all that's needed is for the group to follow up. The cadres shouldn't just make arrangements and give orders. They should play the leading role among the masses. You've had to put up with a lot in your time. Settle your scores with the landlords in front of the group, don't just rely on the old way of doing things. Are you afraid of exposing yourselves? Our work in Tsolu county since last year has suffered from this. We're always afraid of going too far. A few cadres think things over again and again, afraid they won't be able to control the situation or that the people will make mistakes, so they don't dare stir them up. This means they don't trust the people. Now the people are criticising us, and quite rightly, saying we keep fomenting and never get started. Isn't that so?"

"Yes, that's how it is. We're not clear what the higher-ups want. On the one hand we're afraid the lower-downs won't agitate and on the other they may go off the tracks. It's not that we don't understand affairs in the village, it's that we're afraid of making mistakes! Another thing, there are the comrades from the district too; everything has to be decided by them." Hearing the other's criticism, Yumin immediately became conscious that he too was lacking in courage. He had found such a simple matter so difficult.

"Don't be afraid!" said Pin, patting Chih's shoulder. "This time we're going to get started and do away once for all with those rogues. See if they can still cooperate with the Kuomintang. He who makes the first move gets the upperhand. Let's weed them out, then nobody'll be afraid."

The two cousins were so pleased they jumped up, and shouted with laughter, "How right you are! If we stand up we must stand up properly: we won't eat half-cooked rice."

"If we can't stand up properly just make greater efforts. If the food is half-cooked just add fuel to the fire. Can we afford not to rise, not to eat? Dealing with problems we've got to take a long view. Just now we're like a small tree with green branches

and green leaves, which have still to grow big, blossom and bear fruit. The rich people's sun is setting. It'll only be red a little longer. Never mind if some people are still afraid of them. The world's already a different place, and it's going to get better still. What we must do now is make everyone think back to the sufferings the rich caused us in the past, the unreasonableness and cruelty of the old feudal society. That's the only way to fight successfully. And we must think too how to make sure of keeping the rich under, so that they won't dare try to take revenge again. You go and tell people what we've been talking about, you go and reason with your uncle again."

Pin got up too, and said to Yumin: "Come on, there's not much time. Let's go and find the comrades of the work team. Difficulties should be discussed together."

Lichang and Yumin followed him out to Old Han's house. They dared not criticise Wen, only on the way told Pin how Wen failed to get on with Yang and Hu. Yang insisted on holding a meeting of the Association that night to settle the quarrel, intending to propose an attack on Chien, and had already arranged for a good many people to speak. Only Wen did not know yet. He said it was all right to hold a meeting to discover the attitude of the masses. They said he was a cultured man, not easy to get intimate with. Yumin, who felt very wronged, said Wen had believed Chang's lies about his having an affair with a loose woman, and had questioned several of the cadres about it.

## CHAPTER XLIV

Wen had spent the last few days as usual quite leisurely. He often told people that all creative work, all gems of thought, were a product of an orderly and tranquil life. He had consented to the proposal of Yang and the others to hold a meeting that evening, but knew nothing of their preparations, still confident that by his speech, his air, his status, he could beat Yang. The peasants would sympathise with him, that is to say they would sympathise with the argument that Chien was a middle peasant and an army dependent, they would sympathise with the way the cadres had dealt with the orchards and sympathise with Chang. He felt in fact that



only the weight of public opinion could stop Yang's mouth. This being so he was very optimistic, intoxicated by his own wishful thinking, and so he looked on the young commissar's visit as just so much more trouble. However he was still very pleased, believing the achievements in Nuanshui should satisfy Pin.

Wen had met Pin in the county seat, and his impression of him then was that he was young, probably like many other youngsters who had grown up in the revolutionary ranks, possessing a lovable simplicity and loyalty. They could bear hardship and were brave, but always retained a kind of countrified shyness together with a certain complacency — not that they were proud but just because they did not yet understand the wider world. Wen was very fond of such youngsters and often envied them. He would clap their shoulders and say: "You were produced from the struggle of the masses, from practical experience. You have richer knowledge than we have, we ought to learn from you." This was what he said. He did not really think such experience had much value so he could not really respect them, much less learn from them.

Now the few of them had finished talking over conditions in the village, and were discussing their next steps. First Pin made some encouraging remarks: "This time we started late in Tsolu. It was lucky you people came down to help. You're more resourceful than we are. All the people in the Sixth District praised your fruit selling. The masses spontaneously wanting to seal up a house and furniture had never happened before in Tsolu. I shall report this when I go back to the county government as an experience in giving free rein to the people."

Naturally Wen was delighted, and said without thinking: "Our meetings now are not on the old model. You always used to make preparations first and fix on definite people to speak, whereas now we let the people speak as they choose. Thus it's difficult to say beforehand which problems a meeting will clear up. The sealing up of Chiang's house was a spontaneous act of the masses. Now the masses are aroused. All we have to do is keep some restraint, and not let them go to extremes." He had completely forgotten that only the previous day he had been against sealing up the house and confiscating all movable property.

Yang and Hu did not say anything about their plans for the meeting that evening. They felt they were forced into being secretive but that their motives were good. They only asked to

review the work of the past two weeks, convinced that if they did not see eye to eye on the past and distinguish right from wrong, future matters would be difficult to deal with.

However Wen preferred to let bygones be bygones, and said magnanimously: "I don't think we need stress any differences of principle. The only real disagreements are about the order of the work. Comrade Pin has said too that everything should be in keeping with the level of political consciousness of the masses and we need not keep blindly to rules. This is very true. As for any differences between ourselves, we can talk of those later."

Pin approved of postponing the discussion too. He casually asked Yang and the others about their preparations, and was rather satisfied with what he heard. Yumin added that all the members of the Association were poor peasants, with a few middle peasants who did not have much land; only one member of each household came to meetings. In the past sometimes all the members of the Youth Association and the Women's Association had attended meetings, including all the Literacy Class, so they could not avoid having some landlords and rich peasants. But this time they'd restricted it more severely. Young men and women from landlords' or rich peasants' families were not allowed in. The people were beginning to wake up. Ever since Liuman's quarrel with Chang in the orchard, a number of peasants had felt disturbed, fearing the cadres were prejudiced, saying they had become the running dogs of the old powers. Others said what was even worse, that the Eighth Route Army wasn't really much better than the Japanese, otherwise why should those who did so well under the Japanese be on such friendly and intimate terms with the Communists. Only when these things were explained today did those peasants feel relieved and convinced that the cadres were really on the side of the poor. This cleared the way to struggle. If this had not been done, they still would be sleeping with their tails between their legs and wouldn't be able to struggle at all!

When Wen heard this he was very surprised. Without so much as looking at them he thought: "Some sense of Party discipline! And these are supposed to be Party members!" However he did not want to enter into an argument. He felt none of these problems could be settled in front of the young commissar, moreover he began to suspect that Pin and Yumin had already had a talk. "Ah! They're one clique. He's the cadre put up by him;

of course he listens to him." Thereupon he had to adopt a passive attitude, doing his best to carry out the decisions of Pin, his Party superior.

Sure enough, in a moment Pin had reached a decision: he inclined to agree with Yang. However Pin realised that it would not be proper to leave the cadres aside and not educate them. Believing that most of the cadres had been tested and were more or less sound, he called off the meeting of the Association that evening to have a meeting of Party members and cadres. Cheng would still be invited, although he had taken a rather ambiguous stand, as well as Chang even though he was working with all his might for Chien. Pin really had not yet learned how to discuss questions patiently or in detail with everyone. Past conditions of work were responsible for this, as well as the limited time he had at his disposal that day.

This decision really disappointed Wen, destroying all his previous complacency. He remained quite silent, coldly observing Yang and Hu's pleasure and Pin's youthful forcefulness. His opinion of Yumin naturally sank even lower than before.

Old Tung arrived back from Liku. He had worked under the young commissar before. He agreed entirely with his decision, and said: "I said all along if Nuanshui didn't attack Chien the work couldn't go on. He's the one the people hate most." But he added naively: "I've no brain. I can't remember clearly that book of directions Comrade Wen brought. I'm only good for a follower. I can't do anything on my own! I daren't make proposals. I'd like to go back to the guerrilla days when I dared go anywhere."

After the question was settled, the conversation became more animated. Lichang told many stories about happenings in the village, imitating White Snake and Li's wife to the life. White Snake no longer dared rouge and powder herself and had invited Lord White into a chest. If people complained of stomach-ache she would reply at once, "I'm not superstitious any more, you go and see the doctor. They bullied me into it before." . . . Li's wife spent more time than ever at the top of the street, pretending to be looking for her children. Whenever she saw the cadres coming she would go over and greet them, making eyes at them, calling Yumin and Lichang affectionately. Lichang was no relation of hers, but if she insisted on recognising a relationship he was two generations her junior.

Pin roared with laughter, and said: "Shameless dogs! That parasite Li, gambling and drinking, up to no good, has sucked the people's blood all these years. Then there's his brother Ying. Don't let either of them off! When I return to Tsolu tomorrow I'll have him sent back. Let him taste a little hardship. Yumin! You were his hired man. Why don't you go to settle scores with him — don't let him off!"

Yumin told how he had done all kinds of jobs for Li. They wanted him to empty Mrs. Li's chamber pot but Yumin said, "I'm a man after all, and I don't want to be unlucky. I'm not going to do jobs like that." The woman said: "So emptying my chamber pot is unlucky is it? I was afraid my good luck would be emptied by you that way. Let's see if you can get rich without emptying it." . . . Another time she was washing her feet inside, and called Yumin in, wanting him to pass her the soap box. She made him so angry, devil take her, that he tossed his head and walked out, saying: "I'm not a slave girl you've bought." Other things he didn't mind, but these he couldn't stomach, so he quarreled with them, and would not work for them even if it meant starving.

However later Pin explained that in newly liberated areas like this the people the masses feared most were the petty tyrants, traitors and running dogs. But it was impossible for them to gain a deep insight into the landlords' exploitation all at once. They did not see that landlords and tyrants were the same class, all partners in oppressing the people, even though they sometimes quarreled among themselves. The first step was still to weed out the sharpsters and after that go for the landlords. Only they must enlighten the masses by showing them the facts and make them recognise their own power before they could finally rid themselves of the idea that things might change again. Otherwise it would be a case of wanting to eat but not daring to.

Still Wen said nothing, thinking this was a lecture to him, and reflecting irritably: "Bah! All right, let's see how you get on. Nowadays young people are so lacking in knowledge, yet look down on everyone!"

"The work here wasn't well done in the past," continued Pin, looking at Yumin. "It wasn't your fault. I take the chief blame, also the district government didn't give constant guidance and enough help. Just think, even in the Sixth District, the peasants told me that the worst person in your village was Chien. They said

Hsu was not such a conspirator nor half so cunning as he, yet we've never attacked Chien. You told me this spring, but unfortunately I didn't go into it carefully then. I gathered several cadres for a talk, but nobody brought his name up. Somehow or other we decided on Hou and made arrangements accordingly. Hou is a bad man too, but because we didn't attack Chien the people didn't dare stand up to speak. At that meeting only a few Party members spoke, calling out slogans and raising their fists, so that things looked lively, but actually, thinking back, that was all there was to it. You're always cursing Hou for a die-hard, but the fact of the matter is we didn't do a good job. Yumin! Everything else about you is fine; you don't mind poverty, you're firmly disinterested and you can unite the cadres. You weren't timid to begin with, but in this business you've been over cautious. You ought to reflect on the cause of it! What devil's got into you! Ah! Ho! . . ."

His laughter was so frank it set a good many others laughing too and started Yumin roaring with happy laughter. Unconsciously stroking the back of his neck like Pin he said: "One reason was ideological confusion. I wasn't really thinking of the people. Fear was the first principle. I kept being afraid we wouldn't bring it off, worrying about this and that, worrying about the result if we didn't agitate successfully and failed to overthrow him. Wouldn't I be losing face for nothing, and get criticised? Bah. I really had no guts. I looked at things from a personal point of view, not taking a firm stand. It was lucky Comrade Yang kept planning things with me all the time. But frankly, I didn't mean to be what I was! Ho . . ."

Old Tung too said he had disclaimed responsibility and let things slide, giving all his attention to Liku, just because the cadres had said they'd give him three *mou* of vineyard. Oh! He really had the backward peasant mentality. . . .

Hu asked him slyly if his marriage were fixed up or not. Old Tung turned red and denied it emphatically: "How could I. That would be too much of a joke. . . ."

Amid such joking Wen relaxed a little. Hu started asking Yumin again about finding a wife. Yumin stoutly denied it, and Lichang explained that once in the past Chang had suggested introducing a widowed cousin to him, but Yumin had refused, saying he was a poor bachelor and could not support a wife. Chang

had asked Lichang to persuade him, but when Lichang spoke to Yumin the latter cursed him. He'd heard that after the woman's husband died, she had not behaved too properly. Then Chang spread rumours about him, deliberately trying to make trouble.

Hu teased him, saying that he couldn't see anything wrong about it. For it would mean getting both the woman and her property. Surely now that he was Secretary of the local Party branch he must look for a wife; he'd certainly help to find him one, and wouldn't leave the village until he'd attended the wedding.

At this the fourteen-year-old bride who was being brought up for Lichang became subject for laughter. By now the atmosphere had gradually relaxed and grown cheerful, and Wen joined in too. Pin was a youngster and a bachelor himself, but he declared boldly that once after the Chairman of a Woman's Association had held his hand, he had not slept well all night. The next day he had given her a good talking to, telling her to work hard in future and be careful what impression she made.

Just as they were talking away fourteen to the dozen, Chao and Cheng burst in. They also could not help laughing, but pressed them to go to eat. They had to put an end to the long hours of excitement and prepare the meeting for Party members that evening.

## CHAPTER XLV

Coming out of his father-in-law's house Chang planned to go to the cooperative and then to see Comrade Wen, meaning to find out what had happened since Pin's arrival. His father-in-law had said many things to him and he felt a little ill at ease. However Wen had said repeatedly that army dependents would be given special treatment. Beside Wen had come from Kalgan. He was a cadre with some background and Pin might not be a match for him. His wife followed him, urging repeatedly: "Mind you do what father says, be sure you remember! If they really mean — ai! In that case don't on any account go to my father's house again. Come straight home and tell me! There are times when one has to play safe. . . ."

By now it was dark. A new crescent moon hung in the western sky, its faint beams falling on the low wall in the east. All along the base of the wall crickets were chirruping. There was already

a feeling of autumn in the air and people no longer came out to cool off. Chang quietly told his wife not to worry, and to go home, he would be back very soon. His wife was about to say something more when someone appeared round the corner of the wall and challenged them: "Who's there?" Chang saw that it was one of the militiamen, and holding his frightened wife with one hand he called out, "Don't you know me? It's I, the security officer. Why do you shout so loudly? If there was anybody bad about he'd be frightened away."

"Oh! It's the security officer. Yumin's been looking for you for hours. He wants you to go to Old Han's house." The militiaman came nearer, still holding his rifle, and looked the woman over from head to foot.

"What's happened? Has Pin from the county left or not? Where is he?" Then he nudged his wife and said: "You go home first."

"Hey! If it isn't the security officer!" Two figures emerged from the dark. "Where have you been? We've had such a search, and all the time you've been here on guard!" These were Lichang and Kung. Chuckling they took hold of Chang and led him away.

All Chang could say was, "What's the joke, where are you taking me?"

The other two laughed again and said: "You were not going to visit relatives? What was your wife tagging along at your heels for! Aren't you afraid of being laughed at?"

Chang was uneasy, and with a feeling of foreboding asked: "So you're not holding a meeting of the Association after all. What does Pin say about our quarrel yesterday? It wasn't my fault. Everybody knows Liuman did it deliberately to make trouble!"

"Pin hasn't said anything. He's talking to Wen and the rest about what happened in Li Kung-te's family in Paihuai. They confiscated over three thousand garments, but not a single one that could be worn by ordinary people — all brightly patterned silk gowns and high-heeled shoes. And he says Li's second wife is a devil. She didn't shed a single tear, but with her head high stalked out of the northern room filled with glass-ware, to move into a room beside the kitchen, a little room where the cook used to live." Kung was still as fascinated as when he just heard the story.

"I've said all along," said Chang, "we don't have any big landlords like that, no one really worth attacking. Li is fairly well off, but we let him run away. Do you think in the meeting this evening they'll discuss our quarrel yesterday?"

Lichang did not answer, only asked, "What are you afraid of?"

"Afraid?" Chang did not like the sound of that and replied, "I'm not afraid of anything. In the first place I'm not a landlord, in the second place I'm not a traitor. It was Pin who approved me joining the Party. What can he do to me?"

There were guards too at the door of Old Han's house. Chang thought, "Surely in this land reform they're not going to make me the scapegoat. I said yesterday Chien is an army dependent, and that's true. That's what Chairman Wen said too. Last time they classified people I wasn't the one to do the classifying. I'm not afraid."

There were too many people for inside, so they were all sitting in the courtyard, where their faces could not be seen clearly because the court was too big. Although there were only about two dozen present still it seemed very lively.

Most of them had joined the Party before Liberation. They were sworn brothers, who had nothing against each other; the atmosphere in the courtyard was very harmonious. In addition to this Pin's presence made things even more gay, as if there had not been so many people together for a long time.

Only Chang looked as if he had a guilty conscience, and paying no attention to anyone he went and sat down by himself. Chao sitting next to him did not say anything either.

After Yumin had checked their numbers he opened the meeting, but all his speech was a condemnation of his own conduct. He said during the past two meetings he had not brought up Chien's name for fear it would be no use, that he was suspicious of various comrades, and although peasants often came to see him to ask what was happening and make suggestions he had not told Comrade Wen, not even trusting the cadres from the district government. He said how bad it was to try and keep everything in his own hands like this, how he had failed to work for the good of the masses. "I've worked two years for the revolution," he said, "but I'm still so short-sighted. I ought to tell the people to beat me up. I've lived twenty-eight years and worked a dozen years as a hired labourer. Other people grew up eating grain, but I ate more



husks than grain, working day and night for people like a donkey in a stable, yet not as valued as a donkey. I have been poor all along. Yet now instead of thinking for the masses, I hide things from those above and deceive those below. I'm really beneath contempt! The masses see things clearly. They know quite well if we're acting selfishly or not. If we have a boil on the back of our head we can't see it ourselves, but it's ridiculous to imagine other people can't see it. This evening we'll talk quite frankly, like cadres of two years standing, like brothers who have sworn to stand or fall together. Haven't we all been afraid of the power changing hands, afraid of offending people, anxious to compromise, taking personal feelings into consideration, held back by selfish considerations? With these faults we've forgotten ourselves. Now all this is from my heart, and if I still tell even a white lie you throw me out of the Party. I have another suggestion which is this: Let everyone say frankly what's on his mind."

During his speech the atmosphere in the courtyard became more and more solemn. Everyone felt conscience-stricken yet delighted. They wanted to say something like Yumin. But because they were taken unawares they were unprepared and did not know what to say, while Yumin's speech stirred up such wonder and admiration that many of them felt bewildered.

There was a pause during which no one spoke. The silence had become almost unendurable when swarthy Kuo jumped up and shouted in a rough voice: "Haven't we been? We all have! Every day we call on the people to arise, while we cadres just sit in the co-op drinking tea or stroll about the street. During meetings, although everyone knows who it is in our village who kills people without a knife, we just talk nonsense, all afraid because his cousin and son-in-law are cadres, and we want either not to offend him or else get some connection with him! Look, Yumin wants us to tell the truth, and nobody says anything. Yet we say we aren't acting from personal feelings. It ought to be clear to all." Having said this he walked to one side, breathing angrily.

Wenhu was a straightforward fellow. He had a mind only for his work. He had been made Chairman of the Workers' Union, but without understanding what his duties were. He was Chien's cousin, but they had never had anything to do with each other. He had never proposed attacking Chien, neither had he opposed it. He had no idea that because of him the others had not spoken out,

and this gave him a sense of injury. He was a man of few words, but now he stammered: "What d'you mean by cousin? Doesn't everyone know that no one in our family has anything to do with him? Haven't you seen how his elder brother Wenfu, that poor old bachelor who has one *mou* of vegetable garden, doesn't have anything to do with him? He never shared his money or power with anyone. In the past his friends were those people in the puppet *hsiang* government or the rich people in the village, not us poor relations. If he could have changed his name he'd have stopped calling himself Chien long ago. If you want to attack him I've nothing against it. None of us in the Chien family are against it."

"We're not asking whether you're against it or not, but whether you approve or not," said someone.

"I approve, I approve! Only one thing: I can't speak in the mass meeting. Not for any other reason, but I can't get the better of him in argument."

At that everybody laughed, and asked him what he was afraid of.

Following this several others spoke, some at considerable length, some just saying a word or two. Tien mentioned the quarrel in the orchard, saying since then he had run about all day before he was able to get a dozen people to work there. The job could not remain half done.

By this time Chang had already made up his mind. He admired his father-in-law's foresight. Evidently the sincerity of all these comrades was no match for one Chien. Not troubling himself about the rights and wrongs of the case he felt quite unmoved, the only idea in his head being to extricate himself from this predicament. Chien had ordered him, if he saw things going badly, to steer a new course. If only Chien could get by this time or go into hiding for a time, he would take his revenge some day. Chien had also told him a day would come when Yi would return to avenge him. Believing him, relying on him and at the same time fearing him, Chang linked his fate with that of his father-in-law, unconscious that he was leaning on a broken reed. After reflecting for some time and figuring out how to put things, he had a suitable opportunity to speak.

"There's not much I can say. You've all made up your minds that I'm in with Chien, otherwise I couldn't have married his

daughter!" He paused a second to see if there were any objections, but the courtyard was absolutely silent as they all listened to him. "Ever since I married his daughter you've all looked on me as an outsider. The proverb says a man doesn't tell the truth to his wife. Do you suppose I could be under the spell of a woman? Doesn't everyone take an oath on entering the Party? If you want to suspect me what can I do about it? Whenever there's any business you all talk about it behind my back. I don't know what you intend to do. I can only go by guesswork. If you say we must find someone sinister to attack in land reform, I don't disagree that he is known as the schemer. He's injured lots of people. I know all about it. In the past he had connections with the Japanese and traitors and spies. But you didn't say that. After talking backwards and forwards you only said to do away with the big feudalistic landlords, so I guessed that meant choosing whoever's land was most. Yesterday I quarreled with Liuan saying Chien was an army dependent. But that isn't something I made up. The district cadres said the same at the other day's meeting. Another thing, seems to me according to your classification of people he's out of it. I don't mind admitting I'm muddle-headed but I never forget my origin. I'd never oppose the decision of the group. I joined the revolution before Liberation too."

"Ha! How well he makes it sound!" They all thought, and were at a loss to answer.

Then Wen said, "Chang's attitude is very good. It was wrong of us to suspect him like that in the past. We can't distrust a comrade of the revolution so easily. This is a lesson for us!"

Silence followed. Chao who had just been preparing to question Chang about his activities, sighed and shifted himself, in order to move further away from him.

After a while Chang got up to ease himself outside, but Chao suddenly stopped him, and shouted to the chairman: "The meeting's not over, nobody can leave." Chang had to sit down again, muttering, "Ai! You still don't trust me."

The meeting became lively, with shouts of "Right, before the meeting's over no one must leave!" Others shouted: "Have Chien arrested!"—The rest responded: "If he's arrested, just see how keen the people will be tomorrow!" "Right, have him arrested!"

Cheng too was disgusted but could not argue with Chang. He had no courage. He often wished he were braver, but there was

always something dragging him down. He thought, "She's oppressed too, but she lives in his house. Outsiders don't realise; they just know she's his niece. Ah, I can't very well say it. Why let people trample on her? It's enough for me not to oppose attacking that old rogue." — Cheng always considered himself very just and he hated Chien, so he was very willing to attack him. But he shrank from mentioning Heini for fear of involving her, instead of realising that this would liberate her. He felt he had already wronged her and now if he mentioned her in order to clear himself it would be even more inexcusable. "Anyway if I never marry her," he thought, "the matter will clear itself up. No need to explain it."

Not until a number of people had looked at him wanting him to speak did he declare that he had designated Chien as a landlord. But then Chang had protested, saying he had already divided his property with his sons, whereupon Yumin in accordance with Chang's idea changed his category. He, Cheng, wasn't responsible for that. He believed Chien ought to be a landlord; his division of property was only a pretence.

That evening everybody was dissatisfied with him. He was Chien's old hired man and tenant, beside being Chairman of the Peasants' Association, yet his attitude was irresolute and apathetic. Someone suggested that the next day they should elect a chairman for the Association's meeting, and that no one connected with Chien should be eligible. All present agreed to this proposal — Right! Let the masses elect whom they pleased!

Pin said too this was an ideological problem, and there should be no coercion. It was no use talking well but acting badly. In the future they must judge from the facts and let deeds speak for themselves. He also spoke of the class origin of each, urging them to act as a vanguard instead of falling to the rear of the mass movement. This put each man on his mettle. Each one, conscious of his own defects, wanted to do a good job of work.

When the meeting was nearing its conclusion Kuo stood up and asked in a low voice: "Can I go first?"

"All right!" said Yumin. "You go first. Have him taken for the time being to the shed in Hsu's back courtyard. We'll put some more men on guard."

Chang gave a start, but realising it was too late to do anything, he said: "Right! First have him arrested. I'll go

myself as security officer. I'll see he's tightly tied." However the others objected saying, "Just the captain will do."

After Kuo had gone the feeling of tension still persisted. Although there was nothing more to discuss, nobody wanted to leave. They waited for a time until Kuo came back, and only then were they content to go home. All the way they could not resist discussing this happy business in loud voices, so that before the next day a number of the villagers knew what had happened that evening, and all were eager to spread the news.

## CHAPTER XLVI

Walking home with the crowd Cheng seemed unusually silent, while the others talked and joked loudly and indulged in horseplay together. Whenever anyone bumped into him he just gave way quietly. He could not explain himself. To begin with he had felt embarrassed, then wronged, and finally rather timid. It was as if he had committed some crime or injured somebody, so that he could not hold up his head. Such a feeling he had never experienced before. Listening to all that Pin said it seemed as if every sentence was addressed to him and he became conscious for the first time of his own vile conduct. Pin had seen it clearly. Cheng had been a straightforward fellow who never deceived people, but now he felt he was dishonest, he had deceived himself. He realised it had simply been a pretence when he said he would not marry Heini. It was only because he was afraid of criticism that he had forced himself to avoid her and keep her at a distance. It was only to deceive people, not because he had any hatred for her uncle, the worst man in the village, whom everyone detested. Hitherto he had always had a clear conscience, thinking he had not sided with Chien, whereas in fact he had never opposed him! For his niece's sake he had forgiven him everything! He had overlooked the injuries Chien had done to everyone in the past, had forgotten how he himself had suffered and been exploited in his house. He wanted others to go to settle accounts and ask for the title deeds, while he himself was not brave enough to settle accounts. Had he not cultivated eight *mou* of dry and two *mou* of irrigated land of his? Pin said they must not forget their

origin, but he had forgotten. In what way had he been thinking of the poor? He had been thinking only of himself, mortally afraid of offending the niece of a landlord, the niece of a rogue. He had looked down on Chang because the latter, for the sake of his wife and some small conveniences, grew every day closer to his father-in-law, drifting away from the comrades in the group who were his brothers, and from the peasants, until all the villagers despised him. But in his own case, although he had not married Chien's niece or been to their house, only secretly protecting her in his heart, it was equivalent to protecting them all, to upholding the privileges of the land-owning class — how could he claim not to have forgotten his origin or to be better in any way than Chang?

His steps grew slower and slower as these confused feelings darted through his mind, and he fell behind the crowd. A door in the lane opened with a creak, and he heard someone step outside for a moment, then go in again closing the door behind him. Listlessly Cheng gazed blankly into the darkness — what ought he to do?

Presently he reached his home which was in a courtyard where several families lived together. The door was not bolted and he walked quietly in. Everybody was asleep and he could hear snores from the northern room. The hens kept by the family opposite stirred restlessly in their small coop, and gave a few soft squawks.

A faint light showed from his room. He had forgotten that his mother was no longer at home, having gone to stay with her sister to keep her company during her lying-in. This being so he was not at all surprised by the light. Apathetically he stepped over the threshold.

A tiny point of flame hovered on the wick of the oil lamp, and the faint light seemed more gloomy than blackness. As he went in a shadow detached itself slowly from the black corner by the *kang*. He paid no attention, feeling as if this shadow had nothing to do with him. It just occurred to him to think, "Hasn't Ma gone to bed yet?" However still immersed in his own affairs he went and sat down on one end of the *kang*.

Sure enough the black shadow was a woman. She came over to him before he had lain down, and he suddenly remembered that his mother had been away for several days. Beside, this woman

did not look like his mother. Involuntarily in his surprise he asked sharply: "Who are you?"

The woman made a sudden clutch at his shoulder, and said: "It's me! Aunty."

He dropped his hand, backed up against the wall, and looked fixedly at this ghostly shadow.

She immediately gave him a cloth bundle, and in a tone meant to be kindly but actually embarrassed, wanting to laugh but unable to do so, said softly: "Here you are. It's a present from Heini. She wanted to come herself because she has something to say to you. She solemnly swears she wants to be your wife. Cheng! Don't let her down!"

He wanted to order his hand to send this woman with her bundle and her talk packing, but he did not do it. He could not raise his hand. Guilt and shame pinned it down. He wanted to curse her, but his tongue was numb as if he had taken some strange drug.

"Her uncle will do anything for her," the old woman went on. "You can have her, you can have the land, eighteen *mou* altogether including the vegetable garden. Cheng! Our Heini's counting on you!"

Shivers swept through his whole body. Cheng felt there were countless eyes in the ceiling and in the cracks of the wall smiling sarcastically at him.

Chien's wife thrust her face closer to his, her mouth by his ear, and said distinctly: "Her uncle says we mustn't put you in an awkward position. You're Chairman of the Peasants' Association. Of course you have to say things. Just so long as you understand at heart. Well, after all we're one family! . . ." She squawked like an egret and laughed with appalling shamelessness.

Cheng could stand it no longer. He shook himself, as if using all his might to dislodge a heavy load from his back. An unpleasant sound burst from his throat: "Go away! Get out of here!"

Shaken by his tone the old woman recoiled a step. She moved her lips, but for the moment could not speak.

Picking up the cloth bundle he threw it over, his sense of insult increasing his fury, and shouted: "I don't give a damn for your few *mou* of stinking land. You've come to buy me, but it's no use! Take it back. A day will come when we'll settle accounts."

She seemed to roll outside with the bundle that had been thrown down, her small feet scarcely touching the ground, as she rocked from side to side. Regaining her balance with difficulty, she clutched the door post with one hand and paused, panting, then darted forward again, saying tremulously: "Our Heini . . ."

"Don't you use that name again. I don't want to hear it!" Cheng jumped down suddenly to confront her furiously. Fearing he would strike her she lowered her head but dared not shout out.

The feeble rays of the light lit up her fearful expression, her hair dishevelled, her wild eyes staring wide, her lips awry disclosing the yellow teeth. Cheng tasted the gratification of revenge. With a ghastly smile he said: "Are you still not going? Your old man has already been arrested and shut up in Hsu's backyard. You'd better go home to cry. Get some wood ready for the coffin."

The shadow contracted, receding slowly from him as she retreated into the courtyard. He followed her to the gate where she suddenly came forward again to look at him, then burst out wailing and rushed outside. The sound of her cries gradually died away in the darkness.

Cheng felt as if he had suddenly woken up from a bad dream or as if he were standing on a wild plain. Shaking his head he walked slowly back into the courtyard, looking up at the autumn sky where the stars were twinkling quietly. No more snores were coming from the northern room. The lively chirrups of insects could be heard from the four corners of the wall, while the fowl in the hen coop opposite shook and stretched their wings in the dark narrow coop, and crowed stridently.

"Don't fall behind the mass movement. Don't fall behind the masses. Don't forget your own origin." These words started milling through his head again. But he no longer felt distressed by the invisible bonds that had bound him. He shook himself and went, relaxed and with a light heart, into the house.

## CHAPTER XLVII

People from different families called on each other, old men sought out their cronies, youngsters their pals, women other women. When people saw each other they exchanged significant glances,



then put their heads together. They told each other of what had happened, first speaking rather sceptically or even in a shocked tone, and after questioning each other they would go to ask those who were close to the cadres, or the militia, while some of them went to see the cadres. The news was confirmed, but it grew in the telling. Some people said that by the time Kuo went to look for Chien he was not to be found, and finally was dragged out from under the hay in the stable. Others said that he was lying on the *kang* and on Kuo's arrival all he said was, "So you've come. I've been expecting this a long time." Still others said the militia dared not lift their hands against him, and it was Kuo who tied him up. Others again said that before leaving he put on a new pair of foreign socks as well as a green woollen gown, saying it was cold in the middle of the night. Oho! Maybe it was because he was afraid he would have no decent clothes to die in.

Old women were still sitting on the end of the *kang* cooking breakfast, but the young people had lost interest even in food. Group after group made its way to Hsu's gate to have a look. A militiaman on guard at the gate forbade them to go in, but they said they were looking for someone and forced their way in. Pushing their way among the families who lived there they questioned them, but they said they had seen nothing. All they knew was that while it was still dark there had been a commotion, and he was shut up in a comparatively remote and small courtyard at the back. There was just a big room for firewood there. Now there was no firewood left, only an earthen *kang* and some broken boards. When they still wanted to go in and look they found the gate to the small courtyard firmly fastened. There were militiamen within and without, so they had to leave. But some of them thought they could see Chien through a crack in the door, fanning himself most unconcernedly.

Those in the know said: "Yesterday Pin from the county government arrived. He may look soft, but after all he did grow up with a gun in his hand. He's knocked around our district for quite a time, and been through a lot. In a business like this it's no use being cultured and refined."

The streets were filled with people as if it were market day. There was a crowd in front of the Blackboard News, the people in front reading and the ones at the back listening, all of them smiling. Others stood in front of the wooden sales window of the cooperative and craned their necks to look inside, and when they saw cadres

moving about inside they strained their ears to hear what was being said.

Sheng's mother could not be bothered to cook. She fastened up her skimpy hair and went out on the street. Her daughter kept coming out to call her home, but she refused to go. Whenever anyone crossed the road she would ask: "Do you know someone was arrested in our village last night?"

Everybody knew she was a gossip, and did not pay much attention, giving a careless answer and passing on. But some, because they were in a good humour, forgot her temper. Then she dashed forward and said: "Ah! At long last the sky is clear! If our village doesn't overthrow that flagpole, no matter how capable and just the Communists are the sun won't reach us. In the old days Sheng's *Dyeh* when he had a little spare time in winter would sometimes sell peanut cakes, but Chien said we had earned money and didn't give him presents and at New Year confiscated his basket. There was nothing my man could do except give him ten catties of peanuts and a catty of sugar. But that brought shame on Chien and he threw all the presents on the ground. He said we had taken him wrong and insisted we had broken the law, wanting to send my husband to be tried in the *hsiang* court. My husband was a simple fellow. He didn't know what to do, and after kotowing and paying him money he got off being sent. Later Chien wanted to send my Sheng to Hungshan as a coolie. Everybody knew that people who went to Hungshan never came back, so then we had to sell a pig. Ah! I mean to get that pig back. It was at least seventy or eighty catties. . . ."

Enthusiasts like Fukuei, Hsin and Chung's son Ching all crowded into the cooperative, hurrying behind Yumin, Lichang and the others to Old Han's house, wanting to find the members of the work team to get more information from them.

There seemed to be an unending stream of militiamen too, sometimes several running in a row as if something tremendous had happened. But if questioned they maintained a wooden silence.

Hou came out too and sat down stealthily as usual at the foot of the wall. Since it was still early and the sun had only reached the top of the wall he was wearing a lined jacket. As he pretended to be sunning himself he took advantage of the times they overlooked him to try to catch a few sentences to file in his mind for further consideration. Ching would keep on walking that way, each

time wearing a look of complacency, sometimes saying loudly to bystanders: "We must clean them up!"

Chung who only yesterday had locked his son in the house had heard the shepherd's wife gossiping as soon as it was light. Since he usually despised the woman, thinking her a gossip and busybody, he went out at once. However he still could not help hearing what they were talking about and had to go on listening, standing outside the window playing with some thread hanging on the porch, unwilling to leave. He could not believe his ears. After the shepherd's wife had left, his wife went out in high spirits as if she were going to the fair. His son and daughter were out. He could not resist standing in the doorway looking out, and presently his nephew Chih came over and said: "Uncle! Seems to me that calendar of yours is out of date. Now we've really changed dynasties."

"What? Really?" was all he said.

"Yes, he's been arrested, everybody's asked to accuse him!"

"What should his punishment be?"

"I should say death!"

The old man said nothing. He could not overcome a feeling of panic, anxious as a boatman who suddenly sees a storm approaching. At the same time he felt happy, but this happiness could only be hidden deep in his heart. It was as if he had suddenly seen something he dared not hope for even in his dreams realised, already at hand, but he still wanted to conceal his feelings. He dared not stretch out his hand for fear of frightening it away, for fear that the actuality would once more change into an illusion. He could only ask himself sceptically again, "How did it happen? Can it be true?" However finally he gave himself a satisfactory answer — bad people must always come to a bad end; men reap what they sow! At last he had to go out too, walking to the main street pretending he was not looking for news. He headed for where the crowd was thickest, and presently arrived at the front of the stage. Seeing that there were too many people he turned round and withdrew to one side to strike his flint. But while he was striking it he saw Hou sitting like an old beggar at the corner of the wall just looking furtively at him. He felt as if he had been whipped. That stealthy glance of reproach made him hang his head, and immediately letting his hands fall he hurried off with bent back.

The school children were not having lessons either, but standing and looking out from the school gate. Some people rushed into the

school, but finding nothing came out again, followed by others. The two teachers were both busy, hurrying in and out. Some people seized Jen to question him. Jen was completely panic-stricken and wanted to go home, but dared not because there were so many militiamen about. He tried to deceive himself: "What are you afraid of? You're not a landlord or a traitor or a spy. You don't even belong to the village. Just teaching how can you go wrong? Don't be afraid. That damn Chien has been arrested, and it serves him right. What's it got to do with you?" Still he could not allay his fears. Why had Pin told him to wait for him yesterday? What the devil did he want to see him about? It couldn't be anything good now! There was no way for him to leave the village. Old Wu, as if he knew what was in his mind, was always at his heels. Wherever he went he could see that red nose glistening.

Finally Pin appeared, still wearing the same collarless shirt, bareheaded, without socks on, his shoes tied with string. His shirt was thin, and a bulge showed at his waist with a piece of blue silk visible at the bottom. People crowded round him, all talking at once, so that he didn't know whom to listen to.

"Pin! Don't go till you've cleared up our village."

"What are you going to do with Chien?"

"When's the trial going to be?"

"Should've been arrested long ago."

"Ah, before he was arrested who dared to say anything?"

"This time Chairman Mao's answered our wishes. . . ."

Seeing how happy they all were Pin could not help laughing with pleasure. Rubbing his neck repeatedly he said: "You see who's stronger after all. The people can do whatever they want, only now the thing is to get everyone to unite closely. Only by uniting closely can the old powers be overthrown and we stand on our own feet! The foremost sharpster in your village has already been arrested. Those with grievances should speak up, those who want vengeance state their cases. Now that the Number One Sharpster's overthrown there's no need to be afraid. You can say what you like. Bring your charges against him so that we can deal with him. We in the county are behind you. With our backing don't be afraid! Ho . . ."

A crowd surrounded the school when Pin went there. Yumin followed him in, and a militiaman stood guard at the door. Some people guessed what was happening while some were in the dark, but they all waited outside to see. They saw Old Wu hurry to and





**KU YUAN: We Are the Masters of the Factories**



fro. Presently Mr. Liu came over too and looked outside without saying anything. Soon Pin and Yumin came out with the school teacher Jen at their side carrying a roll of bedding on his back, mumbling incoherently. Seeing all the people outside Pin said to the militiaman: "You escort Mr. Jen some of the way. Walk slowly, I'll catch you up presently."

Trying to look unconcerned Jen walked out. Some villagers followed him out of curiosity, but turned back after a short distance.

Someone in the crowd said: "I said long ago that fellow was no good. All the time sneakily making up to the rich. Wonder what he was up to?"

"Is he being taken to the county?" asked another.

"What's your opinion of him?" asked Pin, smiling.

"Who doesn't know?" they all said. "He's drunk so much ink he's turned black."

"He's young! We must try to reform him and he'll be all right. I'm going to take him back to the county to join the teachers' training class. When his mind's been remoulded you shall have him back. This way he won't spoil your children!" Having said this Pin walked out.

"That's fair enough," said the crowd. "Have him well taught."

They caught up and said: "Pin, are you going? If you go how shall we manage?"

"I'll be back in a couple of days," said Pin as he walked on. "I have things to attend to. Comrade Wen and the others are here. If you've any ideas go and see them. Or see Yumin."

Yumin escorted Pin right out of the village during which time they had another long talk. By the village gate Pin said: "You go back. Consult the people's opinion in everything, and things will be easy. Look how things are this morning — everybody's bold, no need to fear they won't attack. Only — well —" He paused for a minute, but did not finish the sentence.

Yumin looked at him and he looked at Yumin, both realising what the problem was, and after a long interval Pin had to say: "Whatever happens don't let him be killed."

"In that case we'd better hand him over to you."

Pin started thinking hard again. He could not think of a good solution. He was used to working in villages and understood the psychology of peasants: either don't attack or attack to kill. They did not like going through legal procedure, fearing that if they did

so someone they thought deserved death might only be imprisoned. They often felt the Eighth Route Army was too lenient. They were not yet able to take a longer view, but clamoured for revenge, for a clean sweep. The peasants in some villages just killed their hated oppressors under a rain of fists. The district and village cadres all put the blame on the masses, but there were so many people it was impossible to say who was responsible. Pin knew too that the village cadres, just like the masses, worried lest the tables be turned in future, and were therefore eager to do the job thoroughly. To persuade so many people at short notice was far from easy.

"No need to hand him over to us. The county government can't settle so many cases all at once. Better settle it in the village."

"Uh huh." Yumin realised the difficulty too. He was rather at a loss and said: "You understand the whole situation, don't you? Whether the people will be enthusiastic or not depends entirely on this."

"Is that the way you feel too?" asked Pin.

"Most of the cadres feel that way."

"That means you fear the reactionaries may come back. We ought to correct that outlook. Killing people at will isn't good. We can collect statements of his crimes to give the law court. Execution ought to be legally carried out. In agitating nowadays we defeat landlords on political grounds, wanting them to bow to the people, not necessarily wanting to destroy them. You'll have to talk them round."

"Um." Yumin had to agree.

"See how you get on, and after I've reported the situation at the county government we'll all discuss it again. If the people really want him killed, and his crimes deserve death, then we'll send people over. I can't settle the matter by myself, you know that. . . . Listen, the gong's being sounded. We'll leave it at that for the time being. You must organise the people to be thorough, but have him kept alive. During the struggle we want to see the united strength of the masses, and do away with that fear that the reactionaries may return."

By the time Yumin was back in the village Old Wu had already sounded the gong down to the south street. The gong was unusually loud, and many people were following him, shouting. All one could hear was "Dong . . . dong, dong." When the gong stopped, his hoarse voice started chanting cheerfully: "The Demon's caught



alive. We're happy as at New Year! Hurry to the meeting. Make your charges so we can stand up!"

## CHAPTER XLVIII

People surged into Hsu's courtyard like a tide. The earliest arrivals picked good places to stand, but the late comers pushed them aside. They surged this way and that. People were lost in the crowd, and did not know whether the cadres had arrived or not. The militia were unable to keep order. They went several times for advice to Kuo, and he said: "The Peasants' Association can't have so many members. We usually only get about a hundred people at a meeting." He stood on the steps and shouted: "Those who don't belong to the Peasants' Association go away! This is a meeting for members of the Peasants' Association." But still more people came in while no one went out. Then Kuo went to ask the advice of the Peasants' Association and Pukao the organiser said: "This puts us in a fix! At previous meetings just one person came from each family, sometimes the father, sometimes the son. Sometimes they even sent the mother or daughter-in-law. But who should it be today?"

Kuo with his hot temper flared up, and shouted: "You're in charge of organisation! Yet you don't even have a list of your members!"

"Who says I haven't!" Pukao was worked up too. "Only the head of the family appears on the list, but at meetings they ignore the list. If the old man's ill his son represents him, and you can't forbid it; while if the son's out the father comes. It's better to have someone than no one at all. But now they've all come! Which ones can you send away?"

"Devil take it!" Kuo grew even angrier. "You manage things so sloppily, I don't know what you think you're doing. How do you expect us to keep order?"

"Why can't you let them all in?" someone asked.

"If they all come in, they'll burst the house!" growled Kuo.

Seeing them quarrel people quietly pushed further in.

In one corner Lichang started to lead some youngsters in singing. The volume of their voices grew, more and more people join-

ing in, and the sound of the quarrel was drowned out. They moved aside and were at once swallowed up in the crowd. The only sound to be heard in the whole courtyard was the roar of the song: "Unite together — hey! Tillers of the land! . . . Landlords have oppressed us, oppressed us all these years. . . . Now we . . . settle our old scores!"

More and more people filled the porch to overflowing, blocking the doorway. A few small groups out in the road tried to push their way in. They were blocked and withdrew, but after a while came again shouting: "We're members of the Peasants' Association. Why can't we go in?"

Kung looked for Chao, Chao looked for Yumin, Yumin looked for the comrades of the work team. They squeezed in and out of the crowd, but no sooner caught sight of the one they were looking for than he disappeared again. The work team cadres said they wanted to talk things over with the others, whereupon Yumin again looked for Chao, Chao for Kung and Kung for someone else. Hey! Everybody had agreed to assemble in one place, but it was damned difficult to find anyone, although not a soul had left the courtyard!

The singing was a confounded nuisance. There was such a din you couldn't make yourself heard when you called out somebody's name. Yet if they didn't sing the crowd would probably make even more noise.

When the few of them managed to squeeze together to talk things over they found no place to go to, and Yumin took them into a side room. There was an old woman there, a toothless, deaf old crone who could hardly walk, but her face was pressed to the glass window, and she was chuckling gleefully looking at the masses outside, tears standing in her eyes. When the men burst in she was taken aback for a moment, then suddenly seemed to catch on, crawled over from the other end of the *kang*, shaking her head again and again, holding up her hand and opening her mouth, but instead of saying anything she just laughed, laughed and laughed until tears suddenly started pouring down her cheeks. Hu who was standing by the *kang* hurried over to put an arm round her, and she leant on his shoulder where she started sobbing like a child. Hu patted her and after she'd cried for some time she raised her head to look at them all, wiped her tears with one hand, leaning against the wall with the other, then crawled back to the corner of the *kang*. Once more she flattened her face against the window pane.

They all crowded into a corner of the room to talk, and Wen said: "Things are too out of hand, things are too out of hand!"

"It's all the fault of the Peasants' Association," said Kuo. "They don't even know who their members are."

"The people want to attend the meeting, let them all come. Why shouldn't the Peasants' Association meeting be changed into a mass meeting?" suggested Old Tung.

"Bah!" said Chao. "Yesterday evening why didn't we decide to hold a big meeting? Bah! Now we've gone and changed again."

"It doesn't matter changing," said Yang. "Yesterday we didn't foresee things clearly enough, and there were reasons for calling a Peasants' Association meeting. Since there are so many people, we can make a last moment change. We may as well go to the stage."

"Right, let's go to the stage. Ha, if we hadn't arrested Chien the people would never have come like this."

"No one else would have done."

"No more empty talk. Get Old Wu to sound the gong once more. There are still some people who haven't joined the Peasants' Association. Let them all come."

"Wait a moment, Yumin. Some things will have to be arranged all over again. Let's discuss that." Yang pulled Yumin back into the room. The others saying "Right! Right!" hurried out. The courtyard was still a babel of sound.

Very soon Old Wu appeared on the steps. He sounded the gong lustily and the singing stopped, while everybody quietened down. Then he bawled out: "This courtyard's too small. We're going to hold a mass meeting by the stage!" But before he had finished, pandemonium broke out again. Everybody pushed toward the gate, jostling each other to crowd through, and shouting. Women and children kept calling out shrilly as they were jammed.

Without knowing what it was all about the villagers outside followed the stream. As if a fire had broken out, nothing could be heard but the tramp of feet.

Presently they were gathered before the stage. There was more space here, no need to fight for room or jostle each other. Some people moved away to the foot of the wall to sit on the stone benches or wooden boards, talking in twos and threes.

In the meantime Hou had appeared and slunk into his old place. The people sitting nearby, as soon as they saw him, moved further away.

At the same time Old Wu could be heard in another lane, beating the gong and calling out: "Women and children, old and young! Come to the meeting, everyone come! Come to the stage, settle old scores! The tillers will have their land!"

## CHAPTER XLIX

Old Wu hurried along highways and byways, from this lane, to that. A good many people were already standing at the cross-roads, and when they saw others going from the lanes to the main street and thence to the stage, they followed suit. Some of them were comparatively smartly dressed, and wore a most anxious expression, while here and there were one or two merchants wearing straw hats like the local gentry, who mixed in with the crowd, cracking jokes. There were women too who had powdered themselves, with glossy hair, and close fitting gowns, who walked in twos and threes, swaying their hips, to stand in a group at the back. There were also some poor old gaffers and gammers who had been left at home, but who locked their doors now and came out, as well as some women who really had so many children they could not get away; yet now came out carrying one and leading another, making their way as best they could. People started asking: "Why doesn't the meeting start?"

Standing in the middle of the stage, Yumin directed operations: "Women to the right. Will you people please make way. When you're in place, don't move. You by the wall, come over here."

The crowd did as they were told, but as soon as they were in position they turned round again and some started moving back. Then the primary school students marched out to attend the meeting, with Mr. Liu at their head, singing. The children behaved as if they were in a sports' contest, intense and in the highest spirits, singing with all their might: "Without the Communist Party there would be no China." The strains echoed to the sky. Yumin hurried to greet them and had a corner cleared for them in front of the stage; their procession came in through the crowd, and everyone made way for them naturally. Mr. Liu had his work cut out to get them arranged in order, and told them to stop singing.

In the crowd people started whispering: "Has the accused arrived or not?"

"No. He's still locked up."

"Look at that old Hou."

Chien's wife was standing behind the stage too, with her back to it, and kept wiping her tears with her dress, snivelling. She had just taken her husband food, and whenever she saw any of the cadres she kotowed to them, and said sobbingly: "What harm has he done you since you became cadres? Have a heart. Remember our Yi's with the Eighth Route Army."

Someone threatened her: "If you don't keep quiet, we'll have you tied up." But still she would not go.

Someone shouted: "Start the meeting!"

"Yes, start the meeting!" Yumin jumped up again onto the stage. With his shirt unbuttoned and opened, he looked at the crowd and waited for them to be silent.

Lichang blew on a whistle.

Yumin announced: "Our village has been agitating for land reform now for more than ten days. We want to stand on our feet, but it isn't easy. There are lots of landlords in our village who exploited and oppressed us. Today let's catch the sharpsters. Yesterday evening we arrested the notorious chief sharpster, whose nickname is the 'schemer'."

The people started clapping and calling out: "Well done! Beat the dog!"

"Another thing," Yumin went on: "that rascal Chang, our security officer, didn't stand up for the people but for his father-in-law, sabotaging our land reform. The county government has removed him from his job. In the future we'll have to keep an eye on him. . . ."

There was more clapping. People in the crowd said to each other: "Serves him right." And someone shouted: "Beat the traitor!" "Have all those collaborators tied up!"

"Our meeting today is to settle scores with Chien," continued Yumin. "Let's add up the score first, and when it's about complete we'll read it out in his presence another day. We peasants are in charge of the meeting ourselves; we elect the people to be chairmen. What do you say?"

"Fine!" "Yumin!" "Or the Peasants' Association!" Different cries were heard.

"Let it be the people. You choose yourselves. Choose a few people you can trust," said Old Tung, who was standing behind Yumin.

"All right, then we'll choose some; I propose Fukuei." This was young Hsin speaking.

"Do you agree to Fukuei or not?"

"Yes. And I propose Uncle Paotang."

"Uncle Paotang, right."

"I propose Yumin too. Without him we won't get anywhere. What do you all say to that?"

"Right, we want him." "Those in favour, raise your hands!"  
"Ha . . . ."

People pushed Fukuei and Paotang up from the crowd. Paotang just laughed. Fukuei felt awkward too, and looked as sheepish as a bridegroom.

Yumin pulled Paotang to the centre of the stage and conferred with him for a minute. Then the old man put on a serious expression, stepped forward and started speaking: "I'm a poor man," he said. "I've looked after the orchards these scores of years, but I don't own a single tree. I'm sixty-one this year, and about as withered as the autumn leaves that fall to the ground. Even in my dreams I never imagined a day like this, when I'd be chairman! Well! I'm happy, I'm the poor people's chairman. Today let's attack Chien properly. Now is the time for revenge, for righting wrongs, or paying debts, or taking a life for a life. My outlook's quite simple, I'm a poor man. I've finished what I want to say as chairman, the rest of you speak now."

Nobody laughed at him, they were all satisfied with such a chairman.

A great many people wanted to speak, and the chairman told them to take their turn. But each speaking in turn, nobody could say very much. After a few sentences each one stopped. When the crowd shouted their feeling ran very high, but after one or two people had spoken incoherently the atmosphere of the meeting relaxed. Lichang therefore shouted slogans at the top of his voice, but irrelevant slogans seemed beside the point. Liuman was worked up to fever pitch. He jumped on to the platform, staring, raising his fists and shouted, "Do you want me to speak?"

"Liuman! Liuman! Speak out! You talk well!"

"If you want me to speak, I must ask the cadres whether I'll be punished for what I say?"

"Go on, Liuman! No one'll punish you! Who dares to punish you! We want to see what there is in you. We're counting on you to give us a lead!" Yumin reassured him with a smile.

"Who dares to punish you! Go on! Liuman! You did a good day's work when you beat that dog of a security officer!" Someone in the crowd encouraged him.

"Talk about Chien's business," Yumin reminded him.

Liuman looked round at them all with eyes that were blood-shot for lack of sleep. He beat his chest, and said: "I've a big score to settle. I'm going to start at the beginning. Some of you know my story, others don't. Ah! But how can you understand my resentment this last dozen years. I have grown big by stuffing myself with injustice." He slapped his chest, to show how full it was of resentment. "My father had four sons. We were all good workers, and judging by our strength we ought to have managed pretty well. Before the war against Japan we saved over two hundred dollars. My father wanted to invest in a little property, and as ill luck would have it hit on Chien, who told him he could make a good profit out of a mill. He persuaded him to start a mill and helped him rent a building for it, also invited a friend of his to come as assistant. Since it was someone from another village, my father wasn't pleased, but he agreed anyhow. That friend started looking after the business in the mill, but in less than two months he made off, taking with him a couple of donkeys and over a thousand catties of wheat. My father asked Chien about it, and Chien sympathised with him, cursing his friend for involving him. He took my father with him to Tsolu county to take the matter to court. The case was won, but I can tell you nobody should try any lawsuit. We kept putting in more and more money, but still no judgment was handed down. My father fell ill with anger, and the next year he died. The four of us killed a hen and took an oath at New Year that we'd be revenged. Ah! Before we'd done anything my eldest brother was suddenly dragged off to join the army! Goes without saying someone was behind that dirty business! As soon as my eldest brother left, the Japanese arrived. He was swallowed up like a pebble in the ocean, and year after year went by without any news from him. His wife couldn't stick it, and married again. She left a little girl, who's still with me."

"That's true enough," said people in the crowd.

"The second year the Japanese were here," went on Liuman, "Chien came to see my second brother. He said he felt he'd let our father down, that he felt bad about the money we'd lost over the mill. Chien said he wanted to help us, and advised my brother to become ward chief, saying that way he could get a little of the money back. My second brother didn't want to. He was a straightforward fellow and was needed on the farm. Beside he wasn't a man of the world. We all hated Chien, and my brother wouldn't take on the job. We refused Chien and he left, but couple of weeks later an order came from the *hsiang* government appointing my second brother ward chief. There was nothing he could do about it, he couldn't get out of it. The *hsiang* government would ask for money one day, for grain the next, for porters the day after, and groups of spies and traitors kept coming to the village who cursed and beat him for not looking after them properly. If ever my brother didn't send Chien the money he extorted from the people, Chien was ready to say he was disloyal to the Mikado's army, and threaten to send him to the barracks. My brother acted as ward chief for three months, and if he hadn't fallen ill he wouldn't have got out of it even then. Brother! Come up here and let them see what you're like! — Come on, Brother! . . ."

His voice broke, and died away. Unable to speak he just beat his breast.

The people below stirred as Liuchien was found and sent up to the stage. He wore an idiotic smile. They passed him from hand to hand, till he reached the foot of the stage, when Fukuei hurriedly helped him up. The mad ex-ward chief did not understand what it was all about. He blinked stupidly round. His hair was several inches long, matted all over his head, his face was dirty and streaked with mud, his great eyes were sunken, and the whites kept showing: children meeting him at dusk would cry for fright.

Not a word was said by the crowd, only the old people sighed.

Suddenly Liuman raised his hands and shouted, "I want vengeance!"

"Vengeance!" followed a thunderous roar. Fists were shaken.

Lichang led them all in shouting: "Chien is a scheming murdering devil." The crowd shouted with all their might after him. The women put all their strength into shouting, no longer needing to be urged by Kuei.



"I've a score to settle with Chien too." Young Hsin jumped on to the stage too. A few days had changed him, as if he had suddenly aged several years. He was no longer scatterbrained but had confidence, and took this struggle for granted as if it were the only thing to do. He had grown more and more enthusiastic, and when he saw people still sitting on the fence or sighing, he flared up. The youngster was full of confidence and hope. He described how in the past when Liuchien was ward chief, Chien had secretly pulled strings to have him arrested and sent to the Youth Corps. From the stage he asked his father if he wanted Chien to return their house or not. His father answered, "He must return it!" Thereupon the crowd roared out: "Chien arrests people for nothing, and steals their houses and their grain!"

Then an old man emerged from the crowd, pushed up to the stage by others. He could not say a word, but simply looked at everyone. They all knew his son had been sent to Hungshan to do hard labour and never returned. After looking round for some time, he suddenly started crying. Everybody urged him: "Speak out! Don't be afraid!" But although he opened his mouth, he could not speak, and started crying again. Then the crowd became quiet; only sighs were heard in the stillness.

After this one after another went up, and after each had spoken the crowd gave a great roar. The more people spoke the angrier they grew. Some speakers were so enraged that after a few sentences the words stuck in their throats, and they had to stand aside for a moment and recover their breath before going on.

Wen and the other members of the work team had never seen anything like this before. They could not help feeling excited and upset. Old Tung in particular kept pacing up and down, saying: "Oh! This time the people have stood up!" And from time to time Hu would say to the presidium: "What do you think of this? Have you ever seen the like before?"

"Never!" Old Paotang answered. "Today we've turned the tables. We're not afraid of anything, we don't care about anything! Well, let them all speak, get everything off their chests! When we deal with Li I'm going to speak too, see if I don't, and I'm going to start from his grandfather's time."

They felt the opportunity was not to be wasted, and discussed taking advantage of the occasion to have Chien brought out. It

would not matter extending the meeting — in a meeting like this the people would not feel tired.

When Paotang proposed this to the crowd, there was not one dissenting voice. So he immediately ordered Chien to be brought. Kuo himself took several of the militiamen to fetch him.

No more people spoke on the stage, only a few people below whispered together. Some children left the meeting to go to the top of the lane and wait there.

Soon after a tall hat made of white paper was brought over, on it written "Stamp out the feudal power."

The militia were drawn up in excellent order, standing in lines in front and behind the stage, holding their rifles sternly and resolutely.

The people crowded round, looking at the hat and at the militia. These were all their own men, but how dashing they looked.

So they waited for their enemy to come.

## CHAPTER L

When they heard the footsteps of the children who had followed the militia out, the men on the stage glanced at each other, all knowing what it meant. The crowd stood still, craning their necks for a sight. The militia looked even sterner, and stopped talking. Yumin, Paotang and Fukuei posted themselves in the middle of the stage, and Lichang started shouting slogans: "Down with the local despots!" "Down with feudal landlords!" The crowd shouted too, at the same time pressing forward, watching and waiting in an agony of impatience, so that when they were not shouting slogans they were absolutely still.

With a smart movement the militia obeyed the order to cock their rifles, and the crowd's tension increased even more. Then three or four militiamen took Chien up to the platform. He was wearing a lined gown of grey silk and white trousers, his hands tied behind him. His head was slightly lowered, and his small beady eyes were screwed up, searching the crowd. Those reptilian eyes of his which used to strike fear into people's hearts still cast a blight and quelled many of those present. His pointed moustaches made him look more sinister. Nobody said a word.

Members of the presidium looked at each other anxiously. Old Tung and other members of the work team exchanged anxious glances too, and looked expectantly at Lichang, who in turn was looking expectantly at the members of the presidium who were looking at the crowd. The crowd was looking at Chien, and still not a word was said.

For thousands of years the local despots had had power. They had oppressed generation after generation of peasants, and the peasants had bowed their necks under their yoke. Now abruptly they were confronted with this power standing before them with bound hands, and they felt bewildered, at a loss. Some who were particularly intimidated by his malevolent look recalled the days when they could only submit, and now, exposed to this blast, wavered again. So for the time being they were silent.

All this time Chien, standing on the stage gnawing his lips, was glancing round, wanting to quell these yokels, unwilling to admit defeat. For a moment he really had the mastery. He and his many years of power had become so firmly established in the village it was difficult for anyone to dislodge him. People hated him, and they had just been cursing him; but now that he stood before them they held their breath and faltered. It was like the pause before two game cocks start fighting, each estimating the other's strength. The longer the silence lasted the greater Chien's power became, until it looked as if he were going to win.

At this point a man suddenly leapt out from the crowd. He had thick eyebrows and sparkling eyes. Rushing up to Chien he cursed him: "You murderer! You trampled our village under your feet! You killed people from behind the scenes for money. Today we're going to settle all old scores, and do a thorough job of it. Do you hear that? Do you still want to frighten people? It's no use! There's no place for you to stand on this stage! Kneel down! Kneel to all the villagers!" He pushed Chien hard, while the crowd echoed: "Kneel down! Kneel down!" The militiamen held him, so that he knelt down properly.

Then the masses' rage swelled, they tasted power and their indignation waxed. A child's voice was heard: "Put on the hat! Make him wear the hat!"

Fukuei jumped forward and asked: "Who'll put it on? Whoever'll put it on, come up here!"

While the crowd was shouting, "Make him wear the hat! Put on the hat!" a boy of thirteen or fourteen jumped up, lifted the hat and set it on Chien's head, at the same time spitting at him and cursing: "Here you are, Chien!" Then he jumped down, while people laughed.

By now Chien had lowered his head completely, his malevolent eyes could no longer sweep their faces. The tall paper hat made him look like a clown. Bent basely from the waist, screwing up his eyes, he had lost all his power, had become the people's prisoner, a criminal against the masses.

The man who had cursed Chien turned now to face the crowd, and they all saw that it was Cheng, the Chairman of the Peasants' Association.

"Friends!" said Cheng. "Look at him and me, look how pampered he is; it's not cold yet but he's wearing a lined gown. Then look at me, look at yourselves. Do we look like human beings! Hah, when our mothers bore us, we were all alike! We've poured our blood and sweat to feed him. He's been living on our blood and sweat, oppressing us all these years; but today we want him to give back money for money, life for life, isn't that right?"

"Right! Give back money for money, life for life!"

"Don't let's be afraid of him any longer. Today we poor people are standing up! Let's not consider personal relations any more. I'm Chairman of the Peasants' Association. A few days ago I wasn't keen to struggle. I'm ashamed of myself, I forgot myself! I let all of you down. You can spit at me or beat me, and I won't say a word. I've seen light at last, and I want to settle scores with him. Since I was a child my mother and I went hungry. And all for what? In order to toil like a beast for him! I became his running dog! It's no go. I must tell you — last night he even sent his wife to bribe me. Look, what do you think this is!" Cheng opened the white cloth bundle and shook out one title deed after another. Another roar rose from below, mingled with cries of amazement, rage, sympathy and approval.

"No! I'm not like that. I want to have a thorough settlement with that beast who feeds on human flesh! I've only one thought. I'm a poor man, I'm travelling with the poor, with Chairman Mao to the end of my way!"

"We peasants must unite! We must wipe out feudalism from the face of the earth!" Lichang had rushed to the front of the stage. The crowd shouted after him.

Yumin shook his fist too, and shouted: "Cheng is a good example for us all!"

"All peasants are brothers!" "Support Chairman Mao!" "Follow Chairman Mao to the end!" Such shouts sounded from the stage and from the crowd.

Then people rushed up to the stage, stumbling over each other to confront Chien. Chien's wife with tear-stained cheeks stood behind her husband, pleading with them all: "Good people, have pity on my old man! Good people!" Her hair was dishevelled, there were no longer flowers in it, the traces of black varnish could still be seen. She was just like a female clown in the theatre, making a fine couple with her husband. She had echoed him all her life, and now she still clung to him, unwilling to separate their fates.

One accusation was brought after another. Liuman kept leading the crowd to shout slogans. Some peasants were so carried away that they climbed onto the stage and struck at Chien as they questioned him, while the crowd backed them up: "Beat him, beat him to death!"

Chien was helpless. Trying to extricate himself, he said: "Good people, I was guilty of everything. I admit it all, whether I did it or not. I only ask you to be generous!"

His wife too said tearfully: "For the sake of our son in the Eighth Route Army, be merciful to him!"

"Damn it!" Liuman jumped up. "Have I wronged you! Say, did you trick my father into starting that mill or not?"

"Yes, I did," Chien had to admit.

"Did you have my eldest brother conscripted or not?"

"Yes, I did."

"Did you drive my second brother mad, or not?"

"Yes, yes."

"Have I condemned you wrongly?"

"No."

"Damn it! Then why should you say 'whether I did it or not'. Let's ask him what injustice there's been! Damn him, what does he want us to take him for! Let me tell you, I'm going to thrash this out with you: you give me back my father, give me back my eldest brother. Give me back my second brother!"

"Let him pay with his life!" someone shouted. "Kill him!"

People surged up to the stage, shouting wildly: "Kill him!"  
"A life for our lives!"

A group of villagers rushed to beat him. It was not clear who started, but one struck the first blow and the others fought to get at him, while those behind who could not reach him shouted: "Throw him down! Throw him down! Let's all beat him!"

One feeling animated them all — vengeance! They wanted vengeance! They wanted to give vent to their hatred, the sufferings of the oppressed since their ancestors' times, the hatred and loathing of thousands of years; all this resentment they directed against him. They would have liked to tear him with their teeth.

The cadres could not stop everyone jumping onto the stage. With blows and curses the crowd succeeded in dragging him down from the stage and then more people swarmed towards him. Some crawled over across the heads and shoulders of those in front.

Chien's silk gown was torn. His shoes had fallen off, the white paper hat had been trampled into pieces underfoot. All semblance of order was gone and Chien was going to be beaten to death, when Yumin remembered Pin's last instructions and pushed his way into the crowd. Having no other way of stopping them, he shielded Chien with his body, and shouted: "Don't be in such a hurry to beat him to death! We've got to ask the county authorities!" And then the militiamen hastily checked the people.

The crowd was furious, angry at seeing Yumin shelter Chien. They pressed forward with one accord. Yumin was considerably knocked about but still he said to them: "I swear, there was a time I was afraid we couldn't get the better of him! Now you want to beat him to death. Of course I'm pleased. I've always wanted to beat him to death to clean up our district! Only, there's been no order from our superiors and I do not dare. I daren't take the responsibility. A man can only be executed with the county court's approval. I'm asking you to delay it for a few days. Do it as a favour for me! Don't kill him yet till sentence is passed properly."

By now quite a few others had come over to help him keep the crowd back, and they said: "Yumin's quite right. A sudden end is too good for him. Let's make him suffer." A lot of people were persuaded, feeling that it was best to consult the county court before killing anyone, and since it was certain the county would grant the people's request, it did not matter waiting a few days.

But still some of them were dissatisfied. "Why can't we kill him? The people want to kill him, what's to stop them?"

Old Tung stepped forward and addressed the crowd: "Chien owes you money and lives. Just killing him won't make it up to you, will it?"

"If he died several deaths he couldn't make it up," someone said.

"Well, look," said Old Tung, "can he take any more beating?"

By this time Chien had already been carried back onto the stage. He lay there panting like a dying dog, and someone said: "Kill the dog."

"Bah! Killing's too good for him. Let's make him beg for death. Let's humble him for a few days, how about it?" Old Tung's face was red with excitement. He had started life as a hired labourer. Now that he saw peasants just like himself daring to speak out and act boldly his heart was racing wildly with happiness.

"Right," someone agreed.

"If you don't pull the roots a weed will always make trouble," another said.

"Why are you afraid of him? Don't be afraid. As long as we're united like today we can keep him in order. Think of a way to deal with him."

"Yes, I've a proposal. Let's have the whole village spit at him, what about that?"

"I say his property should be divided up among us all."

"Make him write a statement, admitting his crimes, and if he opposes us again, we'll have his life."

"Yes, let him write a statement. Make him write it himself."

Here Chien raised himself again and kneeled to kotow to the crowd. His right eye was swollen after his beating so that the eye looked even smaller. His lip was split and mud was mixed with the blood. His bedraggled moustaches drooped disconsolately. He was a fearful sight, and as he thanked the villagers his voice was no longer clear and strong, but he stammered out: "Good people! I'm kotowing to you good folks. I was quite wrong in the past. Thank you for your mercy. . . ."

A group of children softly aped his voice: "Good people! . . ."

Then he was dragged over to write a statement. He was in a half numbed state, but he had to take the brush in his trembling hand and write line by line. Then everyone discussed the question

of confiscating his property and decided to appropriate all, including that of Chienli. But they could not touch Yi's twenty-five *mon*. The peasants were dissatisfied, but this was an order from above, because Yi was a soldier in the Eighth Route Army! So they had to put up with it.

By now the sun was sinking. Some of the children were kicking pebbles for hunger at the back of the meeting, and some of the women went quietly home to prepare a meal. The presidium urged Chien to hurry up and finish writing, saying everybody was tired of waiting for him, and asking where his usual ability had gone to.

When the chairman started reading the statement the crowd grew tense again, and shouted, "Make him read it himself!"

Chien knelt in the middle of the stage, his lined gown hanging in shreds, shoeless, not daring to meet anyone's eyes. He read: "In the past I committed crimes in the village, oppressing good people . . .!"

"That won't do! Just to write 'I' won't do! Write 'local despot, Chien'."

"Yes, write 'I, the local despot, Chien'."

"Start again!"

Then Chien started reading again: "I, Chien, a local despot, committed crimes in the village, oppressing good people, and I deserve to die a hundred times over; but my good friends are merciful . . ."

"Who the devil are you calling your good friends?" An old man rushed forward and spat at him.

"Go on reading! Just say all the people of the village."

"No, why should he call us his people."

"Say all the gentlemen."

"Say all the poor gentlemen. We don't want to be rich gentlemen! Only the rich are called gentlemen."

Chien had to continue: "Thanks to the mercy of all the poor gentlemen in the village . . ."

"That's no good. Don't say poor gentlemen; today we poor people have stood up. Say 'the liberated gentlemen', and it can't be wrong."

"Thanks to the mercy of the liberated gentlemen, my unworthy life has been spared. . . ."



"What? I don't understand." Another voice from the crowd interrupted Chien. "We liberated gentlemen aren't going to pass all this literary stuff. Just put it briefly; say your dog's life has been spared."

"Yes, spare your dog's life!" the rest agreed.

Chien had to go on: "Spare my dog's life. In future I must completely change my former evil ways. If I transgress in the slightest or oppose the masses, I shall be put to death. This statement is made by the local despot Chien, and signed in the presence of the masses. August 3rd."

The presidium asked the crowd to discuss it, but very few further amendments were proposed, although a few people still felt he was getting off too lightly and they ought to beat him some more.

Chien was allowed to go back. He was only permitted to live in Yi's house for the time being. All his property apart from his land was to be straightway sealed up by the Peasants' Association. As to the question of how much should be left him, that was left to the Land Division Committee to decide.

Last of all a Land Division Committee was elected; everybody shouted Liuman's name. Fukuei was elected too. Paotang had made quite a good chairman, and he was elected too. Chuan was an old peasant who knew more than anyone else about the acreage in the village, so he was also elected. He rubbed his moustaches which looked like brushes, and said with embarrassment: "You don't feel I'm too old, but want me to do a job; how can I refuse!"

Tien was elected too, because he was good at using the abacus and quick-witted. Without him they would be in the soup with their accounts. Ching could calculate too, and he was young and not afraid of offending people, so he was nominated and elected. Last of all they elected the Chairman of the Peasants' Association, Cheng. Cheng had refused Chien's bribe, staunchly leading them all in the struggle; they all supported such a Peasants' Association Chairman.

By now land reform here could be considered as well under way. Although the peasants still had certain reservations, at least they had passed one large hurdle, and overthrown their greatest enemy. They intended to continue the struggle against the bad power in the village, settling accounts with each in turn. They meant to stand up properly. They had the strength, as the events of the day made them realise. Their confidence had increased.

Nuanshui was no longer the same as the previous day. As the meeting broke up they shouted for joy, a roar like thunder going up into the air. This was an end, it was also a beginning.

## CHAPTER LI

That day Old Ku had gone to the meeting like everyone else. At first he had stood in front of the wall, not far from Hou, but not wanting to be with that old fellow he had moved away to one side. However he discovered there were several members of landlords' families near him, so moved away again and not wanting to excite attention mingled unobtrusively with the crowd. All around him people were exchanging views; some of them spoke to him too. At first he dared not answer, just listened. He knew they were to attack Chien today, and was pleased. But at the same time he was afraid of being attacked himself, because they had dubbed him the Working Landlord. When the meeting started and he saw Paotang was chairman, he felt reassured. Paotang was an honest to goodness person, and they were on good terms, having worked on the land together since they were children. After Old Ku had bought Li's orchard he often went there because to begin with he did not know how to look after it, and often asked Paotang's advice. They spent a good deal of time together, one looking after someone else's orchard, the other tending his own. Their friendship was the same as in their young days. No barrier had come between them because their way of life was approximately the same, both toiling hard. Old Ku felt that Paotang understood him, and could never consider him as a working landlord, could never try to attack him or take vengeance. This being the case he was able to relax a little at the meeting, daring to look at the people round him and answer the questions they put to him. Sometimes he even joined in a discussion of his own accord.

Later, when Liuman went on to the stage, he felt great sympathy with the accusation he made. All Liuman's family had been ruined by Chien. If he failed to get vengeance there was no justice in the world. So he shook his fist along with the others. Later his son Shun suddenly started speaking, demanding that Chien make good the loss of their pear tree, claiming that Chien had forced them to

marry into his family, and had bullied his sister, trying to seduce her. And this although she was his daughter-in-law! Listening to his son, Old Ku felt as happy as if he himself had spoken to relieve his feelings, and then worried because he felt it was not proper to say all this, it made them lose face. However no one laughed at them, it only made the crowd angrier, shouting: "Shameless wretch! Old lecher!"

In the end he was completely carried away by the anger of the crowd, like a charging horse on the battlefield he followed along with the rest, shouting slogans, shaking his fist, his face crimson, forgetting his worries of the past fortnight, forgetting the odious name of Working Landlord. When Chien was pleading on the stage with averted face, calling out again and again: "Good people! Good people!" he laughed too, marvelling how times had changed. How had it come about? Had the world turned topsy-turvy? Ho . . . So he backed up everyone who went on to the stage, backed up every accusation and protest. He supported the Communist Party, for without the Communists this could never have happened. The Communists had done right!

When he went home after the meeting, all his family was there, still behaving as at the meeting, speaking one after the other. And the children in the middle were re-enacting the scenes they had enjoyed most, one cursing loudly: "There's no place for you to stand on this stage! Kneel down! Kneel to all the villagers!" Then another repeated tearfully: "Good people!" Meanwhile Shun was demanding loudly from the middle of the group: "Ma, Pa! All of you say: should we give up some of our land or not?" When Old Ku heard this, it was like a blow. All his excitement and pleasure melted away, leaving him standing speechless in the doorway, without the courage to go in.

And then Shun went on: "You tell me what's wrong with the Communists? They help poor people overthrow the local despots. We were even able to work off our feelings. Our family has much more land than Chien but they haven't had a meeting to attack us, they haven't sent people to get our title deeds. You don't think it's because they're afraid of us, do you? We're so stubborn, hanging on to a few *mou* of land for dear life. I say it won't do. We'd better go while there's still time to see Yumin and the others. That'd look better than waiting for them to come here! What do you all say? Uncle! Pa! Where's Pa? Why isn't he back yet?"

"Brother's quite right. It doesn't matter having a few *mou* less of land. Beside it'll be divided between poor friends. What's the objection? That's my opinion," said Old Ku's elder daughter-in-law.

Some of the women started squabbling, and feeling ran high with excitement and fright. Old Ku had no desire to discuss this question which he did not know how to answer, and hearing the others asking for him, he quietly made off. The street was empty. He strolled slowly, then walked back to the empty space in front of the stage. The ground was scattered with dusty melon seed shells, and fruit stones, and a torn white paper hat, shreds of which were fluttering on the ground. Only the frame of the hat was left, with a few wisps of paper still sticking to it, blown here and there by the wind, but never flying far before falling to roll on the ground again. The place seemed the more desolate on account of its recent animation. Old Ku, feeling as unsettled as the broken paper hat, sat down on a piece of wood in front of the wall, looking round dubiously, wanting to rid himself of a little of his unhappiness. He did not oppose his son's proposal, but he had to think it over, and would have liked to ask someone: "Why should someone like me, who's worked hard all his life, be classed with Li and the rest? I count as a landlord because I've a lot of land, but I earned my land by the sweat of my brow, by my life's blood!" The name Working Landlord he had been given made him both uneasy and indignant, and he kept thinking: "I'm not going to give up the land. If you want it come and take it; if you want to attack me, do."

Dusk was gathering. Flight after flight of crows flew overhead. But the old man kept sitting there, smoking pipe after pipe, looking round continuously with his bleary eyes, as if in search of something to comfort him.

After a while a rather stooped figure approached from the turning at the northeast corner, advancing slowly step by step, looking all around too, but without catching sight of Old Ku. Old Ku saw it was not one of the villagers, but he recognised the man although he could not put a name to him. He got up and walked over to accost him. The stranger suddenly realised Old Ku's presence, and stood stockstill for a second, before calling out cheerfully: "Old Ku! How are you?"

At once Old Ku realised who it was, and seized his hand, saying in a voice shaking with emotion: "Oh, it's you, Old Hutai!" However at the same time he gripped him fearfully as if he had seen

a ghost, looking round furtively as if to spy out the land, and went on softly: "Come home for a talk. How have things been going in your village?"

"The business at our village is over," answered Hutai calmly. "I've come for my cart. They know it's here. They say it's used for trade, and they don't want to confiscate it."

"Oh!" Old Ku looked at him in surprise, trying to read more proof of it in his face.

Hutai drew him along homewards, saying: "There's nothing to worry about! Haven't you finished here yet? People like us, they just say we're rich peasants, and hold a meeting asking us to offer a little of our own free will. I gave up sixty *mou* of land. They didn't want either of my carts, and left me the draught animals too so that I could go on doing business. They left me my sheep too. What about you? You're far below the mark because you never had a regular hired hand."

"I'm not clear. They haven't said anything yet. They took my fruit, and someone called me a Working Landlord." However he felt a gleam of hope, Old Hutai's family was much richer than his. Judging by his case, certainly the Communists would have one and the same principle for everything!

After taking Hutai home, they talked well into the night. Hutai said it would not hurt a family like his to give up a few dozen *mou* of land. If they had too much land they couldn't cultivate it all themselves and would have to hire labourers, and now wages were high, it wasn't worth it. Since the Eighth Route Army's arrival business had been good. Being allowed to keep the cart was the best thing that could have happened to him. He hadn't oppressed anyone in the past, and so no one would bully him now. In the past taxes had been high, and there had been so many bad people whom good people dared not offend. They had had a lot to put up with too. But now equality was the word, and people could say what they liked. It was very fine. They had classified him as a rich peasant, but what did that matter, as long as he was not a landlord. And Hutai advised Old Ku to go and have a talk with the work team, to get things straightened out. They couldn't consider him a landlord when all his family worked so hard. He couldn't even be called a rich peasant. Hutai also advised him to offer some land, saying not to do so was wrong, some poor people didn't have a single *mou*. He had started as a poor man himself, and he ought

to help the poor. Old Ku agreed with all he said. He listened happily, and replied that he would do as he proposed.

Then they spoke of the fighting. Hutai said he had seen a number of soldiers with his own eyes, travelling by train to Tatung, taking some heavy artillery. Everybody said Tatung was sure to be taken and everybody in Kalgan was busy preparing for its capture. Every single person had sent comforts, and those who could write had written to the troops. Once Tatung was captured business would be good. He also said that the people in his village had been timid before, but after overthrowing two local despots and beating and imprisoning a rumour monger who was in league with the Kuomintang, nobody was afraid any more. Before that nobody dared speak, for fear lest if by any chance Chiang Kai-shek were to come back, they should be under their thumb again. Hutai also said Old Chiang was no good, he couldn't come back. They had the Eighth Route Army men in their village who were in high spirits, both men and horses were in fine fettle. All the Kuomintang troops were conscripted to fight against their will, and were no good. The Kuomintang regular army in the area of Chinglung Bridge was no match even for our guerrillas!

As soon as it was light the next day, Old Ku got out the cart and saw his relative off, accompanying him to the river. And as he watched White Nose drawing the cart into the river he remembered how things had been a month before. He trusted the Communists not to treat him badly. They were right to help the poor. If only all this had happened when he was young and poor! He shouted out good wishes for his business to Hutai who was already in mid-stream. Hutai turned his head to look at him, and said something in reply which he could not catch, but he understood its intention. Their life in the new society could only be easier. Then he went back, stretching his neck to look at his land not far off. And when he saw the plot he intended to give up, it no longer made him feel bad. He simply felt relaxed like a man who has just put down a heavy load.

## CHAPTER LII

When Old Ku went to the Peasants' Association to offer some of his land, the cooperative was packed tightly with people. The

courtyard was overcrowded and there were rows of people standing outside the gate. Each person had his own particular request, each and all wanted to see the cadres, hoping to have their problems settled right away. One could not make oneself heard inside. When he saw how many people there were Old Ku felt rather alarmed, but screwing up his courage he squeezed his way in. He asked if Yumin were there or not, but no one answered him. He asked for Cheng, but again there was no answer. It had been hard enough squeezing his way in, but now there was no one responsible to be seen, only Pukao was sitting on the *kang*, surrounded by people telling him how much land they had.

"We've made a record," said Pukao. "We know."

But still they would tell him again: "My land's arid soil! And it's far off, can't you give me another piece in exchange?" Then Pukao wrote down the request so that he could pass it on to the Land Distribution Committee. Another was explaining how he rented land from another village, asking what would happen to that land. Then Pukao wrote him a letter of introduction telling him to go to the other village to ask for the title deeds, because once he had the deeds everything would be plain sailing.

Old Ku stood there for quite a time. No one paid any attention to him. Pukao was too busy even to look at him, so he was again at a loss. He was afraid of saying something wrong in front of all these people which would arouse them against him. What would he do then? He squeezed his way out again, and when he got to the street he began to hesitate. Seeing a number of people walking toward the primary school, he followed them.

The bare side-court had been cleaned up, and all the members of the Land Distribution Committee were there. This place was crowded too with people, some of whom had business, some of whom had not; but all were curious to see what happened and hung about. Still Old Ku dared not go over, but watched for some time from a distance. He knew all the people there. They were all good people, and he would not have been afraid to speak to any one of them alone. But now they were together in a group, with some of the comrades from the district backing them up, and they seemed suddenly to have increased in stature, to have become real powerful executives, neither lowly nor humble, chatting and laughing. None of them had seen him. They let him go on standing at a distance, and he felt now even Paotang looked down on him. So he started

growing nervous again, and walked slowly back, but he thought, "Well, leave it to fate. I'm ready to do what you want."

Actually the people in the courtyard were just discussing him. The previous evening the cadres and Land Distribution Committee members had held another meeting to classify again all the families in the village. There were altogether eight landlord families. In the past a few had been wrongly classified. The masses were disputing his category, some of them still thinking he ought to be classified as a landlord, while others said he should be a well-to-do middle peasant. Judging from the degree of exploitation he could only have been classified as a well-to-do middle peasant but in the end he was carelessly put down as a rich peasant. They ought to take part of his land, but as to which part, whether good land or bad, that was left to the Land Distribution Committee to decide. So now the Land Distribution Committee was busy estimating the acreage of the landlords and at the same time calculating what land to take from the rich peasants, Old Ku included.

Over the question of classification the work team and cadres had had some argument. Yang advocated leaving the Peasants' Association to decide, but there was no time for that. Comrade Pin had said that the division of land ought to be completed within from five days to a week before the mid-autumn festival, because if the work were not finished by then it would delay the harvest. Besides there was a bigger problem — the war situation on the Peiping-Suiyuan railway to consider. So this matter, important as it was, could only be decided entirely by a meeting of new and old cadres. Not waiting to find out reactions to their decisions, they began to take action. Naturally there were mistakes. Some people had no chance to express their views, while some, obsessed with their own affairs, kept accosting the cadres and the Land Distribution Committee, until the noise and confusion in the courtyard were extreme.

Chung had come too today, bringing two title deeds to show Yumin. His eyes were dancing as he looked at them. Without giving him a chance to speak, his son Ching called out: "Go home! What did you come here for?" He thought his father was looking for him to forbid him to act on the committee, and to call him home.

The old man only chuckled, and mumbled: "Oh, who could have thought it! What's the world coming to!" Everybody asked him what the matter was, telling him to explain slowly, whereupon he told them of his adventure that morning.



Early that morning he had just left his room, when he became aware of someone standing outside the house, and asked: "Who's there?" There was no answer, so he asked again, and the man walked in. It was someone who had never called on him before, so he was surprised and at once asked him in, greeting him: "Oh! Uncle Hou! Uncle . . . Please come in and sit down."

Hou said not a word but followed him inside and instead of sitting on the *kang* forced Chung to sit there instead, then hurriedly kotowed to him, and begged him: "Chung! You must save me! In the past all my family has done injustice to you. Please be generous, I'm old now. I can't stand being attacked. You can have whatever you like. Ah!"

Chung was frightened, and quickly took hold of him to lift him up, but couldn't raise him, so he said: "Sit down and tell me about it, sit down!" With great difficulty he managed to make the old man get up, but the latter definitely refused to sit on the *kang*. He squatted on the ground, so that Chung squatted down with him. They were both getting on in years and couldn't squat long, so presently they sat down on the ground. Seeing how excessively humble the other was, Chung felt ill at ease and said reassuringly: "What are you afraid of? We're all one family. After dozens of years old relationship is still the same. I would never make things difficult for you. Don't be afraid, that son of mine Ching is a bad fellow."

By this time Chung's wife had come in. Hou kotowed to her too till she was quite bewildered, leaning dazed against the door. Then Hou apologised again for doing injustice to them in the past, speaking them fair while demanding a great deal of them and never lifting a finger to help them, letting them live virtually as beggars. He thrust two title deeds at Chung for fourteen *mou* of land, insisting on his accepting them, saying he was old and begging them to let him off, to put in a good word for him to the cadres. Chung dared not keep the title deeds, but Hou knelt down again and refused to get up till he accepted them. . . . The old rogue even cried. After making all this fuss he finally left, and went to another of his tenants, intending to plead from house to house, using this means to get through this difficult period safely, because he had been frightened by the trial the previous day. He realised the masses had arisen, and that if he made the least false step they could crush him like a bed bug.

After Hou had left, Chung and his wife looked at each other, afraid it was all a dream. They turned the title deeds over and over,

then hurried to the door to look, and both laughed, laughed till they cried. Chung sat on the steps wiping his tears as he remembered all the hardships of his life. He had led camels in the desert, wind and snow had weathered him, he had trudged innumerable sand-dunes in the wilds, and as he walked along his hopes had faded away like the horizon at evening. He remembered how when he fell ill and nearly died, he had thought it would be better to die, but he recovered, and that was worse than dying. Gradually he had become fatalistic and looked for truth in a future life, comforting himself with this illusion. But now the future life was being realised in the present, his recompense had come so quickly! He had never thought of this, never dared think of it. He ought to be happy, and indeed he was, only this happiness was more than he could bear, so that he was shedding tears of joy. He had come to life again, he could feel like a human being again, he was no longer a cranky old devil.

However his wife was muttering by his side: "Are you giving them back to him? You give them back to him?"

Chung with a great effort controlled himself and walked out with the title deeds, his agitated wife following him, still saying: "Are you still so stubborn! You still don't dare take them! Do you still believe that religious talk of his?"

"No," he said. "I'm going to the Peasants' Association. I want to tell them. I want to tell a lot of people, the world's really changed! Ho! . . ."

When they had heard his account, everybody laughed, and said, "Why didn't you ask him whether he was rich because that was his fate?" Another said: "Uncle Chung, you won't be going to heaven with him now!" Someone else praised him: "He's too straightforward, this old fellow. He's been trampled on all his life, but now at last he's coming to his senses!"

Ching laughed too and said, "*Dyeh*, Buddha has nothing to do with us. We burned incense every year, but he never paid the least attention. Yet as soon as Chairman Mao gave the order, people came here to give us land. Chairman Mao's our Buddha. In the future if we worship anyone it should be Chairman Mao. Don't you agree, *Dyeh*?"

Old Chung only grinned silently. Finally somebody asked him, "You'll have your share of the land. Will you give it back to them again?"

He shook his head vigorously, and answered: "No! No! Didn't that mass meeting yesterday bring me to my senses? Ho . . ."

News of these happenings spread, and stimulated people and increased their confidence.

## CHAPTER LIII

The peasants did not go to the fields that day, but kept roaming about, one group after another, to look for the village cadres or the work team. Or else, having discussed things among themselves, they went to tell the village cadres of their discussion, or repeated some confused opinions they had heard; and in this way they kept disturbing the Land Distribution Committee. The cadres grew desperate, and shouted: "Ai, now you're on your feet, are you going to do without law and order? If so, you come and do this job yourselves." They proposed ignoring the masses, and pasted a notice on the door: "People without business keep out." Yang said this was no good, they ought to listen to the people's views. The cadres did not like to contradict him, and just said: "It's no good being too democratic. That way nothing'll get done. There's no end to views."

Then Yang talked it over with Yumin, and they opened up another place for office work and meetings. They cleared up Chiang's three northern rooms. There was a big locust tree in his courtyard through which not a ray of sun could penetrate, and under which a crowd might gather. Chiang and his wife had moved back to their old quarters. Most of the place was empty. There was only a poor relative living there to look after the house for him, although Chiang still asked him for rent. The Peasants' Association started working here, Yang and Hu remodelling the organisation, dividing people into groups and choosing new group leaders. All problems had to be brought to these group meetings. When anyone spoke the others judged whether his view was right or wrong, and the group leaders reported it, and when there was any business they held a meeting of group leaders. Thus everyone was satisfied, saying this was better than going one by one to find Yumin.

Pukao could not look after all the details of organisation by himself, so Ting helped him. Yang and Hu went in turns to the different groups, and Yumin attended when he had time. Wen spent all his time with the Land Distribution Committee, helping them divide up the land, until he saw how lively the group meetings were, and then he sometimes went over to join them. The group membership increased daily, and it was no longer a case of only one from each family. Then they set up additional groups, including women's groups, and the women held meetings too. After the meal they tidied up and gathered together. Yang wanted each to speak of past grievances and sufferings. It seemed as if they would never finish, and each one cried, speaking of her hard lot.

Kuei had no reservations now. Her husband Chih had told her: "When there's nothing to do, spend all the time you can at the meeting. I've got a meeting too. Hsu won't be coming back, or even if he does I'm not afraid. If he does come we'll deal with him as we did with Chien, and if he's really re — re — reactionary, then how can he get off with his life! Pin says we should check up thoroughly on his connections. Well, even our uncle Chung isn't scared. We needn't be afraid of anything."

Not only the women but the men too, the older men in particular, liked to talk about the past and describe their hard lot. Some had regretted not speaking at the mass meeting and now they spoke in the groups. There was no longer any sympathy for the landlords, and Li's wife no longer dared stand at the head of the street. If she showed her face outside men laughed at her: "Oh, even if she gives us money we're not interested! Glancing sideways at people all the time, wanting to make a cuckold of her husband!" And Hou was like a field mouse, no longer daring sit in the sun at the foot of the wall.

The landlords had lost all their power to awe, while their running dogs were calling on people right and left, smiling servilely and admitting their faults. Hsu's confederate Jung, afraid he could not escape being attacked, voluntarily sent a letter of repentance to the Peasants' Association.

The more the peasants thought of their sufferings, the more they hated their oppressors, and the more united they became among themselves. However they could not spend all their time attacking. Some relatively minor offences were overlooked. People still had to concern themselves with their own affairs. Not all the

fruit had been sold, and people had to be organised to handle the work. Tien, Ching and Paotang were all at the Land Distribution Committee, so other people had to be found. However that was not difficult; everybody was glad of a chance to help. The few small traders and peddlers in the village were brought in to take part. Then things went even more smoothly, and in two or three days everything was finished. The apples and pears had not been sold, but the sweet-apples alone had realised between seven and eight million yuan. Some people suggested this money be used to buy draught animals for the poor, some proposed sinking a proper well. However everybody was afraid not to have a share, and finally in accordance with the wishes of the majority the money was divided up. Yang judged they would soon be leaving this village, and unless they settled the matter now there was bound to be trouble later, so he agreed to the general wish, and the money was divided up according to each family's size and condition. The Land Distribution Committee was so busy that it entrusted this work to the group leaders.

Only a little of the furniture, implements and grain of the eight landlord families was left them. All the rest was taken out, registered and numbered. In the small groups people discussed their own needs and how these things should be distributed. It was easy for them to see eye to eye in attacking local despots, but when it came to private loss or gain, they all wanted too much and were unsettled, all hoping to get a little more. So the group meetings were held more often and became more heated. Problems had to be solved there. Day by day they were learning one lesson — that in attacking an enemy one must be firm and ruthless, while among comrades there must be mutual consideration and concession. That was the only way to achieve unity and not make a laughing-stock of themselves to the landlords.

Some people realising this, said: "Yes, it's impossible to have absolute justice. The river water's comparatively level, but the river bed is still irregular, and the surface is ruffled with waves. We're all on the same hand, even though the fingers are of different length." Some people could talk all right, but in their hearts they were still calculating how they could get on good terms with the Land Distribution Committee, in order to get a little more land, or better land.

The militiamen intensified their training. They were all poor men who left their own work to stand guard or act as sentries, day

and night, and attended meetings too. They despised selfishness and greed, and cursed these people: "Poor people are blinded by possessions too. Once you're rich see if you don't squeeze other people, and then we'll attack you too!" They had a glorious history, they had formed the front line in the war of resistance against Japan, had caught traitors, and now they wanted to be the people's guard, so that not a single bad man dare stir in their village. More and more militiamen were joining the Party. Their small corps constituted a strong bulwark for the village.

Kuo was the militiamen's model. When there was no grain at home he went secretly to borrow some, afraid that if the work team knew they might give him some of the victory grain. Later Yang came to hear of this, and questioned him, and Kuo blushed all over his face but stubbornly refused to admit it. He was thinking: "What a nuisance that Comrade Yang has found out. I wasn't trying to get a good name for myself."

However among certain of the cadres there grew a tendency to selfishness. And a lively scene was enacted at the Land Distribution Committee.

## CHAPTER LIV

Ever since the small group meetings were held fewer people had gone to the Land Distribution Committee. They were able to carry out the preparatory work of land division quite smoothly, estimating the amount of land available for distribution and classifying it, also estimating the number of families to distribute it to and classifying them. All the committee members were truly disinterested and anxious to make a fair division. Chuan in particular had no children of his own, and the nephew he had brought up was already a grown-up man and had become an administrator of village affairs. With a few fruit trees of his own he was quite contented. His one thought was: "Chairman Mao is concerned for us so far away. How can we neglect our own village affairs? If we make everyone live better, Chairman Mao needn't worry so much!" He was a good old man, but his memory was faulty. He wanted to give everyone some good land, so whenever he went home

to eat peasants often came to see him, and he would reassure them: "Don't worry, children, you won't be left out. I promise to put in a word for you; but it's not for me to decide. It's everybody's business." However when they came to distribute land he would say: "Give him irrigated land, he hasn't many in his family." Or else: "Oh, he's a poor chap, he's never had anything good. Let it be irrigated land." His nephew often scolded him: "See here, do we have anyone here who isn't poor? There's only so much land. The good and bad all have to be matched." Or he would simply exclaim: "Heavens, you'd better rest for a while, old man."

Few people dropped in on the Land Distribution Committee now, only the cadres still came regularly. The success of their mass accusation meeting had given the cadres confidence. They felt themselves the masters of the whole village with power to do anything, hence they stopped paying much attention to Wen's advice. Since they were all brothers together Cheng and Yumin found it very difficult to send them away. They would come and stand about for a while listening or putting in a few words, which sometimes were helpful. Only because they were always around each time the question of their share of land came up the Land Distribution Committee felt they must give them good land, regardless of their families' condition. The cadres themselves did not say anything, that is they did not object. At such times Wen would say earnestly: "Old Uncle Chuan. Don't always be so soft. Of course the cadres are all our own people but you've got to judge their circumstances. Don't make people say we show favouritism. That would mean our work was in vain."

Chuan would tug at his beard in embarrassment and look at everybody, while no one said a word. Fukuei was the keenest of them all, but even he said: "The cadres are a little different. They're caring for us year in and year out, working away harder than anyone, sacrificing hours of their time! I think, we ought to let it go at that."

And Paotang would join in: "Right, they're good servants of the state. They ought to be rewarded for their labours. . . ."

Yumin often attended the group meetings. He realised the masses were watching the cadres carefully, and all business would have to be passed by them, but he spent little time at the Land Division Committee and could not supervise the work. It was Cheng who should have played a decisive part there. But ever since

that evening when Cheng had made up his mind to overcome his former scruples and exposed Chien's plot at the meeting, showing his own attitude was upright and thereby doing much to arouse the masses, everybody felt he was a stout fellow, and he was pleased with his popular support, feeling he had not let the masses down. He wanted to do his job even better, he wanted to do as the comrades of the work team said. And so indeed he did. He attended meetings punctually, did not quarrel with anyone and swept the place himself. But he did not like talking and at times when he should have upheld certain views he remained silent. As to the reason for this, no one knew or paid any attention. Since the mass meeting, along with his positive ideas he felt a certain uneasiness. He often gritted his teeth secretly, thinking: "Oh, hang it all, anyway I've not kept faith!" He was thinking of Heini. He did not know how she was getting on these days with her uncle Chien. She must have hated him. He was sorry he had forgotten to look out for her at the mass meeting, and wondered where she had been standing. Probably with the women's class. He wondered what she had felt when her uncle was hooted and cursed and beaten by the crowd. She was a poor orphan. She'd had a hard life of it with her bad uncle, and now things must be even worse for her. For him, Cheng, to attack Chien was right, but he had not helped her, in fact he had forced her into an unpleasant position. He felt very bad about this, but had not the courage to ask after her. Nor could he stop thinking about this matter. This was a knot difficult to untie and it hampered his keenness in work. He was not as strong as he had hoped. He often followed the crowd.

Originally there was one man here who was firm and not affected by friendship or face. That was Liuman. But because of his anxiety and irregular life for the last three weeks and because this impetuous man had used up his energy to fight and had acted as a shock trooper, when victory was won he was exhausted. He felt tired out, his head ached, his chest ached; sitting down for a short time made him uncomfortable, and he had to slip out to the porch at the back to sleep. It was shady under the tree and quiet, so he emptied his mind like someone who has been ill for a long time, staring at the sky between the branches. If others criticised him, he would just rub his chest gently, answering without words. He had to rest. It was the only way to restore his nerve.



One day they came to discuss Kung's share of land while he happened to be there, and they apportioned him two *mou* of orchard and two *mou* of irrigated land on the hill. But Kung did not want the orchard, so they found him two and a half *mou* of irrigated land instead. Kung thought it was too little, and kept complaining, so Chuan told him it was good land, the water channels were good too, and advised him to accept it, because it was not easy to find anything just right. But Kung refused.

It happened that Wenhui was there, and he said straightforwardly: "If he doesn't want it, I do; you give it to me." They agreed, and after looking for a long time found three and a half *mou* of irrigated land for Kung. Then Kung was delighted and hurried to see what it was like. But when he saw he was annoyed again: this plot of land was not bad, but it was too near the river, part of it was submerged, and another four-fifths of a *mou* was in danger of submersion. He lost his temper and rushed back, shouting as he came in:

"What kind of fool do you think you're making of me?" Then he wanted the land they had given Wenhui. They urged him to take the orchard land, but he refused. They talked it over with Wenhui, but he would not give up his plot, saying:

"Do you think land reform is only for your benefit? That you can pick any land you please?"

Kung had never thought much of this simple fellow, so now he said fiercely: "Why won't you give it me? Are you still counting on your cousin's influence? Before, just because you were relatives we couldn't attack him. Now that we've carried it off you want land too, but you don't deserve any!"

At this Wenhui saw red. Furious at having the truth distorted, he shouted: "Fine! All right, let's exchange our land! Let's exchange all we've got, and see who's really poor! Last year you got half a *mou* of Hsu's orchard land and bought another five *mou* of vineyard. This spring you got one and four-fifths *mou* of land, and you had three *mou* of irrigated land on the hill to begin with. Yet you call yourself a poor peasant! Didn't I join in the struggle the same as you. This spring I got four-fifths of a *mou* of land and a bushel of grain. Let's change; if we change, change everything, or else nothing at all!"

"You say I'm not a poor peasant, I'm a landlord? All right, you come and attack me. You want to take my land, fine! You want to avenge your cousin!"

"Damn you! Don't try to bully people!" Wenhui rushed over to hit him.

Paotang and Chuan grabbed them both and urged; "Don't quarrel. You'll have people laughing at you."

Fukuei took hold of Wenhui, while Ching restrained Kung. Tien was a taciturn type but even he could not help being angry now. He pushed away his abacus, threw down his brush, and cursed: "We're working for the whole village, not for selfish people like you. I'm quitting. Let's have a meeting and re-elect officers. I'm quitting!"

Cheng lost his temper too: "It really is disgraceful! Comrade Wen said we shouldn't let you in, but you insisted on coming, just worrying about your few *mou* of land. You've made us cadres lose face! Get out, all of you, this is no place for you to fight! Go outside to fight!" Then changing his tune: "Friends, have we forgotten that we're brothers to death? How did we come to quarrel? We must be of one heart. If our unity is destroyed for an inch or so of land, can we be said to have risen up? Let's say no more about it. When Comrade Wen comes back he'll criticise us. We cadres must be content with whatever piece of land we're given, and if we're not given any not ask for any. Look at Yumin. He's never been given a single piece of land. He got a bushel of grain this spring which he finished up long ago, but he didn't say anything. We ought to learn from him." He himself had been the same as Yumin, having received only one bushel of grain.

The two of them took the other's advice and stopped quarreling. Kung knew that he was in the wrong and that nobody sympathised with him, so he slipped away, saying, "Don't give me any land. I don't want anything. I've lived all these years without standing up, and without starving to death. It doesn't matter if I don't stand up."

Wenhui did not go, but sat down fuming. He did not say anything, but thought: "I suppose I shall suffer all my life on account of my cousin."

News of this spread before Wen came back from the groups. One person told another, until it spread to different households. Discussion started in lanes and courtyards, one person urging another: "A few Land Distribution Committee members aren't enough. If they won't report to us let's all refuse land, and let

just the cadres stand up. We won't attend any meetings in future, and see whose cadres they are!"

Only when Wen and Yang announced that the result of land distribution would have to be passed by the Peasants' Association, did everybody become cheerful again. They also helped the group leaders to divide up the portable property without delay.

## CHAPTER LV

People were like ants moving to a new home, carrying furniture through various lanes to different households, assembling them according to their kind. They carried, shouted, laughed and cursed, squabbling together like children, some of them chewing dried fruit from other people's courtyards. Women stood in the street watching the fun, and children tagged along. When all the things had been collected, they let people look at them. Every family went to have a look. The women followed the men, daughters-in-law behind their mothers-in-law, daughters with their mothers, mothers carrying their babies. They pointed at the things, the mothers all pointed at the brand-new wardrobes, red lacquer chests and a pair of big flower vases, which would be fine things for their daughters' dowry. They fell in love with the tables, then with the chairs. That clock was a beauty, and it would strike the hours so cheerfully every day. Then they coveted the clothes; they had never seen such pretty coloured materials. It would be nice to buy one length for their daughters, one for their daughters-in-law, everything fair. Of course the young wives liked these things too. They would like to have a gown each, so they need not worry about clothes at New Year. Some old women just wanted a big jar or pitcher. Then with another container, sieve and bamboo basket, they'd have a complete set.

The men were quite indifferent to these things. They went to look at the big ploughs, wooden ploughs, boxes, grain sifters and harrows. After looking at one category of goods in one courtyard they went to look at another category in another courtyard. The not so poor went to look too, and the militiamen kept a watch, not allowing anyone to touch anything. When they got home, old couples would discuss together: "Oh, you can't have everything

you want. There's only a limited amount of things. We can only ask for what we need, not for anything we can get along without. If we ask for more they won't give it."

"Right, there are too many people, and everybody'll have to get something."

People hurried to look and to comment, and were in a hurry to divide the things. The group leaders made an inventory of everything, and allotted so much to each group. The members of each group consulted together over their lists of requirements and the goods allotted. Everybody discussed it together, and when nobody had any more to say, the group leaders distributed slips they had brought, with the names of goods and their numbers, which people were to take to the appointed place to collect the goods. There was no possibility of mistake. All this had been decided on by the whole community, because all lacked experience. The small groups had been rather slack at first, with poor attendance and a good deal of back-biting. But after this business came up, they felt it was best to speak out in the meetings, so more and more people attended, and were punctual. There were many different opinions which had to be criticised by the whole group before they could be passed. Thus the group meetings began to be taken more seriously. Nobody dared be casual, and the business went ahead swimmingly. In a few days their preparations were complete, and they were just waiting for the word to collect the things.

Wen and Yang saw pretty well eye to eye by now. The power and wisdom of the masses had corrected much of Wen's self-importance and self-righteousness. As he sat in the Land Division Committee listening to arguments he might speak on a matter of principle, but he could not settle specific problems. The villagers were familiar with the acreage. When one person mentioned a plot of land the others knew what he was talking about: where it was, how it should be classified, how large it was, whose land it abutted on, where the water channels were and how big a crop could be raised. They knew the people too who cultivated the land, what the landlord was like, what the peasant was like and whom the plot would suit. It was difficult for Wen to join in their animated discussions. He thought of helping with records, but did not know people's names; he thought of helping with reckoning, but although he knew a little geometry and trigonometry Tien's abacus was much faster than his calculations. It was the same with the divi-

sion of goods. At first he did not know how they should be distributed, and was afraid everybody would quarrel, all fighting for the same thing. However together they had thought out a way, this improved the people's morale, and no one was dissatisfied.

He also overcame some of his prejudice against Yang and the others. They enjoyed better prestige among the masses than he because they acted more like the people, while he could never rid himself entirely of his offensive intellectual's airs. He thought the masses difficult to approach and often did not know what to say to them. There was no barrier, however, between Pin and the masses; he understood them and could make decisions for them. Although so young he was remarkably able. This was the outcome of his knowledge of the mass movement and his firm stand. Wen no longer dared dismiss him as a mere youngster; he had to accord him respect. Of course Wen was still very easy going, subjective and prone to give himself airs, but he really was gradually reforming himself and learning to get on with other people. That day he praised the masses' intelligence with the other cadres, and went to see each place where goods were kept, laughing and smiling with everybody else.

The division of land was nearly finished, lists were posted up in the main street for everyone to comment on. They decided to distribute things on the fourteenth of the eighth lunar month, and to discuss land division in the evening, to issue land tickets on the fifteenth, together with the money from the sale of fruit. On the evening of the fifteenth everyone would rest, on the sixteenth they would measure the land, and as soon as that was done it would be time to harvest the crops. The harvest could not be delayed; all the hurry had been on account of this. And after that Yang and the others could go back to report on their work to the county authorities, and then return to their old jobs.

On the fourteenth people had their slips, and had prepared what was necessary to remove the goods. Some had brought rope and poles; some brought sacks and had arranged for help. When the time came the women turned out too. This time the division was very general. A number of families who ought to be considered middle peasants got a jar or a mirror, so there were a great many going to collect. The group leaders were responsible at the different centres to check the slips and see the goods taken away. The numbers and names must tally. To leave the courtyard peo-



ple must have a new slip with a chop on it. With everything in good order nothing could go wrong.

All the members of the work team and the Land Distribution Committee were there. Having finished their division of land they had nothing to do. Some of them also came to take their shares of things. Yang and Hu helped a good many of the people who had come to move things, asking as they did so: "Is there any more?" The place swarmed with people, and as the slips had to be checked the passage was often blocked. The women crowded round the clothes, bedding and kitchen utensils. Because they could not read, they just handed in their slips. If they were not satisfied with what they got they would look at something better, and shout: "That's wrong! I don't want this, this gown is too old." Women who got good clothes beamed with happiness, holding the gown up against themselves to see how it would look. Those who got old-fashioned, embroidered red gowns doubled up with laughter, while the bystanders started cracking jokes. The distribution of this pile of things was no easy matter. Two men group leaders who could read, as well as some women, stood supervising the distribution.

Yueh was standing here in a broken straw hat, still wearing her old man's white vest, issuing directions with half a kaoliang stalk in her hand. In the mass accusation meeting she had led the other women to beat Chien. She was pointing here and there in the crowd, giving directions, the red bracelets with artificial pearls on her wrist flashing as she moved. Those rough women's hands had always been busy with pots and pans, stoves and troughs, steeped in water or working on the land; those hands roughened by wind and rain had been raised with all their might to beat the man-eating representative of the ruling class—what a moving sight that had been! And she herself had been moved. After that action she seemed less easily angry than before, and lost her temper with the shepherd less, becoming gentler; while the shepherd, because he was concerned in the division of land, spent more time at home. She was not so sharp with other people either. In this distribution of things a good many of the women worked very hard, and she proved her ability again.

Two gowns fell to the share of Chao's wife too. She put on one of blue cotton which fitted her well and looked very pretty, carrying another white one in her hand, as well as a length of patterned material. Patting the smooth cloth over her breast as she walked

along she asked everyone she met, "What cloth is this? Look how fine it is, how even!"

Cheng went from place to place to watch the fun, rejoicing to see people going home with their arms full. He himself had been given some implements and grain, and Lichang was helping him carry them back. Lichang had four large flower vases himself. As they were striding out they bumped into Hu, who said: "What do you want those for?"

Lichang shook his freckled head and said smiling: "Nobody wanted them, so I said I'd have them."

Someone in the crowd laughed and said: "Aren't you getting them for your half pint? Why didn't you ask for a pretty dress for the wedding this winter?" Lichang's freckled face turned red, but he strode off without answering.

"Who's the half pint?" asked Hu.

"His little wife to be," answered the other, laughing.

"The half pint! Ho . . ." Hu laughed too.

They saw Sheng's mother in the crowd carrying a brace of fowl, going this way and that, looking for people to talk to. When she saw Wen she hurried over, and greeted him: "Comrade! You've taken so much trouble, and you've thought of everything. This way everybody's got something."

Wen smiled back and asked her: "Don't you have any hens? You've got a cock here too!"

"Hens! Oh yes, I have several, I bought them as chicks and raised them, but these, well, these are revolutionary fowl." This made a lot of people laugh.

"Didn't you get anything else?" Wen asked.

The woman came closer and said with a wink: "Oh, of course I did. I'm an army dependent, I got five *tou* of grain same as all army dependents. When the crops are gathered in I shan't lack. You see, Comrade Wen, I had to take it. They only give it to dependents. It's for face, isn't it?"

Yang standing by felt very amused, and laughed: "Hurry up home! Bring up your two revolutionary fowl properly!"

There were some people squeezing past carrying big containers. Strong youngsters could carry them single-handed, but some were so large it took two people to carry them. Inside an old man was circling round a black water container, trying to think of a way to carry it off, but in vain. Cheng could not make out who it was.

He thought he would go and help him, but he had only taken a few steps when he heard a most familiar voice at his side, saying: "Uncle, we've still got a vase. Come and see, isn't it a beauty! It's white porcelain!" Cheng stopped, and saw Heini squeezing through the crowd, still wearing the same blue gown. She had not seen him, and hurried happily over, lifting up a vase to show her uncle. Wenfu laughed with her, nodded and said: "Heini! First think of a way to take this container. We thought it was a small one, so we didn't bring any rope."

"I'll carry it on my back, uncle," Heini answered. "You take the vase." So saying she picked up the container, laughed again heartily, and said: "This container's from our house, uncle. I know it quite well, Uncle Chien bought it that year from the county town. It's a good container. See how thick the glaze is. . . ."

"Well, Heini, don't keep chattering, put it on my back."

"No, I'll take it."

"Come on . . . let me have it."

"It's too heavy for you, Uncle, better let me. . . ."

Cheng stood dazed. This unexpected encounter bewildered him for a moment. He thought, "Why, she's still so happy! What's she happy about?" Then he realised, as if suddenly waking up from a dream, how ridiculous his past worries had been. "Why shouldn't she be happy? She used to be a poor child. When Chien was attacked, the people he had oppressed were liberated. Wasn't she one of the liberated? How could she be in the same boat with him?"

Then Cheng felt like a released fighter. He rushed over to Wenfu, and said loudly: "Uncle, I'll carry it for you." Without waiting for them to consent he hoisted the container on to his back. The old man looked at him, spreading his hands, not knowing what to say, while Heini turned her face away as if to dissociate herself from them. Then Wenfu followed him slowly out, muttering to himself: "Well, well!" Heini had stopped smiling, and walked some distance behind them in silence. And a crowd of people pressed after them.

Presently all the things had been taken away, but what a scene in the courtyards and hitherto empty rooms of the peasants' houses! Some small rooms were stuffed with red lacquer furniture. In the peasants' own houses these things naturally looked much better than



in the place for distribution, much more delightful. Every lane or street was filled with happy laughter.

## CHAPTER LVI

That evening, during the meeting of the Peasants' Association, Old Tung came back from the district covered with sweat from walking, presenting a strange appearance for a cool autumn evening. Without waiting for the meeting to finish he took Wen out and gave him a letter. He had brought news of the raising of the siege of Tatung. The attack on Tatung was being excellently carried out, and in a few days the city should be taken. Only Fu Tso-yi had brought up reinforcements, and although the Communists had wiped out some of his men at Tsotzu Shan and another division at Fengchen, still he had led his cavalry into Fengchen. Kalgan lay between two battlefronts, and the capture of Tatung would not solve this problem. Confronted again with this predicament their main forces would have to be moved east to prevent the enemy from advancing west from Chinglung Bridge. They had strength to throw back the attacking forces of Chiang Kai-shek and Fu Tso-yi, their morale was excellent, many troops who had not had a chance to fight at Tatung were delighted now. Each man swore he would capture several dozen American rifles. The fortifications at Yenching were not bad, quite strong, but it was imperative to send all available manpower at once to the Huailai region to build more. This was an urgent task, and even though the next day would be the Moon Festival, that could not be helped, men would have to be sent off at once!

Naturally this news did not throw Wen and the others into a panic, but it really was quite unexpected. Living in the country, at some distance from any city, the newspapers they saw were all two days old. They were not well-informed about the situation, and now that there was a sudden change in the military situation they had to consider the future work in the village carefully. However at the same time Old Tung had brought them additional instructions, namely: "When this phase of land reform is finished, you need not return to Kalgan for the time being, but should go to the Eighth District of Tsolu where you will be assigned work." What

would the new work be? They need not concern themselves with that. The one thing certain was that they must leave the village very soon. Naturally nothing could go wrong with the work in the village, because the village cadres and active elements were well able to shoulder the responsibility. Only at this juncture it was very possible rumours might arise, and the fear that the country would change hands. That was something they could not help worrying about.

The meeting went with a swing. Kung, called to account by the masses, was rather indignant, and shouted: "What land do you accuse me of getting! I haven't got anything, and if I haven't got anything why should you criticise me?" Chuan acknowledged his mistake to the whole community, saying he had been an incompetent fool. He announced that in the past they had given the cadres some good land, but after the quarrel Wen had called all the cadres and Land Distribution Committee members to a meeting, and criticised certain people, and after that they had stopped, realising their mistake. Previously he had presumed the cadres deserve special treatment on account of their past services, but that was wrong, he had been wrong. . . .

Some people raised questions in connection with their own land. Cheng, Tien and Lichang explained matters, then everybody was free to speak. Whenever possible to remedy a mistake in distribution, they exchanged land. At first a great many people were dissatisfied, but gradually they stopped being so. The meeting did not last unduly long, and everybody left feeling relaxed now that three weeks and more of tension were practically at an end. They were looking forward to the festival the next day, the Moon Festival, the festival of emancipation. Someone said: "This is easy to remember: I shall tell my children and grand-children they mustn't forget. It was the mid-autumn festival this year our family got land, got a start so that we could really stand up." And they calculated with delight what preparations they ought to make for the harvest. Truly it was a brave new world.

Yumin and the others went back to Wen's courtyard, feeling their work had been successful. Lichang in particular was singing happily, while Cheng was smiling his rare smile. They brought with them bunches of ripe grapes—the grapes of their district were famous, sweeter than honey. They ate themselves and invited others to eat. Lichang wanted to fetch his fiddle, however presently

they realised there was something in the air, and asked Old Tung: "Has something happened?"

"Nothing serious," Wen reassured them, "only we must discuss the work in the village thoroughly this evening. A new job has come up!"

Yumin had joined the party before Liberation. He was not easy to surprise, so he said: "Never mind, whatever job we're given we'll do it! Tell us."

They made very detailed plans for the harvest, for sending porters and for preparing the people. The porters should leave by the following afternoon at the latest, and since the fighting made it more imperative to speed up the harvest they ought to organise shock troops. Women and old people would have to be incorporated in the harvesting teams, the grain should be distributed according to their new amounts of land. They also reorganised the militia, accepted a number of new members, inspected the rifles and ammunition. Old Tung and Wen, in the name of the district authority, appointed Chiti Deputy Captain. Chiti was a veteran soldier. The Nuanshui militia was strengthened by his appointment.

They also appointed Liuman in place of Chang. The job of security officer was very important at this period, when landlords and bad elements had to be strictly watched, and this had to be done with reliance on the masses. Liuman was firm and would make a good security officer whom the masses would support. They checked up the number of new Party members too. There were thirty-nine in all, new and old. They talked about how to improve their education and give them some practical work, who should be helped, guided or watched. These matters were left to Lichang and Kung who were told to try their best to fulfill their duty. They must not allow the Blackboard News to lapse, and must start a housetop broadcast.

The former village head Chiang had been removed. Chao became village head with Paotang and Fukuei as his deputies. Later there might be rear service work, in which case there would be too much for one man to do. The Peasants' Association was still headed by Cheng, who had to speed up the harvest and maintain the new allocation of land, not letting people return some of it as they had done that spring. There must be more group meetings to express the views of the community and to educate them. Only by unity

and stubborn opposition to the forces of feudalism could they safeguard their victory.

Matters had been precipitated. They had not expected to be leaving so soon. All felt an indescribable emotion, but there was no time for regrets at parting. It was very late and they had to prepare for the next day.

## CHAPTER LVII

As soon as it was light things started humming outside the primary school. Men had brought pine logs cut from the hills, the stage was filled with people working, who stacked the planks here. Red paper flowers had appeared too, woven into a bright archway where hung a big red cotton banner on which was written: "Celebrate the return of the land to its owners." On both sides at the back hung rush mats on which were pasted red and green slips of paper with slogans written on them: "Destroy feudalism root and branch." "Support land reform." "The land returns to its rightful owners, everybody will have food." "In unity is strength". "Chairman Mao is our Saviour". "Forever follow Chairman Mao." "Support the Eighth Route Army." "Long live the Communist Party." Then the gongs and drums from the primary school were brought out and sounded furiously on the stage. Some people came to watch the fun, others hurried home for a meal. Many people were drinking wine and eating meat dumplings.

Wen and the rest had dumplings too, and their host said: "Oh, so sorry, we didn't buy meat, it's calabash." Wen strolled out to see several families, some of whom were eating very well. The worst off at least had pumpkin dumplings. Many villagers brought them fruit: pears, apples, and grapes. When they refused to take them the givers were angry, so they let them leave them there. Before breakfast they had held a meeting of cadres and prepared all the porters. After the meeting one hundred able-bodied men would set out, to return in three days.

Everybody in the village knew what the meeting that day was for, and meant to enjoy themselves. They had put on their new clothes and put their houses in order early. Some of them knew of

the change in the situation, but did not care. Gunpowder had been bought from Shacheng, and their old rifles which had not been used for quite a few years were to be let off too. They were specially for birthdays and weddings and made a loud, sharp report, good to hear. Some of the villagers could perform. They got together and formed an orchestra, regretting they had been so busy the last few days they had not thought of it. If there had not been a meeting the previous evening they could have put on an opera without difficulty. These people cleared up a corner of the stage and started playing on their instruments. The men in the street knew they liked fun, and surrounded them asking if they would sing or not.

Old Chung came to watch the fun too. All the old people remembered what he had been like as a youngster and told the others that he had looked handsome dressed up, his voice was strong and his acting good: he was the best performer Nuanshui ever had. The young people laughed, looking at his wizened, monkeyish appearance and asked: "Uncle! Give us a demonstration. Work off your bad luck by singing. Wash out all these years of disappointment. What about it?" The old man said nothing, just smiled, but he kept standing by the stage, listening to the music.

When everybody had arrived some peddlers set up stalls at the back by the wall, and had a good many customers for fruit and melon seeds.

Presently the primary school dancers came out, and danced through some of the lanes and the big streets, ending up before the stage where they gave a skilful performance of whip dances, followed by so many songs and such a variety of dances, that the audience was amazed and marvelled at the children's good memories.

Villagers were greeting each other as if it were New Year.

When they had finished their meeting all the cadres came, bringing a portrait of Chairman Mao which had just been painted. It quite resembled him, and they pasted it on a board and stood it on a table at the back. Some people wanted to light incense before it, but the majority disagreed, saying "Chairman Mao doesn't like superstition." People stood on their toes to look, and the school children pushed their way to a corner in front and sang: "Red in the east rises the sun, China has brought forth a Mao Tse-tung!"

There were now over fifty militiamen, all wearing plain white shirts, towels on their heads and leather belts at their waists, each

with a cartridge belt over his shoulder and a hand grenade belt containing two hand grenades. These two belts crossed over their chests, and made them look very martial. Chiti was similarly equipped. He and Kuo directed the others and they formed a column, standing together, all attending the meeting. They sang the Eighth Route Army March with its heroic and impressive air.

All the cadres crowded onto the stage. Cheng stepped forward and declared the meeting open, saying: "Elders! Neighbours! Our meeting today is to celebrate the return of the land to its rightful owners! We suffered, generations of our ancestors lived like beasts, but we had no land, nothing to eat and nothing to wear — where had our land gone?"

"Stolen by the exploiting landlords!" answered several voices from below.

"Now the Communist policy is that every peasant shall have land of his own to till. The land is for those who have suffered. Do you approve or not?"

"Yes!"

"In a moment we're going to distribute tickets, stating where the land is. The old title deeds are no longer valid. We're going to burn them."

Excited murmurs swept the assembly.

"Chairman Mao thought of this for us," Cheng went on. "Chairman Mao is the champion of the poor. There in Yen-an he is thinking of us and working for us day and night. Today we've invited him here. See, here's his portrait. We ought to bow to him to express our thanks."

"Bow to Chairman Mao!"

"It's right for us to bow to Chairman Mao!"

Everybody responded below the stage.

Cheng turned round and called out very respectfully in front of Chairman Mao's portrait: "Bow!" There was not a sound from the men and women below as they all bowed their heads after him. They bowed three times. Then Cheng turned round again to go on, but the crowd had started shouting slogans: "Support Chairman Mao! Long live Chairman Mao!"

Next Paotang reported on the division of land and problems connected with it explaining to the masses why they must leave Chien and the others enough to live on: "As long as they submit and mend their ways, and are willing to work, they should be given

land. You don't want to drive them to become thieves or beggars, do you? If we don't give them land to cultivate, they'll have nothing to do, and if they beg won't that mean eating our food?" When he explained this everyone laughed, and no one insisted on their original idea of leaving nothing to the landlords.

When the land slips were distributed, there was only one man speaking while all the others listened carefully to the size of each person's plot of land and boundaries. The eyes of all the crowd eagerly followed each one who went up to take a slip. When he came back the people nearby craned their necks to look, while he held the red paper slip tightly, as if it weighed a hundred-weight. Some put it in the wallet of their belt, and kept their hands outside. Some quietly showed their slips to people who could read and asked if what had just been read was right or not.

The names were called out one after the other. The proceeds from the fruit were divided too, taking a considerable time, but nobody felt impatient. Even when the slips had all been given out, nobody left, and Cheng called out: "Sound the drums and let off guns to celebrate."

Again Lichang led the others in shouting slogans, which echoed far and wide. Gongs and drums were beaten frenziedly, whistles were blown, the old rifles were let off one after the other, the people shouting all the while. Then the school children sang again. Nobody could quite make out what they were singing, but they all seemed to have become children again, enjoying this tumult of noise. Their extreme happiness and deep emotion impelled them to rejoice wildly.

However Cheng called out again from the stage, and a number of cadres shouted with him: "Stop talking please. Be quiet, don't sing!" The noise still continued for a moment, but presently the crowd quietened down, and they heard the order: "Start the demonstration!"

The red banner on the stage was mounted on two bamboo poles and lifted down to be carried at the head of the procession. Immediately behind it came the band, next the militiamen, then all the villagers, the men in front, then the women and last the school children. They proceeded from the main street to the lanes, from the lanes to outside the village, forming a long procession, and a few people left at home stood in the street to watch them go by. Whenever they passed a landlord's house they shouted: "Down

with the feudalistic landlords!" with voices like thunder. The gates of the landlords' houses were wide open, but nobody came out. Only a few families had one or two standing by the door to stare round-eyed at the angrily shouting masses.

When the procession passed Chien's house they roared out: "Down with the local despot!" Chien's wife did not hide, but stood there nervously, watching with a blank face as they marched by, as if she had no special feeling but were just watching the fun, as if the demonstrators had nothing to do with her but were all strangers. Suddenly however she seemed struck with astonishment, she shook her head in amazement, her hand trembled, and she called out toward the procession: "Heini!" But no one answered. The column passed rapidly forward, and scratching her head she hobbled back inside. She felt the world had turned topsy-turvy.

The procession made a tour outside the village, and just as they reached the point for turning back Liuman and a group of men stood out from the column. Liuman had recovered from his exhaustion and regained the energy he had displayed at the mass trial. He shouted: "Those going to Huailai to dig trenches, this way!"

The procession stopped, a number of men went over to where he was, among them some cadres and some militiamen.

"Have you brought your things?" Liuman asked.

They lifted up their mattocks; they had come prepared.

"If you don't take bedding, why not take padded clothes? The evenings are very cool," Yumin said to some who he saw only wore lined clothes.

"Form up!" shouted Liuman. "Look sharp!" They immediately formed a small column, over a hundred strong, all sturdy young men.

"We're going to build fortifications to defend our land! March!" Liuman marched at their head to the big road outside the village. They shouted slogans. Those left behind did not stir, only followed them with their eyes, while Yumin and Lichang led them in shouting: "Defend our land, down with the reactionaries! Three cheers for the Eighth Route Army!" The children started singing again. The small column receded into the distance, sturdy, quick and in high spirits. When they were out of sight, the villagers turned back and returned to the stage. By now there were fewer of them. Yumin spoke of the plans for going into the land the next day.



Everybody must join a harvesting team, everybody must back up the organisation. They listened contentedly, feeling that the plan was thoroughly drawn up. Only a very few quietly asked: "What's it mean? Is there going to be fighting in the east too?" However most people had confidence. After the meeting dispersed they went home to eat dumplings and keep the festival.

## CHAPTER LVIII

After eating an early supper Wen and the two others, as well as Old Tung, put on their packs and let Yumin, Cheng, Chao and Kuo see them off to the east of the village. They were all racking their brains to think if there were any business they had forgotten in the village, hoping that they had prepared for all eventualities. Although they seemed to have said all there was to say, the village cadres kept asking: "Is there anything else?" Or saying regretfully: "Oh! We'd only just got to know each other! You must come again when you have time! Come to help us with the work!" Wen asked them not to come any further, but they insisted, and when at last the time came to part, all Yang could find to say was: "Keep close to the masses. That's the only way to be strong. If the masses aren't awakened try to arouse them. When the masses do rise don't be afraid, but take your stand firmly among them to lead them. Be firm with your enemies but united among yourselves. You know all this quite well. Just carry it out with all your might!"

When they had said good-bye, Wen and the others headed for the county town and their new work. Along the road they met group after group of porters going to dig fortifications, all of them peasants from villages which had had land reform, all filled with a new spirit, brimming over with happiness, all seeming to say: "The land is ours, it's the result of our hard struggle for emancipation. Do you want to come and invade it, Chiang Kai-shek, you dog? It's no use! We have our people's army, the Eighth Route Army. We have millions of liberated peasants. We are united in one common aim, to defend our land!"

Halfway Old Tung left them to go to the district, while the others continued on their way. They were like the porters headed

for the front, full of self-confidence and satisfaction! Just as they were about to ford the river before reaching the city, the bright moon started rising behind them. They turned to look at its brightness, and at the villages under the moonlight. Over there was Nuanshui, where they had spent three weeks — what were the villagers there doing? Celebrating the Autumn Festival, celebrating the festival of their emancipation. Willow tendrils along the road stirred lightly. They pressed forward, waded into the water and across the Sangkan River, and the villagers across the river, no, not only the villagers but the peasants at the south gate of the city were also sounding gongs and drums. It was the same everywhere! Everywhere there had been a complete change during the last month or more! Now the world belonged to the workers. There were no difficulties that could not be surmounted.

That evening they reached the county town and reported on their work. The next day when the sun was just rising over the Sangkan River they set out again, headed for a new post in the Eighth District where they would help in the work of political training.

## *On The Kolchin Grasslands*

by MALCHINHU

An amazing drama was enacted on the Kolchin grasslands last August.

The evening sun was being swallowed up by the far horizon. A northwest wind was stealthily ruffling the grass till the plain looked like a racing sea, while the dark clouds gathering overhead resembled the calf skin roof of a tent. Everybody knew the autumn rain was at hand.

Sarin-Gua had driven her cattle back from further than the eye could see. She was riding a big roan horse, accompanied by her favourite hunting dog, little Galu, who followed his mistress wherever she went.

Although the herd strained forward against the high wind, Sarin scolded them for being too slow. She cracked her whip continuously and shouted: "Giddup!" But how could the cattle know this treatment was due to the fact that their mistress was anxious to meet her lover?

When Sarin had driven the herd to a sand-dune not far from the village she suddenly reined in her horse and swept the plain for some time with disappointed eyes. "Sanbu! Sanbu!" she called. But there was no one in sight, and no answer to her call. She could do nothing but round up the cattle on the sand-dune and wait for Sanbu in the high wind.

Presently a gray horse came flying like an arrow from the east. Then Sarin's heart gave a leap and her face lit up like a blooming flower. Hurriedly jumping down from her horse she took from her breast a pink tobacco pouch with long ribbons, which she waved over her head in welcome. However as the newcomer drew nearer, her enthusiasm was damped.

It was not her long awaited Sanbu.

A bearded old man galloped up to Sarin and reined in his horse.

"What are you doing here, lass?" Actually he knew quite well why she was there, and was simply teasing her.

"What's the hurry, Grandad, that your horse is in such a lather?" she parried his question.

"Very urgent business, and I must call a mass meeting to announce it."

"After the meeting this evening will you go on with the story you didn't finish yesterday?"

"It probably won't be possible. Didn't I say there's very urgent business?"

"Urgent business indeed! Say you won't and have done with it."

"It's true; take my word for it. All right, I must be getting on. You'd better go back soon too, young woman."

The horse galloped off.

This old man, whose name was Amugulan, was both village head and an old Party member. Because he was honest and kind, and because he was the first to accept hardship and the last to take his ease in the service of the people, he had won the confidence and love of the masses. All the youngsters in the village called him Grandad Amugulan.

After Amugulan had left, Sarin started worrying again over Sanbu's delay. She also wondered about the urgent business of Grandad Amugulan.

Just then the northwest wind brought the booming of thunder, and the distant horizon was lit by golden lightning — the prelude to a downpour. But since she had promised to meet her lover, Sarin had to wait on.

"Good evening, comrade!" A low, deep voice sounded behind her. "Would you please tell me the name of the village ahead?"

She turned to confront a man lean as a brown goat. His long, unkempt hair seemed to be swarming with lice, his pock-marked face was stained with sweat, and he had over his shoulder a brown blanket. Suspicious of this unexpected arrival, Sarin asked rather nervously:

"Who are you, and where are you from?"

"I've come from the Zharut-Hushu because of the drought there." He deliberately withheld his name.

"Where are you going, and who are you looking for?"

"When I set out, Malhei of our village asked me to bring a message to Galsan in Bayan-undur village of the Kolchin-Hushu. Tell me, please, how far Bayan-undur village is from here." Awaiting her answer he eyed her cunningly.

The words "Galsan of Bayan-undur" aroused Sarin's suspicion. Galsan of their village had been a platoon leader of the Kuomintang troops, and was under surveillance. . . . And now a suspicious character like this had come expressly to ask about another suspicious character. For a long time Sarin said nothing. Galu, the little hunting dog beside her, pricked up his ears and looked steadily at the stranger.

"Where is your home in Zharut?"

"Altan-obo village." He paused, then added hastily: "Only very soon we'll be moving away, because the drought there's terrible. Tell me, comrade, do you know how far Bayan-undur village is or not?"

"Bayan-undur village? Very close," she said slowly. "But we've a rule in Kolchin that travellers must produce their identity cards before they've the right to ask the way. Otherwise people won't tell them."

"Hah!" He gave a crafty smile. "Identity card? I have one all right. Only when I left home my wife was afraid I might lose it on the road, so she sewed it into my pants. It would be rather awkward getting it out here. All right, it's growing dark and I must be moving on. Goodbye!" And he started off.

As Sarin watched him go she felt very uneasy. She knew he was a suspicious character, yet she had no means of stopping him. She remembered the Mongolian proverb, 'Whoever lets a wolf go sins against the grasslands', and thought: "Since I've met a suspicious character I mustn't on any account let him slip away." At once she hit on a plan, and hurried after the stranger, calling: "Wait a moment, comrade!"

The rascal slowly came to a standstill.

"It's late, and sure to rain by the look of it. Come to my house for a bowl of tea and a rest."

The fellow said nothing, only looked up at the sky reflectively. Just then, as luck would have it, a sudden gust of wind switched the brown blanket he had over his shoulder. A shiver ran down Sarin's spine as she saw with amazement the glittering barrel of a gun.

Sure now that he was up to no good, she thought, "I simply must find a way to get him back to the village. No, that's no good; he's so crafty that he'd be able to see through my plan, and then it'd be too late. Now he's looking up at the sky, what's to stop me snatching his gun from him?"

Darting fiercely forward she laid hands on the rogue's gun. He twisted round and struggled desperately with her. However Sarin had a firm grip on the gun, and the two of them tugged wildly this way and that.

As she struggled for the gun, Sarin shouted: "A saboteur! Come quick!" hoping this would summon the villagers. Little Galu came to her aid, biting the scoundrel till his hands and face ran with blood. For a moment the stranger relaxed his guard and Sarin giving a fierce tug at the gun, succeeded in wresting it from him. Frenzied with rage he kicked her savagely in the stomach. Although the pain was agonizing, she realised this was a matter of life and death, and that on no account could she let the enemy get the better of her.

Dogs are the most intelligent creatures on the plain. By now the dogs in the distant village had been aroused and were barking wildly. This alarmed the scoundrel even more, and he thought: "I've lost my gun, and soon a pack of dogs from the village may be after me. I could never hope to get away from those Mongolian dogs. Better go while the going's good." He turned and jumped onto Sarin's big roan horse. The horse gave a start, but under the pressure of the stranger's legs, it flew off.

It was a Czech gun Sarin had seized. Since she was only used to hunting guns, she was unable to manipulate it. In her agitation she took a few steps forward, then fell down. Only little Galu pursued the stranger, biting the roan horse's hind legs and making it buck like a crazy thing until the rascal was thrown. He scrambled up at once, and, not able to catch the horse again, dropped the brown blanket and took to his heels. Once more Galu gave chase, but gave up when he saw his mistress was not following.

The rascal had spent the last few days on the grasslands, in the desert and wilderness, without a square meal all that time. The fierce struggle with Sarin had exhausted him. He had scarcely left the sand-dune before his head started reeling. However he ran on desperately until he saw in front of him a stretch of marshland, where reeds were tossing like ocean waves in an

evening gale. He stopped for a moment, then produced a box of matches from his pocket, and dived into the reeds.

By the time little Galu and the big roan horse reached Sarin's side again, she was just getting unsteadily to her feet, thinking to herself: "Although I've captured a gun, the enemy's escaped. It's as bad as shooting rabbits and only nicking their fur."

She lowered her head, frowning, to fumble with the gun. There was a sudden click as the safety catch was released. In her joy she forgot her pain and fatigue. Mounting the roan horse, she led little Galu northward in pursuit.

As soon as she had crossed the sand-dune she smelt smoke. Sarin gave an exclamation on seeing a sea of fire ahead. She reined in her horse. Consternation made great drops of perspiration run down her forehead.

Fanned by a strong north wind, a raging fire was roaring and crackling furiously. Because it was August, the reeds were dry, and they blazed so fiercely that even a wild duck could not have flown over.

Although Sarin was still nearly three hundred yards from the fire, the dense smoke already made it difficult for her to breathe, and her face stung in the fierce heat. She could not understand how this fire had started.

Marshland is one of the treasures of the plains. Those who live nearby take the reeds to town each year to exchange for cloth, boots, tea, flowered silk, and brocade. Some indeed depend on this for the whole year's food. And now their marshland was a sea of fire. As a Mongolian saying goes: 'Fire is the plain's worst enemy'.

"That rogue must have started this fire. But he's wrong if he thinks he can get away with it!" Thereupon Sarin brought her whip smartly down on the horse, and without hesitation headed for the blaze.

Flames and smoke formed a lurid line of fire closing in upon her from all sides. Yet her one thought was: "I must break through! The saboteur mustn't get away!" She bent down to call Galu to jump on to the horse. Fearing he would be burnt as they dashed through the fire she wrapped him in the folds of her skirt. By now sparks were raining on her head. She saw that the belt of fire was narrower to the west, and decided to break through there. Given free rein the roan horse like a mad wolf hurtled through the fiery inferno. The intense heat made

Sarin faint and fall limply over his neck, her headdress on fire and white smoke wreathing from her clothes. The roan horse was burnt too, and blood dripped from his mouth. As if sympathising with his mistress he slackened his pace and walked on with lowered head. However at that critical moment his strength failed him. His front legs suddenly buckled under him, his head dropped, and he sank onto the scorched black ground.

As night fell the wind dropped. Sarin felt a refreshing coolness, as when one takes off furs in June to plunge into the river. She recovered consciousness. Her eyes opened weakly, then closed again. However when she remembered she was chasing a counter-revolutionary she shook herself and straightened up. She found the heavy Czech gun still slung over her left arm. Only then did she become conscious of the pain of her face, and when she put up her hand to her cheeks, her fingers came away stained with blood. "The roan horse has been hurt in the fire, and I'm still dizzy," she thought. "It would be better to let Galu go first." So she released Galu from her lap, saying: "Go on! Off with you!" Not a hair of his body had been hurt, and he jumped down and dashed in the direction pointed out by his mistress.

Then Sarin extinguished the sparks in her clothing, adjusted her dress and pulled the horse to his feet. After leading the horse for a few steps she mounted once more to gallop across the boundless plain through the black, illimitable night.

By now drops of rain were beginning to fall from the dark sky, pelting noisily on the grass.

Sanbu had been to town that day to have his horse shod. Since he was late coming home, he knew Sarin must have waited for some time. He bolted his meal and hurried out again. Riding the snow-white horse 'Baby Rabbit', a fast runner with staying power, he reached the sand-dune in next to no time. To his surprise Sarin was not there. There was not even a sign of her. "Hang it, she's let me down," he thought. Looping his whip he started for her home, but he had no sooner passed the sand-dune than he saw a thick pall of smoke to the north, and flames leaping high. At once he put aside all thought of Sarin, and turned back to report to Grandad Amugulan.

Grandad Amugulan had just called a mass meeting and was reading an announcement to the villagers:



"The meeting this evening is for an announcement. First I'll read you the circular from the Hushu Security Office." The old man started reading in a grave, deep voice:

*People's Government of Tunutug-gacha.*

*Yesterday we received a notice from the League Security Office regarding the counter-revolutionary Boyan. This criminal joined the Kuomintang in 1947 and held the post of deputy commander of a unit of the puppet cavalry. He lorded it over the Ar-Kolchin-Hushu, committing every conceivable crime, plundering the people of over five hundred horses, over seven hundred cattle, and over three thousand sheep. He also raped more than twenty women. . . . His crimes aroused the wrath of the people. Hence when our army liberated the Ar-Kolchin-Hushu, this criminal changed his name and escaped to a district in the Zharut-Hushu, where for a long period he carried out subversive activities. The great movement to suppress counter-revolutionaries has struck fear into the hearts of evil-doers, and on the fifteenth of this month he fled. A description of his appearance follows: . . .*

Amugulan had just finished reading this announcement and was pausing a moment before embarking on a simple explanation, when Sanbu burst into the meeting like a two-year-old colt, completely out of breath. Everybody was taken aback.

"A fire's started, Grandad Amugulan!" he gasped.

"What, a fire!" The whole room was agog.

"Speak plainly, Sanbu, where is the fire?" asked Amugulan.

After Sanbu had given Amugulan a clear account, everybody rose from his seat. Some of those standing in the doorway had already left.

Two simple words — "grasslands fire" — yet what an impression they create! There had been many such fires in the past. Homes had been reduced to ashes, while cattle, sheep and camels had perished in the flames. Since liberation, however, each district had a fire prevention organisation, and clauses on fire prevention had been included in patriotic compacts, with the result that no fire had broken out during the past three or four years. Now that the fearful words were heard again, they naturally caused alarm.

On hearing Sanbu's account Amugulan knitted his brows and paced to and fro. Then, he turned to the others:

"Today's meeting is temporarily adjourned. Our first job is to fight the fire. All go home at once to get what's needed, and gather when the bell rings under the old elm east of the village."

Everyone rushed off to carry out the orders.

Amugulan held an emergency meeting with the village cadres and some of the militiamen, at which he said:

"We've had no fire on the Kolchin plain for three or four years, have we? Then what a coincidence that today — just after receiving an urgent notice from the Hushu Security Office — such a fierce fire should suddenly break out. There's more to this than meets the eye. We must be very much on our guard."

They all agreed with Amugulan, and immediately posted guards about the village. Amugulan took out his pencil and wrote a few characters in his diary, then he tore out the page, folded it in three and gave it to Sanbu, saying:

"Deliver this directly to the District, and bring back a receipt." And to another militiaman he said: "You go and ring the bell."

All the villagers gathered under the old elm tree, men and women, old folk and youngsters who had just laid down their school books. Most of them had brought brooms, others had hoes and sopping wet rugs.

About eight hundred yards from the fire was a hillock like a pyramid of cow dung. Amugulan stood there, and waved his arm, and the villagers came to a pause. Old Bayar, who towered a head above the crowd, noticed that the rain was coming down faster and faster, and muttered as if it were an incantation: "When thirst burns your vitals, may you find a peach orchard. When a grassland fire starts, may the north wind bring a downpour."

"Comrades!" shouted Amugulan. "The fire's just ahead. We must learn to fight the fire. We must first break up the enemy forces, then annihilate the different sectors, so to speak."

"But it seems to me this fire is so fierce, if we grapple with it directly we're bound to fail," Old Bayar put in before Amugulan had finished. "That means we must burn a 'fire-ditch' in front of the fire, where all the grass be burnt at once so that by the time the fire reaches the ditch, it cannot pass. That way we can put it out safely. This is a lesson we learnt through many

years in dealing with fires." He made his proposal very confidently.

"Old Bayar's right, that's the best way — let's do it!" said Amugulan.

"Right! That's the way to deal with grassland fires!"

A roar of approbation rose from the crowd.

"All right, don't shout! We'll carry out old Bayar's proposal. First we must systematically burn a strip in front of the fire. When the fire reaches the passage we have burnt out, we'll divide into teams to cope with the different sections. Fortunately it's going to pour all evening. We're in luck. It just goes to show that we people of the Kolchin plain are Fortune's favourites! Get to work, comrades! When we've finished putting out the fire, our pretty girls will sing to us."

Organised into a big fire fighting force, the three hundred odd villagers attacked the fire as if they were besieging a city. All persons, regardless of age or sex, were confident of victory as they charged toward the fiery sea.

Sanbu braved the pouring rain to deliver the letter to the District, but in his eagerness to return and fight the fire, hurried off without waiting for a receipt. Flying like the wind, Baby Rabbit galloped for dear life over the muddy turf. But when he galloped past the eastern sand-dune and turned north, the horse suddenly pricked up his ears and stopped, as if frightened. Sanbu looked in front and saw not far away a dark object. Surprised, he jumped off his horse to have a look at it. It was a brown blanket, soaked through with water. Picking up the blanket he had only taken a couple of steps when he saw another object like a black clod. His flashlight showed it to be a new pink tobacco pouch with long green brocade ribbons embroidered with twining petunias. He gave a puzzled smile: "Who could have had a rendezvous here and dropped this? Well, no matter what pretty girl made it, it's mine now. Still, my Sarin can embroider a hundred times better than this." Then he thought: "Fighting the fire's the main thing." He rolled up the pouch and blanket, fastened them to his saddle, and moved on.

Presently he could hear the distant shouts of the fire fighters and see that the fire was rapidly being extinguished. Only a few minor sections remained, but these also were under control. He was just heaving a sigh of relief, when he noticed a line of fire in

the south, which was stealthily burning across. That looked bad, because to the east was the largest haystack in the whole district. If the fire were to spread here, the cattle would have nothing to eat that winter. Filled with anxiety he leapt down from his horse and tried to call the others to help, but his voice was lost in the sizzling of the flames. Thereupon thrusting the tobacco pouch into his pocket, he took the wet blanket from the saddle, and dashed toward the conflagration which was spreading eastward.

Baby Rabbit retreated a little further from the fire, to wait for his master.

Sanbu was very brave, yet it would be interesting to know what he was thinking when he leapt into the fire. He was not so mad as to seek death by burning. Far from it. He was a level-headed, intelligent youngster. But he was a twenty-two-year-old Youth Leaguer. When he saw the raging fire thrusting like a poisonous snake toward the big haystack, and it looked as if presently the towering goat grass would be ablaze, he leapt into the fire without any thought of the danger.

A wet blanket is the best thing to put out fire. Sanbu used it to extinguish flames right and left. However it is not easy to move in a raging fire. The thick smoke suffocated him, the flames seared him agonizingly. But he paid no attention to them, thinking, "If only I can put out this fire, I don't care if I'm burned."

Exhausted and dizzy from the dense smoke, he pulled himself together for a spell, but then all went black before his eyes and he staggered and fell. Little tongues of flame still darted around him.

Amugulan hurried from east to west and back again, encouraging the villagers and inspecting the work of each team, until he was ready to drop. Thanks to the villagers' efforts and the pouring rain the great fire was finally extinguished.

"Hey, look! There's still fire in the east!" shouted old Bayar.

"How could a fire have started there too?"

Amugulan looked eastward and saw another blaze there. Gasping for breath he hurried over, and was able to make out a black form lying in the flames. He exclaimed, "Someone's lying in the fire. Hurry up and get him out!"

The villagers ran forward, old Bayar at their head. He rushed into the fire with eyes closed and bated breath, picked up the unconscious form and darted back again. Then the others

helped carry the injured man some distance from the fire, and discovered it was Sanbu.

Led by Amugulan the villagers put out this fire too.

Then Amugulan went over to Sanbu to call him by his name, but the lad remained unconscious and there was no reply.

"We'd better hurry up and carry him back," said a youngster.

"No, that doesn't matter," said Amugulan. "He's been overcome by the smoke. As soon as he breathes fresh air he'll come round."

Sure enough, very soon Sanbu recovered consciousness. Still feeling weak and dizzy, he made no answer to Bayar's friendly questions. Bayar knew his daughter and Sanbu were in love, and he himself was fond of the lad.

"He's come to," said Amugulan to the villagers, "and the fire has been extinguished. The rain's getting heavier, we'd better go back. Only the captain of the militia must post some militiamen as guards to see that no further fires break out."

Black night covered the boundless grasslands. Although the fire had been put out, the treasure of the plains—the reeds of the big marsh—had been burnt to the ground. Tired and sick at heart, they all walked home in silence.

On the way back Sanbu's head cleared. He gave Amugulan and Bayar a complete account of how he had picked up the blanket and the tobacco pouch on his way back from delivering the message, and also of his experience later in fighting the fire.

"You say besides picking up a blanket, you picked up a tobacco pouch?" said Bayar, as they entered the village administration office.

"See, here it is." Sanbu produced the pouch from his pocket and handed it to Amugulan.

"Aha! This is very interesting," said Amugulan as he took the pouch and opened it. "There's a paper inside. Why, it's a letter."

"Whose letter? What does it say?" asked Sanbu and Bayar simultaneously.

After glancing through the letter, Amugulan looked bewildered.

"Strange! What can it mean?" he wondered. "The blanket, the letter . . . and on such a dark and rainy night. Very odd."

"What does it mean?"

"Do you see whose letter this is?" He handed it to Sanbu.

"Why, it's a note to me from Sarin," Sanbu cried.

"What's happened to my Sarin?" exclaimed Bayar.

"Did your daughter bring the cattle back this evening?" asked Amugulan.

"I didn't see her, but she may have gone to fight the fire with the others. She's one of the women activists, and wouldn't shirk!"

"Better go home and see whether she's really back or not."

"What could have happened? Right, I'll go and have a look." As he spoke Bayar departed.

*Dear Sanbu,*

*This tobacco pouch is not very pretty, but I tired my fingers out sewing it. It's for you.*

*Sarin.*

*August 24.*

As Sanbu read the letter, his eyes grew round as saucers, and he looked completely at sea.

"Don't you think it strange?" asked Amugulan.

"Strange! Very strange!" Cold sweat was pouring down Sanbu's face. "This suspense is terrible."

"Don't get worked up, lad. When Bayar comes back we'll know."

The door of the outer room slammed as Bayar rushed in with a number of villagers at his heels. Failing to find Sarin at home he had called at several houses.

"She left this morning and hasn't been back since," Bayar told Amugulan. "We've looked all over the village, but no one knows anything about her."

"No, when I was coming back from the District at sunset, I saw her on the east sand-dune. I thought she must be waiting for Sanbu."

"Yes, we had arranged to meet today, but when I got to the east sand-dune she wasn't there."

"Why should she stay out for no reason? What else did you say to her, Sanbu? Why does it happen just today she hasn't come?"

Although Bayar trusted Sanbu, his anxiety made him speak very sternly. It was the first time he had treated Sanbu like this.

Sanbu felt as if he had been given a slap in the face. Unable to speak he stared at the light for a time, then tears came to his eyes.

After a moment's reflection Amugulan took up the brown blanket and said: "I take rather a different view of this. All look at this blanket — a brown blanket. When I read the notice from the Hushu Security Office at the meeting just now, it said that escaped felon Boyan was carrying a brown blanket. It's strange too that those fires broke out this evening. If instead of considering these questions we just quarrel among ourselves, we won't get anywhere."

Bayar looked up in embarrassment, glanced at the company, and said to himself: "The proverb says: 'A blind man can crawl all his life without getting out of the Kolchin grasslands.' I'm an old fool. Although my hair's white I'm still muddle-headed. Amugulan's quite right. Sanbu can't be blamed for Sarin's disappearance. I know he loves her." Then turning to Sanbu he asked, "Are you still angry with me, lad?"

Sanbu got up slowly, and said: "No, I'm not angry with anyone. What worries me is how to get Sarin back quickly. I tell you, I can't be at ease for a single second while she's disappeared."

Just then the militia captain and security officer who had heard of Sarin's disappearance, hurried in perspiring.

"Good, you've come just at the right time," said Amugulan. "I was about to send someone for you."

When Amugulan had studied the situation with the militia captain, the security officer, Sanbu, Bayar and the others, he decided to divide the village militiamen into several groups to search different parts of the plain for Sarin. He also wrote a report to the District.

Amugulan, Sanbu and three other militiamen formed one group, to search northwards.

Sarin had kept after the counter-revolutionary.

The storm raged violently over the grasslands, crashes of thunder and flashes of lightning were making people feel the end of the world was near. Before Sarin stretched the black, empty wilderness. She could only guess at the direction and terrain, guided by her years of experience in cattle herding here. But it is difficult to advance so much as an inch on the grasslands in the rain because everywhere is a mass of mud. Occasionally the roan horse floundered, and horse and rider fell together into the muddy water. But Sarin did not lose heart, and after each fall got up again to go on with the chase.

When her burns came in contact with the water the pain was agonizing. "How far will I have to chase him on this vast plain?" she wondered. Just then a flash of lightning enabled her to see footsteps in the mud, and this encouraged her to go on, thinking: "Shar-mringol river is to the west, and because of this heavy rain it will be in flood. He won't go there. The north's the only possible way."

She could dimly make out a small hill ahead, with some young elms on it. Not only had Sarin often brought the cattle here in the past, but it was on this hill Sanbu had first proposed to her. All kinds of flowers grew on the hill, and she remembered how once Sanbu had put two blossoms in her headdress. . . . In her mind's eye she saw Sanbu's handsome mouth and gay smile, and was lost for a moment in memories of their love.

Suddenly, short barks were heard from the hill, and Sarin's heart missed a beat, though whether from pleasure or fear she herself could hardly say.

"Galu must have found the saboteur," she thought.

Ascending the hill she did her best to make the horse go slowly and quietly, trying to pierce the darkness with her eyes. She hoped little Galu would give her another sign, but he was silent.

"Ha! Let's see you bite again, damn dog!" A man's deep voice sounded triumphantly from the slope seven or eight yards away. Straining her eyes Sarin could see a black figure climbing the hill, and behind it another black form lying on the ground.

"The scoundrel must have killed Galu!" she thought, and in a fit of fury rushed toward him and fired. The black figure flew like the wind. "He has no gun," she thought. "I needn't kill him; better capture him alive!" She caught up and struck him with the butt of the gun. Sarin heard him give a cry and fall. With her finger on the trigger she shouted: "Don't move!" (She remembered this was something soldiers said.) The black form neither spoke nor stirred. "I may have knocked him out," she thought. Alighting from her horse she was just going over to tie him up, when she heard the click of a rifle behind her, and then a shout: "Don't move! If you move we'll fire!"

Sarin trembled all over, and thought: "It's all up! I've fallen into a trap and been surrounded! But I must be a true Mongolian, and show no fear."



"Who are you? If you come any nearer I'll fire!" she shouted at the top of her voice.

"Hi! Is that Sarin?" It was a man's voice which Sarin knew and loved. Then the bright light of an electric torch lit up her mud-stained figure.

"It's really you, Sarin, dear child!" cried Amugulan, jumping down from his horse. There were others behind him.

"Grandad Amugulan! Sanbu!" Never before had these names sounded so dear and wholly admirable to Sarin. With tears in her eyes she ran forward and grasped Amugulan warmly.

"Good girl! Hold on a bit. Tell me, was it you who fired just now?"

"Yes. I'd seized the saboteur's gun, and I knocked him out with it."

Sarin embraced Sanbu too, then took his torch to shine on the prostrate black form. They looked where she turned the torch, and saw a pock-marked man getting up and ready to make off.

"Want to escape, you wretch? Halt!"

Amugulan strode over to the frightened rogue, and asked: "Who are you? What are you doing?"

"I — I'm an ordinary citizen." Gold teeth flashed as he spoke.

"Oh, I know you, you're Deputy Leader Boyan of the Ar-Kolchin-Hushu."

"That's not true, I'm of the Kolchin-Hushu."

"Think you can talk your way out of this? Then think again."

"It was this rogue who set fire to the northern marsh," said Sarin indignantly.

Boyan rolled his eyes and said nothing.

"No more reasoning with a counter-revolutionary," said Amugulan to the militiamen. "Tie him up and take him off."

The sight of the enemy being tied up made Sarin inexpressibly happy. Then Sanbu came up and gripped her hand, saying, "You've had a tough time, Sarin."

"No, it was my duty."

They laughed.

"Sarin's quite right: this is the duty of every Mongolian."

"Grandad Amugulan! My little Galu had been with me for four years, and killed three wolves who were after the cattle; but today . . . " She faltered and stopped.

Amugulan stroked her hair and said: "I feel for you, child. Your hair's been scorched, your face is swollen with burns, and your favourite dog's been killed. But I don't think this is sad. You ought to understand, that man you caught is Boyan, the counter-revolutionary most hated by the people of the Zharut and Kolchin-Hushu, and all Mongolians. So you've not only wiped out a pest for the grasslands, but brought glory on us!" After a pause he went on: "I should tell you, your Sanbu did something pretty fine for the grasslands too. In fighting the fire he leapt right into the flames, until finally he was overcome by the smoke and fell. You are both true Mongolians of the Mao Tse-tung era. The bandit Chiang Kai-shek used to call us Mongolians 'barbarians, brought up on cow-dung'. But today we 'barbarians', under the guidance of Chairman Mao and the Communist Party, have become a new, advanced people, as strong as steel. Not only can we build up our homeland's border region — beautiful Inner Mongolia, we also know how to protect it. Since the drive to suppress counter-revolutionaries scum like Boyan have had to leave the towns. But if they think that they can knock about two or three years on the plain, they're wrong. It's no longer the plain as they knew it. On this vast grassland a great net has been stretched for them!"

Boyan hung his head as Amugulan spoke.

The black clouds overhead rolled southwards, and in the eastern sky dawn appeared. The flowers carpeting the grasslands raised their heads smilingly, while high in the sky wild geese cried.

The sun had risen.

