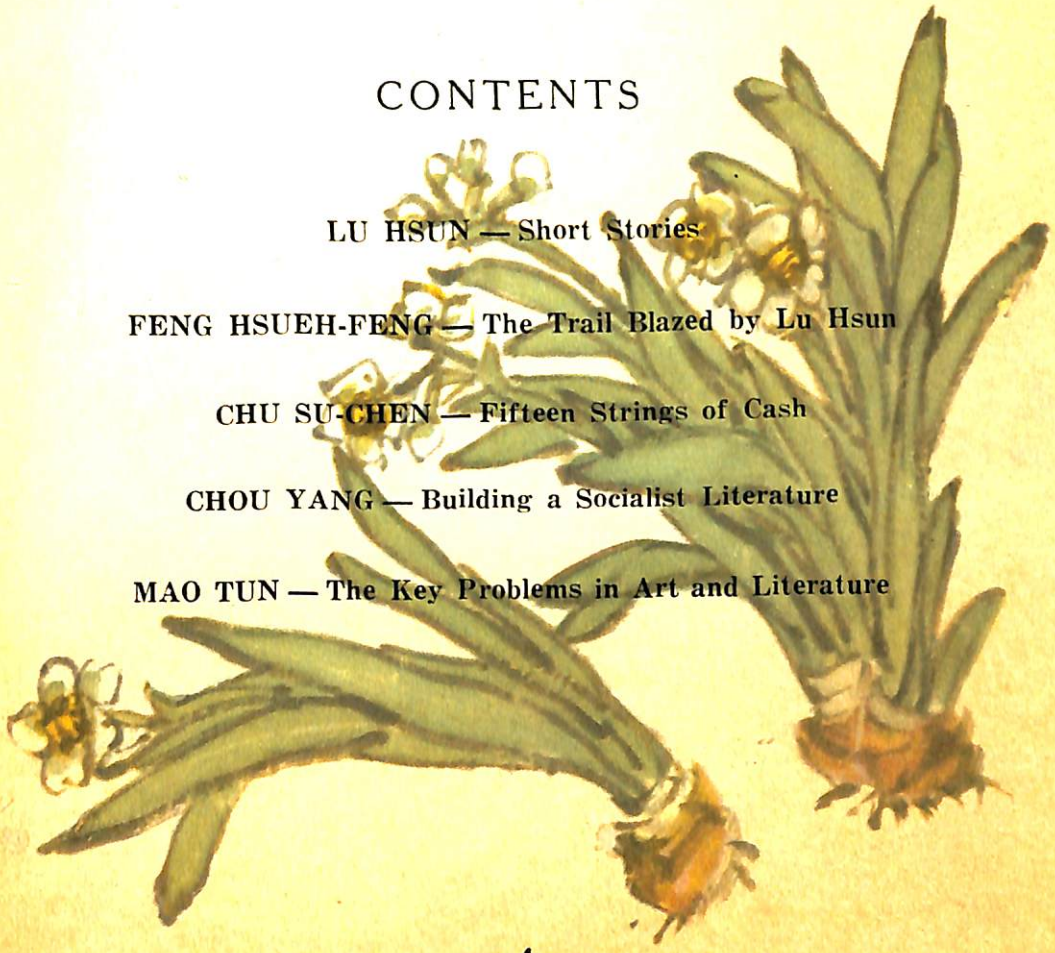
CHINESE LITERATURE

CONTENTS



4

1956

CHINESE LITERATURE

CONTENTS

No. 4, 1956

CHINESE LITERATURE

QUARTERLY

EDITOR: MAO TUN

Published by the Foreign Languages Press
Pai Wan Chuang, Peking (37), China
Printed in the People's Republic of China

SHORT STORIES BY LU HSUN

In this number we are presenting to our readers four more short stories by Lu Hsun. "Tomorrow" comes from his first collection of short stories Call to Arms, *published in 1923. "Soap" and "The Divorce" are from his second collection of stories* Wandering, *published in 1926. The characters and incidents described here are drawn from Chinese society of that period. "The Flight to the Moon" is taken from Lu Hsun's third collection of stories,* Old Tales Retold, *which contains eight tales based on ancient Chinese myths and legends. The hero of this story is a legendary archer of ancient China, while the tale of Chang-ngo's flight to the moon is one of the most beautiful and popular myths in China.*

TOMORROW

"Not a sound—what's wrong with the kid?"

A bowl of yellow wine in his hands, Red-nosed Kung jerked his head towards the next house as he spoke. Blue-skinned Ah-wu set down his own bowl and punched the other hard in the back.

"Bah . . ." he growled thickly. "Going sentimental again!"

Being so out-of-the-way, Luchen was rather old-fashioned. Folk closed their doors and went to bed before the first watch sounded. By midnight there were only two households awake: Prosperity Tavern where a few gluttons guzzled merrily round the bar, and the house next door where Fourth Shan's Wife lived. For, left a widow two years earlier, she had nothing but the cotton-yarn she spun to support herself and her three-year-old boy; this is why she also slept late.

It was a fact that for several days now there had been no sound of spinning. But since there were only two households awake at midnight, Old Kung and the others were naturally the only ones who could notice if there was any sound from Fourth Shan's Wife's house, and the only ones to notice if there was no sound.

After being punched, Old Kung—looking quite at his ease—took a great swig at his wine and piped up a folk tune.

Meanwhile Fourth Shan's Wife was sitting on the edge of her bed, Pao-erh—her treasure—in her arms, while her loom stood silent on the floor. The murky lamplight fell on Pao-erh's face, which showed livid beneath a feverish flush.

"I've drawn lots before the shrine," she was thinking. "I've made a vow to the gods, he's taken the guaranteed cure. If he still doesn't get better, what can I do? I shall have to take him to Dr. Ho Hsiao-hsien. But maybe Pao-erh's only bad at night; when the sun comes out tomorrow his fever may go and he may breathe more easily again. A lot of illnesses are like that."

Fourth Shan's Wife was a simple woman, who did not know what a fearful word "but" is. Thanks to this "but," many bad things turn out well, many good things turn out badly. A summer night is short. Soon after Old Kung and the others stopped singing the sky grew bright in the east; and presently through the cracks in the window filtered the silvery light of dawn.

Waiting for the dawn was not such a simple matter for Fourth Shan's Wife as for other people. The time dragged terribly slowly: each breath Pao-erh took seemed to last at least a year. But now at last it was bright. Clear daylight swallowed up the lamplight. Pao-erh's nostrils quivered as he gasped for breath.

Fourth Shan's Wife smothered a cry, for she knew that this boded ill. But what could she do? she wondered. Her only hope was to take him to Dr. Ho. She might be a simple woman, but she had a will of her own. She stood up, went to the cupboard, and took out her entire savings—thirteen small silver dollars and a hundred and eighty coppers in all. Having put the whole lot in her pocket, she locked the door and carried Pao-erh as fast as she could to Dr. Ho's house.

Early as it was, there were already four patients sitting there. She produced forty silver cents for a registration slip, and Pao-erh was the fifth to be seen. Dr. Ho stretched out two fingers to feel the child's pulses. His nails were a good four inches long, and Fourth Shan's Wife marvelled inwardly, thinking: "Surely my Pao-erh must be fated to live!" She could not help feeling anxious all the same, and could not stop herself asking nervously:

"What's wrong with my Pao-erh, doctor?"

"An obstruction of the digestive tract."

"Is it serious? Will he. . . ."

"Take these two prescriptions to start with."

"He can't breathe, his nostrils are twitching."

"The element of fire overpowers that of metal. . . ."*

* The ancient Chinese believed that there were five elements: fire, wood, earth, metal and water. Fire could conquer metal. The traditional Chinese doctors also considered that the heart, lungs, liver, spleen and kidney corresponded to the five elements. Here, Dr. Ho is saying that heart trouble had affected the lungs.

Leaving this sentence unfinished, Dr. Ho closed his eyes; and Fourth Shan's Wife did not like to say any more. Opposite the doctor sat a man in his thirties, who had now finished making out the prescription.

"The first is Infant Preserver Pills," he told her, pointing to the characters in one corner of the paper. "You can get those only at the Chia family's Salvation Shop."

Fourth Shan's Wife took the paper, and walked out thinking as she went. She might be a simple woman, but she knew Dr. Ho's house, Salvation Shop and her own home formed a triangle; so of course it would be simpler to buy the medicine first before going back. She hurried as fast as she could to Salvation Shop. The assistant raised his long finger-nails too as he slowly read the prescription, then slowly wrapped up the medicine. With Pao-erh in her arms, Fourth Shan's Wife waited. Suddenly Pao-erh stretched up a little hand and tugged at his loose tuft of hair. He had never done this before, and his mother was terrified.

The sun was fairly high now. With the child in her arms and the package of medicine to carry, the further she walked the heavier she found her load. The child kept struggling too, which made the way seem even longer. She had to sit down on the doorstep of a big house by the roadside to rest for a while; and presently her clothes lay so clammy against her skin that she realized she had been sweating. But Pao-erh seemed fast asleep. When she stood up again to walk slowly on, she still found him too heavy. A voice beside her said:

"Let me take him for you, Fourth Shan's Wife!" It sounded like Blue-skinned Ah-wu.

When she looked up, sure enough it was Ah-wu, who was following her with eyes still heavy from sleep.

Though Fourth Shan's Wife had been longing for an angel to come to her rescue, she had not wanted her champion to be Ah-wu. But there was something of the gallant about Ah-wu, for he absolutely insisted on helping her; and at last, after several refusals, she gave way. As he stretched his arm between her breast and the child, then thrust it down to take over Pao-erh, she felt a wave of heat along her breast. She flushed right up to her ears.

They walked along, two and a half feet apart. Ah-wu made some remarks, most of which were left unanswered by Fourth Shan's Wife. They had not gone far when he gave the child back to her, saying he had arranged yesterday to have a meal at this time with a friend. Fourth Shan's Wife took Pao-erh back. Luckily it wasn't far now: already she could see Ninth Aunt Wang sitting at the side of the street, calling out to her:

"Fourth Shan's Wife, how's the child? . . . Did you get to see the doctor?"

"We saw him. . . . Ninth Aunt Wang, you're old and you've seen a lot. Will you look him over for me, and say what you think. . . ."

"Um."

"Well . . . ?"

"Ummm. . . ."

When Ninth Aunt Wang had examined Pao-erh, she nodded her head twice, then shook it twice.

By the time Pao-erh had taken his medicine it was after noon. Fourth Shan's Wife watched him closely, and he did seem a good deal quieter. In the afternoon he suddenly opened his eyes and called: "Ma!" Then he closed his eyes again and seemed to be sleeping. He had not slept long before his forehead and the tip of his nose were beaded with sweat, which, when his mother felt it, stuck to her fingers like glue. In a panic she felt his chest, then burst out sobbing.

After quieting down, his breathing had stopped completely. After sobbing, she started wailing. Soon groups of people gathered: inside the room Ninth Aunt Wang, Blue-skinned Ah-wu and the like; outside others like the landlord of Prosperity Tavern and Red-nosed Kung. Ninth Aunt Wang decreed that a string of paper coins should be burnt; then, taking two stools and five articles of clothing as security, she borrowed two dollars for Fourth Shan's Wife to prepare a meal for all those who were helping.

The first problem was the coffin. Fourth Shan's Wife still had a pair of silver ear-rings and a silver hair-pin plated with gold, which she gave to the landlord of Prosperity Tavern so that he would go surety for her and buy a coffin half for cash, half on credit. Blue-skinned Ah-wu raised his hand to volunteer to help, but Ninth Aunt Wang would not hear of it. All she would let him do was carry the coffin the next day. "Old bitch!" he cursed, and stood there grumpily pursing his lips. The landlord left, coming back that evening to report that the coffin would have to be specially made, and would not be ready till nearly morning.

By the time the landlord came back the other helpers had finished their meal. And Luchen being rather old-fashioned, they all went home to sleep before the first watch. Only Ah-wu leant on the bar of Prosperity Tavern drinking, while Old Kung croaked a song.

Meanwhile Fourth Shan's Wife was sitting on the edge of the bed crying, Pao-erh lay on the bed, and the loom stood silent on the floor. After a long time, when Fourth Shan's Wife had no more tears to shed, she opened wide her eyes, and looked around in amazement. All this was impossible! "This is only a dream," she thought. "It's all a dream. I shall wake up tomorrow lying snug in bed, with Pao-erh sleeping snugly beside me. Then he'll wake and call: 'Ma!' and jump down like a young tiger to play."

Old Kung had long since stopped singing, and the light had gone out in Prosperity Tavern. Fourth Shan's Wife sat staring, but could not believe all that had happened. A cock crew, the sky grew bright

in the east, and through the cracks in the window filtered the silvery light of dawn.

By degrees the silvery light of dawn turned copper, and the sun shone on the roof. Fourth Shan's Wife sat there staring till someone knocked, when she gave a start and ran to open the door. A stranger was there with something on his back, and behind him stood Ninth Aunt Wang.

Oh, it was the coffin he'd brought!

Not till that afternoon was the lid of the coffin put on, because Fourth Shan's Wife would keep crying, then taking a look, and could not bear to have the lid closed down. Luckily, Ninth Aunt Wang grew tired of waiting, hurried indignantly forward and pulled her aside. Then they hastily closed it up.

Fourth Shan's Wife had really done all she could for her Pao-erh—nothing had been forgotten. The previous day she had burned a string of paper coins, this morning she had burned the forty-nine books of the *Incantation of Great Mercy*,* and before putting him in the coffin she had dressed him in his newest clothes and set by his pillow all the toys he liked best—a little clay figure, two small wooden bowls, two glass bottles. Though Ninth Aunt Wang reckoned carefully on her fingers, even then she could not think of anything they had forgotten.

Since Blue-skinned Ah-wu did not turn up all day, the landlord of Prosperity Tavern hired two porters for Fourth Shan's Wife at 210 large coppers each, who carried the coffin to the public graveyard and dug a grave. Ninth Aunt Wang helped her prepare a meal to which everyone who had lifted a finger or opened his mouth was invited. Soon the sun made it clear that it was about to set, and the guests unwittingly made it clear that they were about to leave—home they all went.

Fourth Shan's Wife felt dizzy at first, but after a little rest she quietened down. At once, though, she had the impression that things were rather strange. Something which had never happened to her before, and which she had thought never could happen, *had* happened. The more she thought, the more surprised she felt, and another thing that struck her as rather strange was the fact that the room had suddenly grown too silent.

She stood up and lit the lamp, and the room seemed even more silent. She groped her way over to close the door, came back and sat on the bed, while the loom stood silent on the floor. She pulled herself together and looked around, feeling unable either to sit or stand. The room was not only too silent, it was far too big as well, and the things in it were far too empty. This over-large room hemmed her in, and the emptiness all around her bore hard on her, till she could hardly breathe.

---

* This was a Buddhist chant, believed to help the soul of the deceased to reach heaven.

She knew now her Pao-erh was really dead; and, not wanting to see this room, she blew out the light and lay down to cry and think. She remembered how Pao-erh had sat by her side when she spun, eating peas flavoured with aniseed. He had watched her hard with his small black eyes and thought. "Ma!" he suddenly said. "Dad sold *hun tun*.* When I'm big I'll sell *hun tun* too, and make lots and lots of money—and I'll give it all to you."

At such times even every inch of yarn she spun seemed worthwhile and alive. But what now? Fourth Shan's Wife had not considered the present at all—as I have said, she was only a simple woman. What solution could she think of? All she knew was that this room was too silent, too large, too empty.

But even though Fourth Shan's Wife was a simple woman, she knew the dead cannot come to life again, and she would never see her Pao-erh any more. She sighed and said: "Pao-erh, you must still be here. Let me see you in my dreams." Then she closed her eyes, hoping to fall asleep at once, so that she could see Pao-erh. She heard her hard breathing clearly through the silence, the vastness and emptiness.

At last Fourth Shan's Wife dozed off, and the whole room was very still. Red-nosed Kung's folk song had long since ended, and he had staggered out of Prosperity Tavern to sing in a falsetto:

"I pity you—my darling—all alone. . . ."

Blue-skinned Ah-wu grabbed Old Kung's shoulder, and laughing tipsily they reeled away together.

Fourth Shan's Wife was asleep, Old Kung and the others had gone, the door of Prosperity Tavern was closed. Luchen was sunk in utter silence. Only the night, eager to change into the morrow, was journeying on in the silence; and, hidden in the darkness, a few dogs were barking.

June 1920

SOAP

With her back to the north window in the slanting sunlight, Ssu-min's wife was pasting paper money for the dead with her eight-year-old daughter, Hsiu-erh, when she heard the slow, heavy footsteps of someone in cloth shoes and knew her husband was back. She paid no attention, though, simply went on pasting coins. But the tread of cloth shoes drew

* Dumplings stuffed with meat and boiled in soup.

nearer and nearer, till it finally stopped beside her. Then she could not help looking up to see Ssu-min before her, hunching his shoulders and stooping forward to fumble desperately under his cloth jacket in the inner pocket of his long gown.

By dint of twisting and turning he extracted his hand at last with a small oblong package in it, which he handed to his wife. As she took it, she smelt an indefinable fragrance rather reminiscent of olive. On the green paper wrapper was a bright golden seal with a network of tiny designs. Hsiu-erh bounded forward to seize this and look at it, but her mother promptly pushed her aside.

"Been shopping? . . ." she asked as she looked at it.

"Er — yes." He stared at the package in her hand.

The green paper wrapper was opened. Inside was a layer of very thin paper, also a sunflower-green, and not till this was unwrapped was the object itself exposed—glossy and hard, besides being sunflower-green, with another network of fine designs on it. The thin paper was a cream colour, it appeared. The indefinable fragrance rather reminiscent of olive was stronger now.

"My, this is really good soap!"

She held the soap to her nose as gingerly as if it were a child, and sniffed at it as she spoke.

"Er — yes. Just use this in future. . . ."

As he spoke, she noticed him eyeing her neck, and felt herself flushing up to her cheekbones. Sometimes when she rubbed her neck, especially behind the ears, her fingers detected a roughness; and though she knew this was the accumulated dirt of many years, she had never given it much thought. Now, under his scrutiny, she could not help blushing as she looked at this green, foreign soap with the curious scent, and this blush spread right to the tips of her ears. She mentally resolved to have a thorough wash with this soap after supper.

"There are places you can't wash clean just with honey locust pods,"* she muttered to herself.

"Ma, can I have this?" As Hsiu-erh reached out for the sunflower-green paper, Chao-erh, the younger daughter who had been playing outside, came running in too. Mrs. Ssu-min promptly pushed them both aside, folded the thin paper in place, wrapped the green paper round it as before, then leant over to put it on the highest shelf of the wash-stand. After one final glance, she turned back to her paper coins.

"Hsueh-cheng!" Ssu-min seemed to have remembered something. He gave a long-drawn-out shout, sitting down on a high-backed chair opposite his wife.

"Hsueh-cheng!" she helped him call.

---

* In many parts of China, honey locust pods were used for washing. They were cheaper than soap, but not so effective.

She stopped pasting coins to listen, but not a sound could she hear. When she saw him with upturned head waiting so impatiently, she felt quite apologetic.

"Hsueh-cheng!" she called shrilly at the top of her voice.

This call indeed proved effective, for they heard the tramp of leather shoes draw near, and Hsueh-cheng was standing before her. He was in shirt sleeves, and his plump round face was shiny with perspiration.

"What were you doing?" she asked disapprovingly. "Why didn't you hear your father call?"

"I was practising Hexagram Boxing. . . ." He turned at once to his father and straightened up, looking at him as if to ask what he wanted.

"Hsueh-cheng, I want to ask you the meaning of *o-du-fu.*"*

"*O-du-fu*? . . . Isn't it a very fierce woman?"

"What nonsense! The idea!" Ssu-min was suddenly furious. "Am I a woman, pray?"

Hsueh-cheng recoiled two steps, and stood straighter than ever. Though his father's gait sometimes reminded him of the way old men walked in Peking opera, he had never considered Ssu-min as a woman. His answer, he saw now, had been a great mistake.

"As if I didn't know *o-du-fu* means a very fierce woman. Would I have to ask *you* that? — This isn't Chinese, it's foreign devils' language, I'm telling you. What does it mean, do you know?"

"I . . . I don't know." Hsueh-cheng felt even more uneasy.

"Pah! What use is it my spending all that money to send you to school if you don't even understand a little thing like this? Your school boasts that it lays equal stress on speech and comprehension, yet it hasn't taught you anything. The ones speaking this devils' language couldn't have been more than fourteen or fifteen, actually a little younger than you, yet they were chattering away in it, while you can't even tell me the meaning. And you have the face to answer 'I don't know.' Go and look it up for me at once!"

"Yes," answered Hsueh-cheng deep down in his throat, then respectfully withdrew.

"I don't know what students today are coming to," declared Ssu-min with emotion after a pause. "As a matter of fact, in the time of Kuang Hsu,** I was all in favour of opening schools; but I never foresaw how great the evils would be. What 'emancipation' and 'freedom' have we had? There is no true learning, nothing but absurdities. I've spent quite a bit of money on Hsueh-cheng, all to no purpose. It wasn't easy to get him into this half-Western, half-Chinese school, where they claim they

---

* In Chinese this means "vicious wife."

** i.e. 1875-1908.

lay equal stress on 'speaking and comprehending English.'* You'd think all should be well. But — bah! — after one whole year of study he can't even understand *o-du-fu*! He must still be studying dead books. What use is such a school, I ask you? What I say is: Close the whole lot of them!"

"Yes, really, better close the whole lot of them," chimed in his wife sympathetically, pasting away at the paper money.

"There's no need for Hsiu-erh and her sister to attend any school. 'What's the good of girls studying?' as Ninth Grandpa said. When he opposed girls' schools I attacked him for it; but now I see the old folk were right after all. Just think, it's already in very poor taste the way women wander up and down the streets, and now they want to cut their hair as well. Nothing disgusts me so much as these short-haired schoolgirls. What I say is: There's some excuse for soldiers and bandits, but these girls are the ones who turn everything upside down. They ought to be very severely dealt with indeed. . . ."

"Yes, as if it wasn't enough for all men to look like monks, the women are imitating nuns."**

"Hsueh-cheng!"

Hsueh-cheng hurried in holding a small, fat, gilt-edged book, which he handed to his father.

"This looks like it," he said, pointing to one place. "Here. . . ."

Ssu-min took it and looked at it. He knew it was a dictionary, but the characters were very small and horizontally printed too. He turned frowning towards the window, and screwed up his eyes to read the passage Hsueh-cheng had pointed out.

" 'A society founded in the eighteenth century for mutual relief.' — No, that can't be it. — How do you pronounce this?" He pointed at the devils' word in front.

"Oddfellows."

"No, no, that wasn't it." Ssu-min suddenly lost his temper again. "I told you it was bad language, a swear-word of some sort, to abuse someone of my type. Understand? Go and look it up!"

Hsueh-cheng glanced at him several times, but did not move.

"This is too puzzling. How can he make head or tail of it? You must explain things clearly to him first, before he can look it up properly." Seeing Hsueh-cheng in a quandary, his mother felt sorry for him and intervened rather indignantly on his behalf.

"It was when I was buying soap at Kuang Jun Hsiang on the main street," sighed Ssu-min, turning to her. "There were three students shop-

---

* English was taught in nearly all the new schools at that time, and learning to speak was considered as important as learning to read.

** Monks and nuns in China shaved their heads. Hence, at the end of the Ching dynasty and later, conservatives laughed at the men who cut their queues, claiming they looked like monks.

ping there too. Of course, to them I must have seemed a little pernickety. I looked at five or six kinds of soap all over forty cents, and turned them down. Then I looked at some priced ten cents a cake, but it was too poor, with no scent at all. Since I thought it best to strike a happy mean, I chose that green soap at twenty-four cents a cake. The assistant was one of these supercilious young fellows with eyes on the top of his head, so he pulled a long dog's face. At that those impudent students started winking at each other and talking devils' language. Then I wanted to unwrap the soap and look at it before paying — for with all that foreign paper round it, how could I tell whether it was good or bad? But that supercilious young fellow not only refused, but was very unreasonable and passed some offensive remarks, at which those whipper-snappers laughed. It was the youngest of the lot who said that, looking straight at me, and the rest of them started laughing. So it must have been some bad word." He turned back to Hsueh-cheng. "Look for it in the section headed Bad Language!"

"Yes," answered Hsueh-cheng deep down in his throat, then respectfully withdrew.

"Yet they still shout 'New Culture! New Culture!' when the world's in such a state! Isn't this bad enough?" His eyes on the rafters, he went on. "The students have no morals, society has no morals. Unless we find some panacea, China will really be finished. Look, how pathetic that was. . . ."

"What?" asked his wife casually, not really curious.

"A filial daughter. . . ." His eyes came round to her, and there was respect in his voice. "There were two beggars on the main street. One was a girl who looked eighteen or nineteen. Actually, it's most improper to beg at that age, but beg she did. She was with an old woman of about seventy, who had white hair and was blind. They were begging under the eaves of that clothes shop, and everybody said how filial she was. The old one was her grandmother. Whatever trifle the girl received, she gave it to her grandmother, choosing to go hungry herself. But do you think people would give alms to even such a filial daughter?"

He fixed her with his eye, as if to test her intelligence.

She made no answer, but fixed him with *her* eye, as if waiting for him to elucidate.

"Bah — no!" He supplied the answer himself at last. "I watched for a long time, and saw one person only give her a copper. Plenty of others had gathered round, but only to jeer at them. There were two low types as well, one of whom had the impertinence to say:

" 'Ah-fa! Don't be put off by the dirt on this piece of goods. If you buy two cakes of soap, and give her a good scrubbing, the result won't be bad at all!' Think, what a way to talk!"

She snorted and lowered her head. After quite a time, she asked rather casually: "Did *you* give her any money?"

"Did I? — No. I'd have felt ashamed to give just one or two coins. She wasn't an ordinary beggar, you know. . . ."

"Mm." Without waiting for him to finish she stood up slowly and walked to the kitchen. Dusk was gathering, and it was time for supper.

Ssu-min stood up too, and walked into the courtyard. It was lighter out than in. Hsueh-cheng was practising Hexagram Boxing in a corner by the wall. This constituted his "home education," and he used the economical method of employing the hour between day and night for this purpose. Hsueh-cheng had been boxing now for about half a year. Ssu-min nodded very slightly, as if in approval, then began to pace the courtyard with his hands behind his back. Before long, the broad leaves of the evergreen which was the only potted plant they had were swallowed up in the darkness, and stars twinkled between white clouds which looked like torn cotton. Night had fallen. Ssu-min could not repress his growing indignation. He felt called on to do great deeds, to declare war on all the bad students around and on this wicked society. By degrees he grew bolder and bolder, his steps became longer and longer, and the thud of his cloth soles grew louder and louder, waking the hen and her chicks in the coop so that they cheeped in alarm.

A light appeared in the hall — the signal that supper was ready — and the whole household gathered round the table in the middle. The lamp stood at the lower end of the table, while Ssu-min sat alone at the head. His plump, round face was like Hsueh-cheng's, with the addition of two sparse whiskers. Seen through the hot vapour from the vegetable soup, he looked like the God of Wealth you find in temples. On the left sat Mrs. Ssu-min and Chao-erh, on the right Hsueh-cheng and Hsiu-erh. Chopsticks pattered like rain against the bowls. Though no one said a word, their supper table was very animated.

Chao-erh upset her bowl, spilling soup over half the table. Ssu-min opened his narrow eyes as wide as he could. Only when he saw she was going to cry did he stop glaring at her and reach out with his chopsticks for a tender morsel of cabbage he had spotted. But the tender morsel had disappeared. He looked right and left, and discovered Hsueh-cheng on the point of stuffing it into his wide-open mouth. Disappointed, he ate a mouthful of yellowish leaves instead.

"Hsueh-cheng!" He looked at his son. "Have you found that phrase or not?"

"Which phrase? — No, not yet!"

"Pah! Look at you, not a good student and with no sense either — all you can do is eat! You should learn from that filial daughter: although she's a beggar, she still treats her grandmother very respectfully, even if it means going hungry herself. But what do you impudent students know of such things? You'll grow up like those low types. . . ."

"I've thought of one possibility, but I don't know if it's right. . . .

I think, perhaps, they may have said *o-du-fu-la* (Chinese transliteration of 'old fool' — *Translator*)."

"That's right! That's it exactly! That's exactly the sound it was: *o-du-fu-la*. What does that mean? You belong to the same group: you must know."

"Mean?—I'm not sure what it means."

"Nonsense. Don't try to deceive me. You're all a bad lot."

" 'Even thunder won't strike folk at meat,' " burst out Mrs. Ssu-min suddenly. "Why do you keep losing your temper today? Even at supper you can't stop hitting the hen while pointing at the dog. What do boys that age understand?"

"What?" Ssu-min was on the point of answering back when he saw her sunken cheeks were quivering with anger, her colour had changed, and a fearful glint had come into her triangular eyes. He hastily changed his tune. "I've not been losing my temper. I'm just telling Hsueh-cheng to learn a little sense."

"How can he understand what's in *your* mind?" She looked angrier than ever. "If he had any sense, he'd long since have lit a lantern or a torch and gone out to fetch that filial daughter. You've already bought her one cake of soap: all you have to do is buy another. . . ."

"Nonsense! That's what that low type said."

"I'm not so sure. If you buy another cake and give her a good scrubbing, then worship her, the whole world will be at peace."

"How can you say such a thing? What connection is there? Because I remembered you'd no soap. . . ."

"There's a connection all right. You bought it specially for the filial daughter; so go and give her a good scrubbing. I don't deserve it. I don't want it. I don't want to share her glory."

"Really, how can you talk like that?" mumbled Ssu-min. "You women. . . ." His face was perspiring like Hsueh-cheng's after Hexagram Boxing, probably mostly because the food had been so hot.

"What about us women? We women are much better than you men. If you men aren't cursing eighteen or nineteen-year-old girl students, you're praising eighteen or nineteen-year-old girl beggars: such dirty minds you have! Scrubbing, indeed!—Disgusting!"

"Didn't you hear? That was one of those low types. . . ."

"Ssu-min!" A thundering voice was heard from the darkness outside.

"Tao-tung? I'm coming!"

Ssu-min knew this was Ho Tao-tung, famed for his powerful voice, and he shouted back as joyfully as a criminal newly reprieved.

"Hsueh-cheng, hurry up and light the lamp to show Uncle Ho into the library!"

Hsueh-cheng lit a candle, and ushered Tao-tung into a room on the west. They were followed by Pu Wei-yuan.

"I'm sorry I didn't welcome you. Excuse me." With his mouth still full of rice, Ssu-min came in and bowed with clasped hands in greeting. "Won't you join us at our simple meal? . . ."

"We've already eaten," Wei-yuan stepped forward and greeted him. "We've hurried here at this time of night because of the eighteenth essay and poem contest of the Moral Rearmament Literary League. Isn't tomorrow the seventeenth?"

"What? Is it the sixteenth today?" asked Ssu-min in surprise.

"See how absent-minded you are!" boomed Tao-tung.

"So we'll have to send something in tonight to the newspaper office, to make sure they print it tomorrow."

"I've already drafted the title of the essay. See whether you think it will do or not." As he was speaking, Tao-tung produced a slip of paper from his handkerchief and handed it to Ssu-min.

Ssu-min stepped up to the candle, unfolded the paper, and read it word by word: " 'We humbly suggest an essay in the name of the whole nation to beg the President to issue an order for the promotion of the Confucian classics and the worship of the mother of Mencius,* in order to revive this moribund world and preserve our national character.' Very good. Very good. Isn't it a little long, though?"

"That doesn't matter," answered Tao-tung loudly, "I've worked it out, and it won't cost more to advertise. But what about the title for the poem?"

"The title for the poem?" Ssu-min suddenly looked most respectful. "I've thought of one. How about The Filial Daughter? It's a true story, and she deserves to be eulogized. On the main street today. . . ."

"Oh, no, that won't do," put in Wei-yuan hastily, waving his hand to stop Ssu-min. "I saw her too. She isn't from these parts, and I couldn't understand her dialect, nor she mine. I don't know where she's from. Everyone says she's filial; but when I asked her if she could write poems, she shook her head. If she could, that would be fine."**

"But since loyalty and filial piety are so important, it doesn't matter too much if she can't write poems. . . ."

"That isn't true. Quite otherwise." Wei-yuan raised his hands and rushed towards Ssu-min, to shake and push him. "She'd only be interesting if she could write poems."

"Let's use this title." Ssu-min pushed him aside. "Add an explanation and print it. In the first place, it will serve to eulogize her; in the second, we can use this to criticize society. What is the world coming to anyway? I watched for some time, and didn't see anybody give her a cent—aren't people utterly heartless. . . ."

---

* A woman famous for her virtue. According to tradition, she moved house three times to avoid undesirable companions for her son.

** In old China, it was considered romantic for women to exchange ideas with men through the medium of poems. The fashionable courtesans could write poetry.

"Aiya, Ssu-min!" Wei-yuan rushed over again. "You're cursing baldheads to a monk. I didn't give her anything because I didn't happen to have any money on me."

"Don't be so sensitive, Wei-yuan." Ssu-min pushed him aside again. "Of course you're an exception. Let me finish. There was quite a crowd around them, showing no respect, just jeering. There were two low types as well, who were even more impertinent. One of them said: 'Ah-fa! If you buy two cakes of soap and give her a good scrubbing, the result won't be bad at all!' Just think. . . ."

"Ha, ha! Two cakes of soap!" Tao-tung suddenly bellowed with laughter, nearly splitting their ear-drums. "Buy soap! Ho, ho, ho!"

"Tao-tung! Tao-tung! Don't make such a noise!" Ssu-min gave a start, panic-stricken.

"A good scrubbing! Ho, ho, ho!"

"Tao-tung!" Ssu-min looked stern. "We're discussing serious matters. Why should you make such a noise, nearly deafening everyone? Listen to me: we'll use both these titles, and send them straight to the newspaper office so that they come out without fail tomorrow. I'll have to trouble you both to take them there."

"All right, all right. Of course," agreed Wei-yuan readily.

"Ha, ha! A good scrubbing! Ho, ho!"

"Tao-tung!" shouted Ssu-min, furious.

This shout made Tao-tung stop laughing. After they had drawn up the explanation, Wei-yuan copied it on the paper and left with Tao-tung for the newspaper office. Ssu-min carried the candle to see them out, then walked back to the door of the hall feeling rather apprehensive. After some hesitation, though, he finally crossed the threshold. As he went in, his eyes fell on the small, green, oblong package of soap in the middle of the central table, the gold characters on it glittering in the lamplight, with fine designs around them.

Hsiu-erh and Chao-erh were playing on the floor at the lower end of the table, while Hsueh-cheng sat on the right side looking up something in his dictionary. Last of all, on the high-backed chair in the shadows far from the lamp, Ssu-min discovered his wife. Her impassive face showed neither joy nor anger, and she was staring at nothing.

"A good scrubbing indeed! Disgusting!"

Faintly, Ssu-min heard Hsiu-erh's voice behind him. He turned, but she was not moving. Only Chao-erh had put both small hands to her face as if to shame somebody.

This was no place for him. He blew out the candle, and went into the yard to pace up and down. And, because he forgot to be quiet, the mother hen and her chicks started cheeping again. At once he walked more lightly, moving further away. After a long time, the lamp in the hall was transferred to the bedroom. The moonlight on the ground

was like seamless white gauze, and the moon—quite full—seemed a jade disc among the bright clouds.

He felt not a little depressed, as if he, like the filial daughter, was "utterly forlorn and alone." That night he slept very late.

By the next morning, however, the soap was being honoured by being used. Getting up later than usual, he saw his wife leaning over the wash-stand rubbing her neck, with bubbles like those emitted by great crabs heaped up over both her ears. The difference between these and the small white bubbles produced by honey locust pods was like that between heaven and earth. After this, an indefinable fragrance rather reminiscent of olive always emanated from Mrs. Ssu-min. Not for nearly half a year did this suddenly give place to another scent, which all who smelt it averred was like sandalwood.

March 22, 1924

THE DIVORCE

"Ah, Uncle Mu! A happy New Year and good luck to you!"

"How are you, Pa-san? Happy New Year! . . ."

"Happy New Year! So Ai-ku's here as well. . . ."

"Well met, Grandad Mu! . . ."

As Chuang Mu-san and his daughter Ai-ku stepped down into the boat from Magnolia Bridge Wharf a hum of voices broke out on board. Some of the passengers clasped their hands and bowed, and four places were vacated on the benches of the cabin. Calling out greetings, Chuang Mu-san sat down, leaning his long pipe against the side of the boat. Ai-ku sat on his left opposite Pa-san, her scythe-shaped feet fanning out to form a V.

"Going into town, Grandad Mu?" asked a man with a ruddy face like the shell of a crab.

"Not to town." Grandad Mu sounded rather dispirited. But his dark red face was so wrinkled in any case that he looked much the same as usual. "We're making a trip to Pang Village."

All on board stopped talking to stare at them.

"Is it Ai-ku's business again?" asked Pa-san at last.

"It is. . . . This affair will be the death of me. It's dragged on now for three years. We've quarrelled and patched it up time after time; yet still the thing isn't settled. . . ."

"Will you be going to Mr. Wei's house again?"

"That's right. This won't be the first time he's acted as peace-maker; but I've never agreed to his terms. Not that it matters. Their

family's having their New Year reunion now. Even Seventh Master from the city will be there. . . ."

"Seventh Master?" Pa-san opened his eyes very wide. "So he'll be there to put his word in too, eh? . . . Well. . . . As a matter of fact, since we pulled down their kitchen range last year we've had our revenge more or less. Besides, there's really no point in Ai-ku going back there. . . ." He lowered his eyes again.

"I'm not set on going back there, brother Pa-san!" Ai-ku looked up indignantly. "I'm doing this to spite them. Just think! Young Beast carried on with that little widow and decided he didn't want me. But is it as simple as that? Old Beast just egged on his son and tried to get rid of me too — as if it were all that easy! What about Seventh Master? Just because he exchanges cards with the magistrate, does that mean he can't talk our language? He can't be such a blockhead as Mr. Wei, who says nothing but: 'Separate, better separate.' I'll tell him what I've had to put up with all these years, and we'll see who he says is right!"

Pa-san was convinced, and kept his mouth shut.

The boat was very quiet, with no sound but the plash of water against the bow. Chuang Mu-san reached for his pipe and filled it.

A fat man sitting opposite, next to Pa-san, rummaged in his girdle for a flint and struck a light, which he held to Chuang Mu-san's pipe.

"Thank you, thank you," said Chuang Mu-san, nodding to him.

"Though this is the first time we've met," said the fat man respectfully, "I heard of you long ago. Yes, who is there in all the eighteen villages by the coast who doesn't know of Uncle Mu? We've known too for some time that young Shih was carrying on with a little widow. When you took your six sons to tear down their kitchen range last year, who didn't say you were right? . . . All the big gates open for you, you have plenty of face. . . . Why be afraid of *them*. . . ."

"This uncle is a truly discerning man," said Ai-ku approvingly. "I don't know who he is, though."

"My name is Wang Te-kuei," replied the fat man promptly.

"They can't just push me out! I don't care whether it's Seventh Master or Eighth Master. I'll go on making trouble till their family's ruined and all of them are dead! Mr. Wei has been at me four times, hasn't he? Even dad's been thrown off his balance by the sight of that settlement money. . . ."

Chuang Mu-san swore softly to himself.

"But, Grandad Mu, didn't the Shih family send Mr. Wei a whole feast at the end of last year?" asked Crab-face.

"Makes no difference," said Wang Te-kuei. "Can a feast blind a man completely? If so, what happens when you send him a foreign banquet? Those scholars who know the truth will always stick up for justice. If anyone's bullied by everyone else, for instance, they will

up and speak for him no matter whether there's wine to be had or not. At the end of last year, Mr. Yung of our humble village came back from Peking. He's one who has seen the great world, not like us villagers. He said that a Madame Kuang there, who's the best. . . ."

"Wang Jetty!" shouted the boatmen, preparing to moor. "Any passengers for Wang Jetty?"

"Here, me!" Fatty grabbed his pipe, and darted out of the cabin, jumping ashore just as the boat drew in.

"Excuse me!" he called back with a nod to the passengers.

The boat rowed on in fresh silence, broken only by the plash of water. Pa-san began to doze off, facing Ai-ku's scythe-shaped shoes, and his mouth fell open by degrees. The two old women in the front cabin began softly chanting Buddhist prayers and telling their beads. They looked at Ai-ku and exchanged significant glances, pursing their lips and nodding.

Ai-ku was staring at the awning above her, probably considering how best to raise such trouble that Old Beast's family would be ruined and he and Young Beast would have no way to turn. She was not afraid of Mr. Wei. She had seen him twice and he was nothing but a squat, round-headed fellow — there were plenty like him in her own village, only a little darker.

Chuang Mu-san had come to the end of his tobacco, and the oil in the pipe was sputtering, but still he went on puffing. He knew the stop after Wang Jetty was Pang Village. Already, in fact, you could see Literary Star Pavilion at the entrance to the village. He had been here so often it was not worth talking about, any more than Mr. Wei. He remembered how his daughter had come crying home, how badly her husband and father-in-law had behaved, and how they had worsted him. The past unfolded again before his eyes. Usually when he recalled how he had punished the evil-doers, he would give a bleak smile—but not this time. The fat form of Seventh Master had somehow intervened, and was squeezing his thoughts out of any semblance of order.

The boat went on in continued silence. Only the Buddhist prayers swelled in volume. Everyone else seemed sunk in thought like Ai-ku and her father.

"Here you are, Uncle Mu. Pang Village."

Roused by the boatman's voice, they looked up to see Literary Star Pavilion before them.

Chuang jumped ashore, and Ai-ku followed him. They passed the pavilion and headed for Mr. Wei's house. After passing thirty houses on their way south, they turned a corner and reached their destination. Four boats with black awnings were moored in a row at the gate.

As they stepped through the great, black-lacquered gate, they were asked into the gatehouse. It was full of boatmen and farm-hands, who were seated at two tables. Ai-ku dared not stare at them, but she took

one hasty look round, and saw there was not a sign of Old Beast and Young Beast.

When a servant brought in soup containing sweet New Year cakes, without knowing why, she felt even more uncomfortable and uneasy. "Just because he exchanges cards with the magistrate doesn't mean he can't talk our language, does it?" she thought. "These scholars who know the truth will always stick up for justice. I must tell Seventh Master the whole story, beginning from the time I married at the age of fifteen. . . ."

When she finished the soup, she knew the time was at hand. Sure enough, before long she found herself following one of the farm-hands, who ushered her and her father across the great hall, and round a corner into the reception room.

The room was so crammed with things she could not take in all it contained. There were many guests as well, whose short jackets of red and blue satin were shimmering all around her. And in the midst of them was a man who she knew at once must be Seventh Master. Though he had a round head and a round face too, he was a great deal bigger than Mr. Wei and the others. He had narrow slits of eyes in his great round face, and a wispy black moustache; and though he was bald his head and face were ruddy and glistening. Ai-ku was quite puzzled for a moment, then concluded he must have rubbed his skin with lard.

"This is an anus-stop,* which the ancients used in burials."

Seventh Master was holding something which looked like a corroded stone, and he rubbed his nose twice with this object as he spoke. "Unfortunately, it comes from a recent digging. Still, it's worth having: it can't be later than Han.** Look at this 'mercury stain'***. . . ."

The "mercury stain" was at once surrounded by several heads, one of which, of course, was Mr. Wei's. There were several sons of the house as well, whom Ai-ku had not yet noticed, for so awed were they by Seventh Master that they looked like flattened bed-bugs.

She did not understand all he had just said; she was not interested in this "mercury stain," nor did she dare investigate it; so she took this chance instead of looking round. Standing behind her by the wall, close to the door, were both Old Beast and Young Beast. She saw at a glance that they looked older than when she had met them by chance half a year ago.

Then everybody drifted away from the "mercury stain." Mr. Wei took the anus-stop and sat down to stroke it, turning to ask Chuang Mu-san:

---

* It was the custom for small pieces of jade to be inserted in a dead man's orifices, for people believed this prevented the corpse from decaying.

** The Han dynasty (B.C. 206-A.D. 220).

*** The jade and metal objects found in tombs are often stained with mercury, which was placed in corpses to prevent them from decaying too rapidly.

"Did just the two of you come?"

"Just the two of us."

"Why have none of your sons come?"

"They hadn't time."

"We wouldn't have troubled you to come at New Year, if not for this business . . . I'm sure you've had enough of it yourself. It's over two years now, isn't it? Better to remove enmity than keep it, I say. Since Ai-ku's husband didn't get on with her, and his parents didn't like her . . . better take the advice I gave you before and let them separate. I haven't enough face to convince you. But Seventh Master, you know, is a champion of justice. And Seventh Master's view is the same as mine. However, he says both sides must make some concessions, and he's told the Shih family to add another ten dollars to the settlement, making it ninety dollars!"

". . . ."

"Ninety dollars! If you took the case right up to the emperor, you couldn't get such favourable terms. Nobody but Seventh Master would make such a handsome offer!"

Seventh Master widened his slits of eyes to nod at Chuang Mu-san.

Ai-ku saw that the situation was critical and marvelled that her father, of whom all the coastal families stood in awe, should have not a word to say for himself here. This was quite uncalled for, she thought. Although she could not follow all Seventh Master said, he somehow struck her as a kindly old soul, not nearly as frightening as she had imagined.

"Seventh Master's a scholar who knows the truth," she said boldly. "He's not like us country folk. I had no one to complain to of all the wrong that's been done me; but now I'll tell Seventh Master. All the time I was married I tried to be a good wife — I bowed my head as I went in and out, and I didn't fail in a single wifely duty. But they kept finding fault with me — each one was a regular bully. That year the weasel killed that big cock, how could they blame me for not closing the coop? It was that mangy cur — curse it! — who pushed open the door of the coop to steal some rice mixed with husks. But that Young Beast wouldn't distinguish black from white. He gave me a slap on the cheek. . . ."

Seventh Master looked at her.

"I knew there must be a reason. This is something Seventh Master will not fail to notice, for scholars who know the truth know everything. He was bewitched by that bitch, and wanted to drive me away! I married him with the proper ceremonies — three lots of tea and six presents — and was carried to his house in a bridal sedan! Is it so easy for him to toss me aside? . . . I mean to show them, I don't mind going to court. If it can't be settled at the district court, we'll go to the prefecture. . . ."

"Seventh Master knows all this," said Mr. Wei, looking up. "If

you persist in this attitude, Ai-ku, it won't be to your advantage. You haven't changed in the least. Look, how sensible your father is! It's a pity you and your brothers aren't like him. Suppose you do take this matter to the prefect, won't he consult Seventh Master? But then the case will be dealt with publicly, and nobody's feelings will be spared. . . . That being so. . . ."

"I'll stake my life if need be, even if it ruins both families!"

"There's no need for such desperate measures," put in Seventh Master slowly. "You're still young. We should all keep the peace. 'Peace breeds wealth.' Isn't that true? I've added a whole ten dollars: that's more than generous. For if your father-in-law and mother-in-law say 'Go!', then go you must. Don't talk about the prefecture, this would be the same in Shanghai, Peking or even abroad. If you don't believe me, ask *him*! He's just come back from the foreign school in Peking." He turned towards a sharp-chinned son of the house. "Isn't that so?" he asked.

"Ab-so-lutely." Sharp-chin hastily straightened up to answer in low, respectful tones.

Ai-ku felt completely isolated. Her father refused to speak, her brothers had not dared come, Mr. Wei had always been on the other side, and now Seventh Master had failed her, while even this young sharp-chin, with his soft talk and air of a flattened bug, was simply saying what was expected of him. But confused as she was, she resolved to make a last stand.

"What, does even Seventh Master. . . ." Her eyes showed surprise and disappointment. "Yes . . . I know, we rough folk are ignorant. My father's to blame for not even understanding how to deal with people — he's lost his old wits completely. He let Old Beast and Young Beast have their way in everything. They stoop to every means, however foul, to fawn on those above them. . . ."

"Look at her, Seventh Master!" Young Beast, who had been standing silently behind her, suddenly spoke up now. "She dares act like this even in Seventh Master's presence. At home she gave us simply no peace at all. She calls my father Old Beast and me Young Beast or Bastard."

"Who the devil is calling you a bastard?" Ai-ku rounded on him fiercely, then turned back to Seventh Master. "I've something else I'd like to say in public. He was always mean to me. It was 'slut' and 'bitch' all the time. After he started carrying on with that whore, he even cursed my ancestors. Judge between us, Seventh Master. . . ."

She gave a start, and the words died on her lips, for suddenly Seventh Master rolled his eyes and lifted his round face. From the mouth framed by that wispy moustache issued a shrill, trailing cry:

"Come here! . . ."

Her heart, which had missed a beat, suddenly started pounding.

The battle was lost, the tables were turned it seemed. She had taken a false step and fallen into the water, and she knew it was all her own fault.

A man in a blue gown and black jacket promptly came in, and stood like a stick with his arms at his side in front of Seventh Master.

There was not a cheep in the room. Seventh Master moved his lips, but nobody could hear what he was saying. Only his servant heard, and the force of this order entered his very marrows, for twice he twitched as if overcome by awe. And he answered:

"Very good, sir."

Then he backed away several paces, turned and went out.

Ai-ku knew that something unexpected and completely unforeseen was about to happen — something which she was powerless to prevent. Only now did she realize the full power of Seventh Master. She had been mistaken before, and acted too rashly and rudely. She repented bitterly, and found herself saying:

"I always meant to accept Seventh Master's decision. . . ."

There was not a cheep in the room. Although her words were as soft as strands of silk, they carried like a thunder-clap to Mr. Wei.

"Good!" he exclaimed approvingly, leaping up. "Seventh Master is truly just, and Ai-ku is truly reasonable. In that case, Mu-san, you can't have any objection, since your daughter's consented herself. I'm sure you've brought the wedding certificates as I asked you. So let both sides produce them now. . . ."

Ai-ku saw her father fumble in his girdle for something. The stick-like servant came in again to hand Seventh Master a small, flat, jet-black object shaped like a tortoise. Ai-ku was afraid something dreadful was going to happen. She darted a look at her father; but he was opening a blue cloth package at the table, and taking out silver dollars.

Seventh Master removed the tortoise's head, poured something from its body into his palm, then returned the flat-looking object to the stick-like servant. He rubbed one finger in his palm, then stuffed it up each nostril, staining his nose and upper lip a bright yellow. Then he wrinkled his nose as if about to sneeze.

Chuang Mu-san was counting the silver dollars. Mr. Wei extracted a few from a pile which had not been counted, and handed them to Old Beast. He also changed the position of the red and green certificates, restoring them to their original owners.

"Put them away," he said. "You must see if the amount is correct, Mu-san. This is no joking matter — all this silver. . . ."

"Ah-tchew!"

Though Ai-ku knew it was only Seventh Master sneezing, she could not help turning to look at him. His mouth was wide open and his nose was twitching. In two fingers he was still clutching the small

object "used by the ancients in burials." Indeed, he was rubbing the side of his nose with it.

With some difficulty Chuang Mu-san finished counting the money, and both sides put away the red and green certificates. Then they all seemed to draw themselves up, and tense expressions relaxed. Complete harmony prevailed.

"Good! This business has been settled satisfactorily," said Mr. Wei. Seeing that they looked on the point of leaving, he breathed a sigh of relief. "Well, there's nothing more to be done now. Congratulations on unravelling this knot! Must you be going? Won't you stay to share our New Year feast? This is a rare occasion."

"We mustn't stay," said Ai-ku. "We'll come to drink with you next year."

"Thank you, Mr. Wei. We won't drink just now. We have other business. . . ." Chuang Mu-san, Old Beast and Young Beast withdrew most respectfully.

"What? Not a drop before you go?" Mr. Wei looked at Ai-ku who brought up the rear.

"Really we mustn't. Thank you, Mr. Wei."

November 6, 1925

THE FLIGHT TO THE MOON

I

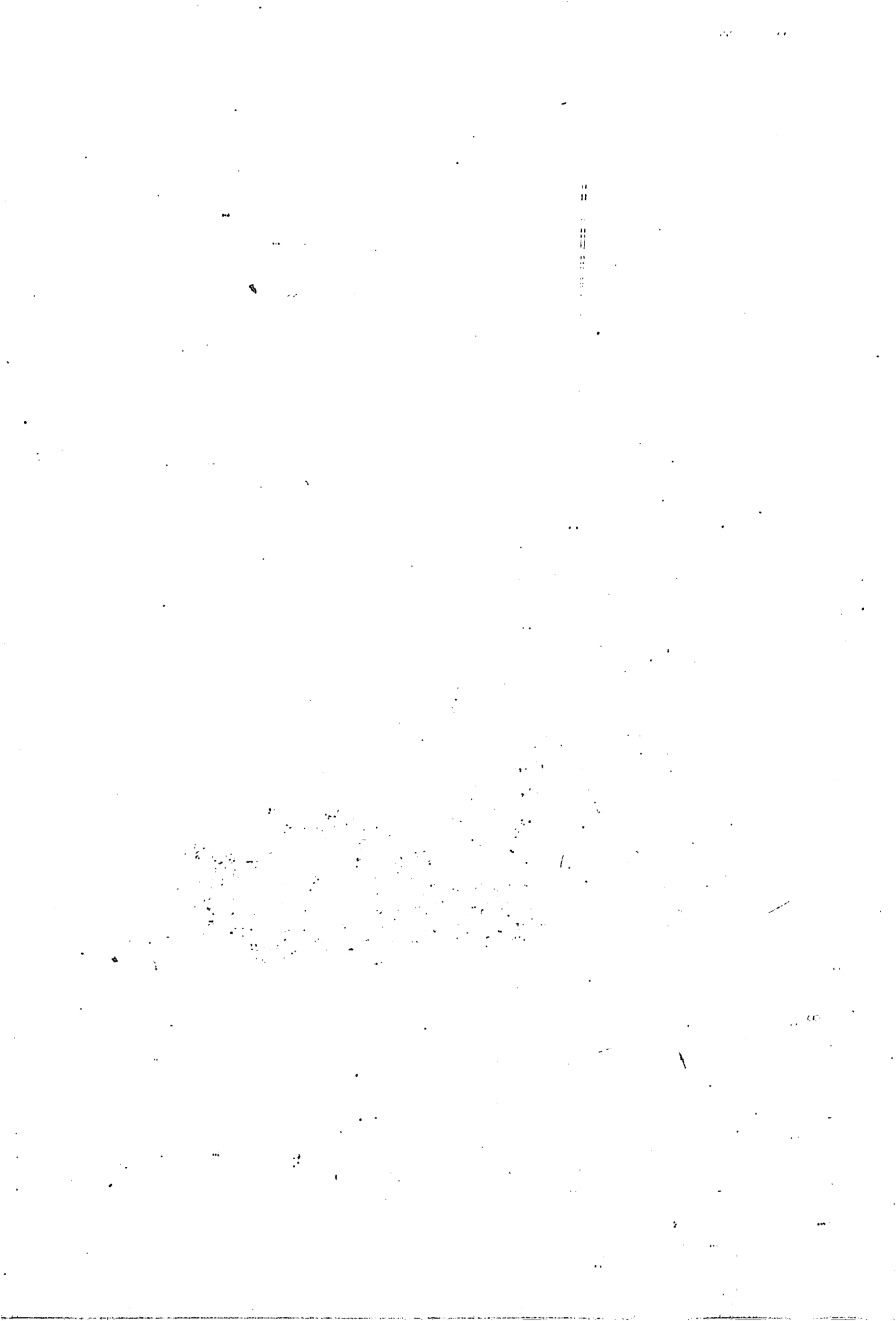
Intelligent beasts do know what men are thinking. As soon as their house came in sight the horse slowed down and, hanging its head at the same time as its master, plodded as heavily as a pestle pounding rice.

The mansion was overhung with evening mist, and thick black smoke rose from all the neighbours' chimneys, for it was time for supper. Hearing the horse's hoof-beats, retainers had come out to welcome him and were standing erect with their arms at their sides in front of the door. As Yi* dismounted languidly beside the dust heap, they stepped forward to take over his reins and whip. When he set foot on the threshold of the great gate, looked down at the quiverful of brand-new arrows at his waist and the three crows and one shattered sparrow in his bag, he felt the most dreadful misgivings. But he strode in, putting a bold face on things, his arrows rattling in his quiver.

Reaching the inner courtyard, he saw Chang-ngo looking out from

* A famous archer hero in ancient Chinese legends.

HO FANG-HUA: Two Chickens



the round window. She was so sharp-sighted she was sure to have seen the crows. This gave him such a turn that he came to a sudden stop — but he had to go on in. The serving-maids came out to greet him, unfastened his bow and arrows and undid his game bag. He sensed that they were smiling nervously.

"Madam! . . ." he called as he walked to his wife's room, after he had wiped his face and hands.

Chang-ngo had been watching the sunset through the round window. She turned slowly and threw him a casual glance, but did not speak to him.

He had been used to this treatment for some time, for over a year at least. But as usual he went on in, and sat down on the old, worn leopard skin over the wooden couch opposite her. Scratching his head, he muttered:

"I was unlucky again today: I found nothing but crows. . . ."

"Pah!"

Raising her willowy eyebrows, Chang-ngo suddenly stood up and swept from the room, complaining as she went: "Noodles with crow sauce again! Noodles with crow sauce again! I'd like to know who else eats nothing but noodles with crow sauce from one year to the next? How unlucky I was to marry you, and eat noodles with crow sauce all the year round!"

"Madam!" Yi sprang to his feet and followed her. "Still, it wasn't so bad today," he continued softly. "I shot a sparrow too, which you can have cooked. Nu-hsin!" he called to the maid: "Bring that sparrow to show your mistress."

The game had been taken to the kitchen, but Nu-hsin ran over to pick out the sparrow and brought it in both hands to Chang-ngo.

"Oh." She glanced at it, and pinched it slowly with two fingers.

"How disgusting!" she said crossly. "It's all in pieces! Where's the meat?"

"Yes, it's shot to pieces." Yi had lost his nerve. "My bow is too powerful, and my arrow-heads are too large."

"Can't you use smaller arrow-heads?"

"I haven't any. Ever since I shot the giant boar and the huge python. . . ."

"Is this a giant boar or a huge python?" She turned to Nu-hsin and ordered: "Serve a bowl of soup!" Then she went back to her room.

Left alone at a loss in the hall, Yi sat down with his back to the wall to listen to the crackling of firewood in the kitchen. He remembered how big the giant boar had been — it had loomed like a small hillock in the distance. If he hadn't killed it then but left it till now, it would have kept them in meat for half a year and spared them all this

worry about food each day. As for the huge python, it could have made soup. . . .

Nu-yi came in to light the lamp, and its faint rays lit up the vermilion bow and arrows, the black bow and arrows, the crossbow, the sword and the dagger, hanging on the opposite wall. After one look, Yi lowered his head and sighed. Then Nu-hsin brought in the supper and set it on the table in the middle: five large bowls of noodles on the left, two large bowls of noodles and one of soup on the right, in the centre one large bowl of sauce made of crows' meat.

While eating, Yi admitted to himself that the noodles were most unappetizing, and stole a glance at Chang-ngo. Without so much as looking at the sauce, she had steeped her noodles in soup, and she set down her bowl half finished. Her face struck him as paler and thinner than before, and he feared she must be ill.

By the second watch she seemed in a better mood, and sat silently on the edge of the bed to drink some water. Yi sat up on the wooden couch next to her, stroking the old leopard skin which was losing its fur.

"Ah," he said in a conciliatory tone. "I bagged this spotted leopard on the Western Hills before we married. It was a lovely sight — golden and glossy all over."

That reminded him of their diet in those days. They ate only the four paws of the bear, only the hump of the camel, giving all the rest to the serving-maids and retainers. When all the big game was finished they ate wild boars, rabbits and pheasants; and because he was such a good marksman he could shoot as many as he pleased.

A sigh escaped him.

"The fact is I'm too good a shot," he said. "That's why the whole place is cleaned out. Who could have guessed we'd be left with nothing but crows? . . ."

Chang-ngo gave a faint smile.

"Today should be counted as lucky." Yi felt more cheerful too. "At least I caught a sparrow. I had to go an extra ten miles to find it."

"Can't you go a little further still?"

"Yes, madam. That's what I mean to do. I'll get up earlier tomorrow. If you wake early, call me. I mean to go nearly twenty miles further, and see if I can't find any roebucks or rabbits. . . . It won't be easy, though. When I shot the giant boar and the huge python, there was so much game. Do you remember all the black bears that used to pass my mother-in-law's door, and how she asked me several times to shoot them? . . ."

"Yes?" Chang-ngo seemed to have forgotten.

"Who could have guessed they would all disappear like this? Come to think of it, I really don't know how we're going to manage in future. *I'm* all right. I've only to eat that elixir the Taoist gave me, and I can

fly up to heaven. But I must think of you first . . . that's why I've decided to go a little further tomorrow. . . ."

"Umm."

Chang-ngo had finished the water. She lay down slowly and closed her eyes.

The sinking light lit up her neglected make-up. Much of her powder had gone, the skin beneath her eyes looked darker, and the paint on her eyebrows didn't seem to match; still her mouth was as red as fire, and although she wasn't smiling you could see the faintest dimple on either cheek.

"Ahh! How can I give a woman like this nothing but crow sauce noodles all the year round?"

Yi was ashamed to think of it: even his cheeks and ears began to burn.

II

Night passed and a new day dawned.

When Yi opened his eyes and saw a sunbeam aslant the western wall, he knew it could not be early. He looked at Chang-ngo, who was lying with outstretched arms fast asleep. Then he quietly dressed himself, slipped down from his leopard skin couch, tiptoed into the hall, and as he washed his face told Nu-keng to order Wang Sheng to saddle his horse.

Because he was so busy, he had long since abolished breakfast. Nu-yi put five baked cakes, five leeks and a package of paprika sauce in his game bag, and fastened this firmly to his waist with his bow and arrows. He tightened his belt and strode lightly out of the hall, and spoke to Nu-keng, who was just coming in:

"I mean to go further today to look for game, and I may be a little late back. When your mistress has woken and had her breakfast and seems to be in good spirits, tell her I'm very sorry but I hope she'll wait for supper with me. Don't forget! Tell her I'm very sorry."

He walked swiftly out, swung into the saddle, and flashed past the retainers ranged on each side. Very soon he had galloped out of the village. In front were the *kaoliang* fields through which he passed every day. He paid no attention to them, having learned long ago that there was nothing here. With two cracks of his whip he galloped forward, and covered about twenty miles without a pause. In front was a dense forest, and since his horse was panting for breath and covered with sweat it naturally slowed down. After three or four more miles they reached the forest, where nothing could he see but wasps, butterflies, ants and grasshoppers — not a trace of game. At first sight of this new place, he had expected to bag a fox or rabbit at least; but now he

realized that had been an idle dream. He made his way out, and saw another stretch of green *kaoliang* fields ahead, with one or two mud cottages in the distance. The breeze was balmy, the sun was bright, and not a bird could be heard.

"Confound it all!" He bellowed to vent his feelings.

After a few more paces forward, however, his heart leapt up; for on the flat ground outside a mud hut in the distance there actually was a fowl. Pecking at the ground at each step, it looked like a large pigeon. He seized his bow and fitted an arrow to it, drew it to its full extent, then let it go, and his arrow sped through the air like a shooting star.

He never missed his quarry, there could be no question of that. All he had to do was spur his horse after the arrow, and he could retrieve the game. But just as he approached it, an old woman picked up the large pigeon transfixed by his arrow and hurried, shouting, towards him.

"Who are you? Why have you shot my best black laying hen? Have you nothing better to do? . . ."

Yi's heart gave a sudden jolt, and he pulled up short.

"What! A hen?" he asked nervously. "I thought it was a quail."

"Are you blind! You must be over forty too."

"Yes, ma'am. I was forty-five last year."

"So old and still such a fool! You could even mistake a mother hen for a cuckoo! Who are you anyway?"

"I am Yi Yi." While saying this he noticed that his arrow had pierced the hen's heart, so of course it was dead; hence his voice trailed away on his name as he dismounted.

"Yi Yi? . . . Never heard of him!" She peered into his face.

"Some people would know me at once. In the days of good king Yao I shot several wild boars and pythons. . . ."

"Oh, you liar! His Honour Feng Meng* and some other men shot those together. Maybe you were one of them; but how can you claim you did it all yourself? For shame!"

"Really, ma'am! That fellow Feng Meng has just taken to calling on me during the last few years; we never worked together. He had nothing to do with it."

"Liar. Everybody says so. I hear it four or five times a month."

"All right. Let's talk business. What about this hen?"

"You must make it up! This was my best laying hen: she laid an egg a day. You must give me two hoes and three spindles."

"Look at me, ma'am — I'm not a farmer or spinner. Where would I get hoes or spindles? I've no money on me either, only five baked cakes, but they're of the finest flour. I'll give you these for your hen, with five leeks into the bargain and a package of paprika sauce. What do you say? . . ."

---

* Traditionally believed to be Yi's pupil.

Taking the cakes from his bag with one hand, he picked up the hen with the other.

The old woman was not averse to taking these cakes of the finest flour, but insisted on having fifteen. After haggling for some time they fixed on ten, and Yi agreed to send the rest over by tomorrow noon at the latest, leaving his arrow there as security. Only then did he feel reassured. He stuffed the dead hen in his bag, sprang to his saddle and headed home. Though famished, he was happy. It was actually over a year since they last tasted chicken soup.

It was afternoon when he emerged from the forest, and whipped his horse to gallop home. The beast was exhausted, though, and not till dusk did they reach the familiar *kaoliang* fields. A shadowy figure flashed into sight some way off, and an arrow sang through the air.

Not curbing his horse but letting it jog along, Yi fitted an arrow to his bow and shot. A clash was heard as two arrow-heads collided, and sparks flew into the air; then the two shafts thrust up like an inverted V, toppled over and fell to the ground. No sooner had the first arrows met than the two men loosed their second, which collided again in mid-air. They shot nine arrows like this, till Yi's supply was exhausted; but he could see Feng Meng gloating opposite, with another arrow on the bow-string aimed at his throat.

"Aha!" thought Yi. "I imagined he'd gone to the seaside to catch fish, but he's been hanging round all this time playing tricks like this. I'm not surprised, then, at what the old woman said. . . ."

In a flash the other's bow arched like a full moon, and whistling through the air the arrow whizzed towards Yi's throat. Perhaps its aim was at fault, for it struck him full in the mouth. He tumbled over, transfixed, and fell to the ground. His horse stood motionless.

Seeing Yi was dead, Feng Meng strode slowly over. Smiling as if drinking to his victory, he gazed at the corpse's face.

He was gazing long and hard, when Yi opened his eyes and sat up.

"You've come for nothing a hundred times or more." He spat out the arrow and laughed. "Don't you know the skill I have in 'biting the arrow'? This won't get you anywhere. These tricks of yours won't do. You can't kill your boxing master with strokes you've learned from him. You must work something out on your own."

"I was only paying you out in your own coin . . ." the victor mumbled.

Yi stood up, roaring with laughter. "You're always quoting some adage. But you can only impress old women that way. You can't impose on *me*. I've always stuck to hunting, never taken to hold-ups like you. . . ."

Looking at the hen in his bag, he was relieved to see it had not been crushed. He swung into his saddle and rode away.

"Curse you! . . ." Oaths carried after him.

"I never thought he would sink to this. . . . Such a young fellow, and yet he's learned to swear. No wonder that old woman was taken in."

Yi shook his head sadly as he rode along.

III

Before he came to the end of the *kaoliang* fields, night fell. Stars twinkled in the sky, and the evening star shone with unusual brilliance in the west. The horse picked its way along the white ridges between the fields, going slower than ever because it was worn out. Fortunately, at the horizon the moon began to shed its silver light.

"Confound it!" Hearing his belly rumble, Yi lost patience. "The busier I am trying to make a living, the more irritating things I run into, wasting my time!" He pressed his knees against the horse's flanks to urge it on; but the beast simply twitched its rump and jogged on as slowly as ever.

"Chang-ngo is sure to be angry, it's so late," he thought. "She may fly into a temper. Thank goodness I've this little hen to make her happy. I'll tell her: 'Madam, I went over sixty miles there and back to find you this.' No, that's no good: sounds too boastful."

In his joy at seeing lights ahead, he stopped worrying. And without any urging the horse broke into a canter. A round, snow-white moon lit up the path ahead, and a cool wind soothed his cheeks — it was better than coming home from a great hunt!

The horse stopped instinctively beside the dust heap. Yi was taken aback to see everything in confusion. And Chao Fu alone came to meet him.

"What's up? Where's Wang Sheng?" he demanded, much surprised.

"Wang Sheng has gone to the Yao family to look for the mistress."

"What? Has your mistress gone to the Yao family?" Yi sat stupidly in his saddle.

"Yes, sir." While replying, Chao took the reins and whip.

Yi dismounted and crossed the threshold. After a moment's thought he turned to ask:

"Are you sure she didn't grow tired of waiting and go to a restaurant?"

"No, sir. I've asked in all three restaurants. She isn't there."

Yi lowered his head to think as he walked inside. The three maids stood nervously together in front of the hall. Amazed, he demanded loudly:

"What! All of you here? Your mistress never goes to the Yao family alone!"

They looked at him in silence, then took off his bow sheath and quiver and the bag containing the hen. Yi suddenly started to panic. Suppose Chang-ngo had killed herself in anger? He sent Nu-keng for Chao Fu, and told him to search the pond in the back yard and the trees. As soon as he went inside, though, he knew his guess had been wrong. The room was in great disorder, the chests of clothes had been opened, and the moment he looked at the other side of the bed, he realized that the jewel case was missing. He felt as if doused with cold water. Of course, gold and pearls were nothing; but the elixir given him by that Taoist had been kept in that jewel box!

After walking round twice in a circle, Yi noticed Wang Sheng at the door.

"Please, sir," reported Wang Sheng, "our mistress is not with the Yao family. They're not playing mah-jong today."

Yi looked at him and said nothing. Wang Sheng withdrew.

"Did you call me, sir?" Chao Fu asked, coming in.

Yi shook his head and waved him away.

He described several circles in his room, walked to the end of the hall and sat down. Looking up he could see on the opposite wall the vermilion bow and arrows, the black bow and arrows, the crossbow, the sword and the dagger. After thinking for some time, he asked the maids who were standing woodenly there:

"What time did your mistress disappear?"

"She wasn't here when I brought in the lamp," said Nu-yi. "But no one saw her go out."

"Did you see her eat the medicine from that case?"

"No, sir. But she did ask me for some water to drink this afternoon."

Yi stood up in dismay. He suspected he had been left alone on earth!

"Did you see anything flying to heaven?" he asked.

"Oh!" exclaimed Nu-hsin suddenly after some thought. "When I came out after lighting the lamp, I did see a black shadow flying this way; but I never dreamed it was our mistress. . . ." Her face turned pale.

"It must have been!" Yi clapped his knee and sprang up. On his way outside he turned back to ask Nu-hsin: "Which way did she go?"

Nu-hsin pointed with one finger, and all he could see when he looked in that direction was the round, snow-white moon suspended in the sky, with its hazy pavilions and trees. While he was a child his grandmother had told him how lovely the moon palace was; he still had a vague recollection of her description. As he watched the moon floating in a sapphire sea, he felt unusually conscious of his own weight.

Suddenly he grew angry. And this anger turned into the urge to kill. With dilated eyes, he shouted to the maids:

"Bring me the bow with which I shot the sun! And three arrows!"

Nu-yi and Nu-keng brought a huge bow from the middle of the hall, dusted it, and handed it to him with three long arrows.

Holding the bow in one hand he grasped the three arrows in the other, fitted them all to the string, drew the bow to the full and pointed it at the moon. He stood there firm as a rock, his eyes darting lightning. His hair, flying in the wind, resembled black fire. For one instant he looked like the hero who had long ago shot the sun.

A whistling was heard — just one — as three shafts left the string together, one after the other, too fast for eye to see or ear to hear. The three shafts should have struck the moon in one and the same place, for they followed each other without so much as a hair's breadth between them. But to be sure of hitting he had varied his aim a little, so that the arrows would strike three different places and make three wounds.

The maids gave a cry. They saw the moon quiver and thought it must surely fall — but still it hung there peacefully, shedding a calm, even brighter light, as if completely unscathed.

Yi threw back his head to hurl an oath at the sky, then watched and waited. But the moon paid no attention. He took three paces forward, and the moon fell back three paces. He took three paces back, and the moon moved forward again.

They looked at each other in silence.

Yi listlessly leant his bow against the door of the hall, and went inside. The three maids followed him.

He sat down and heaved a sigh. "Well, your mistress will be happy all on her own for ever after. How could she have the heart to leave me and fly up there alone? Could she have felt me too old? But only last month she said: 'You're not old. It shows mental weakness to think of yourself as old. . . .' "

"That couldn't be the reason," said Nu-yi. "Some folk still describe you as a warrior, sir."

"Sometimes you really seem like an artist," put in Nu-hsin.

"What nonsense! But the truth is, those crow sauce noodles were really uneatable. I can't blame her for not being able to stomach them. . . ."

"I'll cut a piece of the leg facing the wall to mend that leopard skin where it's worn out. It looks rather bad." Nu-hsin walked inside.

"Wait a bit," said Yi, and reflected. "There's no hurry for that. I'm famished. Look smart and cook me a dish of chicken with paprika, and bake five catties of cakes; then I shall go to bed. Tomorrow I'm going to look for that Taoist to ask him for another elixir, so that I can follow her. Tell Wang Sheng, Nu-keng, to give my horse four pints of beans!"

December 1926

Translated by Yang Hsien-yi and Gladys Yang

THE TRAIL BLAZED BY LU HSUN

FENG HSUEH-FENG

Lu Hsun began to write between 1906 and 1909, when he was studying medicine in Japan. He gave up medicine and turned to literature, as he has described in the preface to *Call to Arms*, because he saw a newsreel of the Russo-Japanese War which showed the tragic apathy of the oppressed Chinese.* This incident shook him to his depths. "After that," he wrote, "I felt that medical science was not so important after all. The people of a weak and backward country, however strong and healthy they may be, can only serve to be made examples of, or to witness such futile spectacles; and it is not necessarily deplorable no matter how many of them die of illness. The most important thing, therefore, is to change their spirit, and since at that time I felt that literature was the best means to this end, I determined to promote a literary movement."

This deep concern for the fate of his oppressed countrymen prompted Lu Hsun to start writing.

Although the magazine *New Life* which he planned to publish in 1906 never saw the light of day, Lu Hsun tried to set afoot a new literary movement. In 1907 he wrote essays including *On Cultural Bias* and *On the Demoniac Poets*, and during 1908 and 1909 published a number of short stories translated from Russian and East European writers. In *On Cultural Bias* he exposed the reactionary nature of the "Westernizers" among the Ching Dynasty ruling class, refuted the views of the reformists who were also becoming reactionary, and boldly criticized the tendency among some revolutionary democrats to keep the people ignorant. At the same time he declared it was necessary to enlighten his fellow-countrymen in order to liberate their spirit. *On the Demoniac Poets* introduced such democratic, patriotic and revolutionary poets as Byron, Shelley, Pushkin, Lermontoff, Mickiewicz and Petöfi. He pointed out that these poets "based their ideas on revolt, and aimed at action," and that therefore their works could arouse the spirit of revolt among the people. It was for the same reason that he translated the stories of Russian humanists and rebellious writers among the oppressed peoples of Eastern Europe. Though these efforts exercised little influence at that time, they formed the earliest

*See *Mr. Fujino* in *Chinese Literature*, No. 3, 1956.

campaign in the movement for revolutionary literature in China, in which Lu Hsun emerged as a revolutionary inspirer of the people. The outstanding feature of his thought at this time — far in advance of other revolutionaries — was that he believed China would be liberated through the awakening of the oppressed masses and the victory of their struggle.

Because these early writings met with little response, after Lu Hsun returned to China in the summer of 1909 he gave up literary work. From 1910 to 1918 he passed through a period of "loneliness," of great significance for his later revolutionary activities and writing; for he experienced the 1911 Revolution and was profoundly affected by the lesson of its failure. Personal contact with the peasants and the urban poor during this period made him see clearly the underlying causes of the sad lot of China's millions and the basic reason for the failure of the 1911 Revolution. What he experienced and observed at this time and the distress he encountered were later reflected in some of his short stories and essays.

In 1918, on the eve of the May Fourth Movement, Lu Hsun started writing again. From this time until his death in 1936, he never rested from his literary work and his revolutionary struggle. In less than twenty years, he made an inestimable contribution to the Chinese revolution, and laid a firm foundation for modern Chinese literature.

He first attracted attention with *A Madman's Diary.* In this story he appears as a great humanist, who uncompromisingly rejects the feudal system with its ideas and morality. His readers' response was immediate and enthusiastic. They agreed that this powerful protest against feudalism marked a new departure in Chinese literature. This was Lu Hsun's first piece of realist writing, and he went on to write many outstanding works in the same vein.

"As for why I wrote these stories," said Lu Hsun later, "I feel today as I did ten years ago, that I should, in the hope of enlightening my people, write about human life and the need to better it. . . . I drew most of my characters from those unfortunates in our abnormal society, because I wanted to expose certain evils, arouse attention to them and have them cured."

A Madman's Diary, Kung I-chi, Medicine and *Tomorrow,* as well as *My Old Home, The True Story of Ah Q,* and *The New Year's Sacrifice,* were all written with this in mind. The chief characters in these stories —the madman, Kung I-chi, Jun-tu, Ah Q and the rest—are all unfortunates in an abnormal society. Lu Hsun made a strong protest against their unhappy fate, and mercilessly exposed and attacked the forces that oppressed them, at the same time giving true expression to their wishes, demands and potential strength. He showed that the only way out was through changing society—through revolution.

For instance, in connection with his immortal work *The True Story of Ah Q,* Lu Hsun declared that he wanted to portray the "silent soul of

the people" which for thousands of years "grew, faded and withered quietly like grass under a great rock." While portraying Ah Q-ism, Lu Hsun is above all pleading for Ah Q and others like him; and through Ah Q he lets readers see the age-long oppression of the Chinese people. It is here that he shows himself such a brilliant realist. He makes it clear that Ah Q's greatest failing is his habit of deceiving himself as well as others whenever he is defeated, by consoling himself with the thought that he has won a moral victory. This is defeatism. Moreover, not only does Ah Q often forget his enemies and oppressors, he takes revenge on people weaker than he is, assuming the airs of an oppressor himself. Lu Hsun shows us that this is simply the result of thousands of years of feudal rule and a hundred years of foreign aggression. Although the Chinese people have always resisted oppression and fought back, their many defeats have produced defeatism which, combined with the age-old teaching of the feudal ruling class—that a man should submit to his superiors—gave rise to Ah Q's method of winning moral victories, the Ah Q-ism which prevents him from facing up to his oppressors. This is what Lu Hsun tries most to reveal to his readers.

Another thing which Lu Hsun strives to make clear is that, in the continuous clash between Ah Q and his oppressors, Ah Q himself is torn between submission and revolt, and has always an urge to revolt. Ah Q, like all the oppressed, can liberate himself only by smashing his fetters —by revolution—and this strength he does possess. Thus when the 1911 Revolution comes, Ah Q's fate is naturally linked with it; and the fact that he is forbidden to take part only proves that the revolution has failed. Ah Q's urge to revolt is still there; there still remains a revolutionary way out for him. This is Lu Hsun's conclusion.

The True Story of Ah Q gives us a picture of the 1911 Revolution, which failed because the peasants were not mobilized. While exposing and attacking the landlord class, Lu Hsun bitterly criticizes the bourgeoisie as well, which led the revolution. By publishing this story Lu Hsun draws the attention of the leaders of the May Fourth Movement to the historical lesson of the 1911 Revolution, indicates the way out, and voices the demands of the people as a whole, of whom the great majority and the most important economically are peasants.

The way out and the people's demands are pointed out as a prelude to hope and to a new life for China in *My Old Home,* written before *The True Story of Ah Q.* "I would not like them . . . to have a treadmill existence like mine," he writes, "nor to suffer like Jun-tu until they become stupefied, nor yet, like others, to devote all their energies to dissipation. They should have a new life, a life we have never experienced. . . . The earth had no roads to begin with, but when many men pass one way, a road is made." This is the only conclusion Lu Hsun can reach after portraying honest Jun-tu, who has suffered so much owing to "many children, famines, taxes, soldiers, bandits, officials

and landed gentry" that he has become like a wooden effigy. Jun-tu is typical of most Chinese peasants at that time. Though still inarticulate, they were the foundation and chief moving force of the democratic revolution. This story depicts the increasing bankruptcy of the countryside during these years, and predicts the peasants' awakening and the imminence of revolution.

In another significant story, *The New Year's Sacrifice,* Lu Hsun sketches the life of an ordinary working woman. Hsiang Lin's Wife is trampled upon, cheated, insulted and abandoned; yet we see her innate goodness, courage and kindness. Because of her pluck, her faith in mankind and the dignity she has acquired, all her misfortunes and ill treatment cannot break her spirit; but finally the mental torture caused by feudal morality and superstition destroys her faith and sense of dignity, so that she goes to pieces. Through his deep insight into this woman's heart, Lu Hsun makes a profound analysis of society. He shows the layer upon layer of social pressure which surround this widow like a spider's web. The utterly inhuman Confucian morality, much of it pure superstition, is the focal point of all these pressures. This has power to kill secretly, and the landed gentry rely upon this force. These pressures have always seemed quite commonplace, and all the time Confucian morality and men like Fourth Master Lu have kept claiming their victims in secret. Countless women and young people perish in silence, unnoticed, not knowing who has killed them. The situation revealed here is more horrifying than that exposed in *A Madman's Diary.* At the end of this story, Lu Hsun's brilliant powers of observation are shown most clearly by his discovery that this woman who has shown such fortitude finally comes to doubt the existence of hell, refuses to go on submitting meekly to her lot, and takes her fate into her own hands.

These stories show Lu Hsun's fearlessness in facing reality and exposing abuses. In the effete China of those days, most men had suffered so much that they were no longer sensitive to pain; but Lu Hsun still heard the cry of agony in the hearts of the oppressed, and felt impelled to express it. His exposure of evil is like a strong beam of light to awaken men. And although he writes soberly, and tries not to let himself be carried away, the more detached he appears the clearer his readers hear the cries of the wretched—cries which come to express awakening and revolt.

In all these stories, Lu Hsun entirely rejects the old way of life and the old society. Readers are convinced that only a complete social revolution can put an end to these evils and the people's agony. *A Madman's Diary, My Old Home, The True Story of Ah Q,* and *The New Year's Sacrifice*—all carry this message. This is also true of *Medicine,* which commemorates a revolutionary of the 1911 Revolution and throws light on the fundamental cause of its failure.

Lu Hsun describes not only the agony of the oppressed but also

their potential strength, and many of his stories bring out the fine qualities of China's working people. Hsiang Lin's Wife and Mrs. Shan are good, kind, courageous women; and the decency of the rickshaw man in *An Incident* is used to debunk the importance of so-called affairs of state. In *The Divorce,* Lu Hsun describes the pluck of the country girl Ai-ku, though she cannot get the better of the powerful local gentry. In *In the Wine Shop,* to show up the colourless surroundings he describes a boatman's daughter, Ah Shun, and her passionate longing for beauty and happiness. Her heart, like her eyes, is as pure as "a cloudless night sky—the cloudless sky of the North when there is no wind." In *Village Opera* above all, with deep feeling and a fine poetic touch, Lu Hsun describes the goodness of country folk and the intelligence and spirit of their sons. In the same way he describes Jun-tu's childhood.

Lu Hsun also uses Chinese myths and legends as his themes. *Mending Heaven* portrays the inventiveness of the ancient Chinese; *The Flight to the Moon* deals with the legendary archer Yi; *Pacifying the Flood* and *Against Aggression* show us the great Yu and Mo-tzu, hero and sage of ancient China; and *Forging the Sword* encourages the weak to revolt against tyrants and to take revenge.

Stories such as *In the Wine Shop, The Misanthrope* and *Regret for the Past* describe the disillusionment and struggles of intellectuals at that time. The integrity of characters like Lu Wei-fu, Wei Lien-shu, Chuan-sheng or Tzu-chun depends upon whether or not they believe that society can be reformed. Once they lose this faith, they cease to be true to themselves. Then they have to destroy themselves like Wei Lien-shu, deliberately compromise like Lu Wei-fu, or surrender like Tzu-chun, who goes home to die exposed to "the sternness of her father and the icy cold looks of bystanders." What makes them lose their faith? Lu Hsun's analysis is clear: Lu Wei-fu and Wei Lien-shu are men who were aroused by the tumultuous events preceding the 1911 Revolution. As young men they had the courage of the madman in *A Madman's Diary* who dared to trample on Mr. Ku's accounts, or the lunatic in *The Ever Burning Lamp* who dared to defy the old society by shouting "I want to set fire to it all!", they were comrades, too, of the young revolutionary in *Medicine.* Progressive intellectuals at the beginning of the twentieth century did in fact pin their hopes to the victory of the 1911 Revolution; but when they came up against all the forces of reaction which this revolution failed to sweep away, they grew disillusioned. This shows the weakness of these intellectuals. Unless these men who were so full of hope before 1911 learned a lesson from the failure of the revolution and linked their fate with that of people like Lao Chuan, who were beginning to become aroused, there was nothing for them but despair. Chuan-sheng and Tzu-chun are two young people awakened by the May Fourth Movement. They fail because they depend only on their own little strength to oppose age-old social pressures. Thus Lu

Hsun judged the ideals of intellectuals and young people according to their relationship with the people as a whole.

So Lu Hsun's standpoint and his motive in writing are clearly seen in his stories.

This is equally true of Lu Hsun's prose poems and reminiscences and, especially, his essays. The most moving passages in his reminiscences are his glowing descriptions of the charm, wisdom and interests in life of peasants and handicraft workers, and the folk art which they create. Most of the prose poems in *Wild Grass*, which describe Lu Hsun's feelings during his struggle against the imperialists and the northern warlords, reveal the courage of a revolutionary intellectual and his experiences in his fight against the powers of darkness. The way in which he conquered despair with hope is in strong contrast to Lu Wei-fu's disillusionment or Wei Lien-shu's self-destruction.

Lu Hsun's essays form the bulk and the most important part of his literary work.

The age in which he lived and his dogged fighting spirit made him look for other weapons besides the short story to enlarge the scope of his struggle on the literary front.

From the standpoint of a fighter as well as an artist, Lu Hsun explained why he adopted the essay form. "Some people have tried to persuade me not to write these short, critical essays," he said. "I am very grateful for their concern, and I know that writing stories is important. But there comes a time when I have to write in a certain way. And it seems to me if there are such troublesome taboos in the palace of art, I would do better not to enter it, but to stand in the desert and watch the sandstorms, laughing when I am happy, shouting when I am sad, and cursing openly when I am angry. The sand and stones may bruise me till my body is torn and bleeding, but from time to time I can finger the clotted blood and feel the pattern of my bruises; and this is not less interesting than following the example of the Chinese literati who eat foreign bread and butter in the name of keeping Shakespeare company."

So Lu Hsun broke through the existing literary taboos and enlarged the sphere of ideological struggle, creating the "daggers" and "javelins" which he needed in the form of these essays, which he used to fight a way out for himself and his readers at a time when "wind and sand lash your face, and wolves and tigers prowl."

In 1918, a few months after he published his first short story, he wrote *My Views on Chastity and Sutteeism*. From then until his death, he wrote six to seven hundred essays, which provided him with an immense arena, through which he could gallop freely as a pioneer thinker and fighter and give full expression to his artistic genius.

Lu Hsun needed a vast arena because he considered his mission was to "settle old scores and blaze a new trail." He had to have space

to observe and analyse every aspect of history and society, to probe into every corner of men's lives, to tear off all disguises, and to attack all enemies he discovered.

The content of these essays is so diverse as to be virtually all-embracing, ranging from fundamental problems of the revolution to such topics as children's toys. He waged innumerable battles and attacked innumerable enemies: imperialists, warlords, Kuomintang die-hards, the men who advocated a return to the past, reactionary writers, "those who trade in revolution," "murderers of the present and future," and "preachers of death." He turned his attention to this great variety of topics because he wanted to indicate and break through to a new way of life for the Chinese people—the democratic revolution which was being carried through and the socialist revolution which was to follow. Lu Hsun pointed out that Chinese history from time immemorial was filled with "feasts of human flesh" for the rulers and foreign aggressors, because two fates only were possible for the people the oppressors "ate." Either it was "a period when they were not even treated as proper slaves," or "a period when they were treated as proper slaves for the time being." So it was necessary to "sweep away the man-eaters, overturn the feasters' tables, and tear down the kitchen," to "create a third type of period hitherto unknown in Chinese history." Thus he said, "Now our most important aims are: first, to exist; secondly, to find food and clothing; thirdly, to move forward. Any impediment to these aims must be trampled down, whether it is ancient or modern, human or supernatural, ancient canon, rare text, sacred oracle, precious idol, traditional recipe or secret nostrum." And finally he declared, "The facts show that the rising proletariat alone will possess the future." Hence he proposes to use "the roaring storm of proletarian revolution" to "sweep clean our land" and clear away all that is "stagnant, vile and rotten." He was for the Soviet Union and hoped that China would also have a socialist society, because he wanted the oppressed to live "like human beings," and "a brand-new, totally unknown social system to emerge from the depth of hell," so that "hundreds of millions of people might become the masters of their own fate."

It is clear then that the goal which Lu Hsun tried to express and strove for in his stories became more sharply defined in his essays, and he became more confident of its attainment. His important historical role, his great stature, his contribution to political thought and to art, are much more vividly reflected in his essays than in his short stories. Turning his back on the past, he looks towards the future of the people and of China. Except to "strike a blow at the enemy behind" he never looked back. No power on earth could make him compromise; no obstruction could stop his advance. He was firmly convinced that the old society and old way of life, with all that was rotten in them, must

inevitably perish; and a new society and new way of life must inevitably triumph.

The class struggle and revolutionary problems of these years are also reflected more accurately and comprehensively in the essays than in the stories. In these essays, Lu Hsun's artistic genius expanded more freely and characteristically in step with his activities and mental development as a revolutionary. The enemies of the people whom he satirizes here are too many to count. And he paints vivid and splendid pictures of the people's heroes, ranging from those of past ages who were "the backbone of China," to the young revolutionaries of his time who fought on undaunted through a hail of bullets, and the Communists "with their feet planted firmly on the ground, who battled and shed their blood for the survival of this generation of Chinese." Almost every one of these essays bears the imprint of a brilliant mind, and each is clearly the handiwork of a genius in the creation of types and a master of satirical writing; while readers are moved by the passion of a true champion of the people, with his burning love and hate, his blazing anger, and dauntless, invincible might.

It was as a great essayist with his own distinctive style that Lu Hsun became an outstanding polemicist, and a giant in China's cultural revolution who dwarfed all his predecessors.

The foregoing is a general account of Lu Hsun's writings—short stories, essays, prose poems and reminiscences. After choosing to be a writer, he transformed himself from an ordinary lover of humanity who wanted to cure the diseased into a great humanist who strove to serve all the oppressed. He searched and fought for a way to free humble folk like Lao Chuan, Jun-tu, Ah Q and Hsiang Lin's Wife from their wretched fate. He proved loyal to his purpose, advancing in the cause of the revolution. And as soon as he took this road, he was bathed in the light of China's future liberation, and his genius constantly received new life from the infinite creative powers of the people.

Lu Hsun's sixteen volumes of essays and three collections of stories, prose poems and reminiscences form an encyclopaedia of Chinese society, the people's life and struggles, and the lessons drawn from these during the great historical period from the beginning of the twentieth century to the thirties. They constitute, above all, a bold declaration of war against imperialism and feudalism, against all oppressors of the people, and all the dark, corrupt forces which would obstruct China's advance. Lu Hsun's brilliant works give us the most comprehensive and profound reflection of conditions from the time of the 1911 Revolution, through the May Fourth Movement and the first and second revolutionary wars.

Throughout this period, Lu Hsun remained the central figure and chief representative of the new literature. The realist approach and theory of art which he introduced to modern Chinese writers were a weapon to reject the old and affirm the new, a way to bring new aesthetic

criteria into writing. His own work and his partisanship of socialist realist literature during his later years marked a new stage of development in modern Chinese writing.

Lu Hsun's style is distinctively and superbly his own, yet at the same time unmistakably Chinese. He worked for a renaissance in Chinese literature, and because he based his renovations on popular demands he was the firmest supporter of and greatest heir to the best traditions in Chinese literature, with its long and glorious history. From Lu Hsun's taste and style we can see the wisdom, taste and style of the Chinese working people.

With his roots deep in Chinese culture and with a reformer's zeal, he read widely in foreign literature. His works show the influence of foreign, especially Russian, writers—of Gogol in particular—and thus linked Chinese literature with the progressive trends of modern world literature. The way in which Lu Hsun assimilated foreign literary influences and made them a part of China's national culture was of historic significance. He achieved this through his own writing. For instance, of his earliest work, *A Madman's Diary,* he wrote: "I relied on the hundred-odd foreign books I had read and a smattering of medical knowledge. . . . In 1834, the Russian Gogol wrote a *Madman's Diary* . . . but this later *Madman's Diary* aims at exposing the abuses of the clan system and Confucian morality, and its indignation goes deeper than Gogol's."

Lu Hsun has also explained how his desire to enlighten people impelled him to look for suitable means of expression in traditional Chinese art forms, and how this influenced his style. "I do my best to avoid wordiness," he said. "I try to convey my meaning without any frills. Chinese opera dispenses with scenery, and the New Year pictures sold to children show a few main figures only. I firmly believe that such methods suit my purpose; so I do not indulge in irrelevant details, or make my dialogue too long."

The scope and profundity of Lu Hsun's thought are paralleled in his art, giving evidence of the most penetrating observation of Chinese society and culture, and the closest links with the people. To describe events or people, Lu Hsun uses a method he calls "drawing the eyes," which implies conveying the spirit of a thing with the utmost conciseness and refinement.

"I forget who first said this," he wrote, "but the best way to convey a man's character with a minimum of strokes is to draw his eyes. This is absolutely correct. If you draw all the hairs of his head, no matter how painstakingly and accurately, it will not be very much use." So the salient feature of his style is the accuracy, penetration and vividness with which he depicts a thing, often in a minimum of words. With a few strokes he brings out a man's chief characteristics. Lu Hsun also

expresses ideas by means of concrete images, equally penetrating, vivid and compact. With a few sentences, or just one sentence, he can get to the heart of a matter and convey its innermost meaning. This conciseness and refinement, typical of Lu Hsun's language, are precisely the most striking characteristics of traditional Chinese poetry and prose.

Lu Hsun's vocabulary is very rich. He paid great attention to language. "My writing must be easy to read," he once said. "If there is no suitable vernacular expression, I frequently use some ancient saying, and hope that some readers will understand it. I do not often use phrases made up out of my own head, which only I, or not even I, can understand." The chief source of his language was the living vernacular of the people, their idioms and colloquialisms, and certain tags from old books and classical allusions; sometimes he also uses expressions translated from foreign words, as well as foreign syntax. Lu Hsun's writing enriched the Chinese language and developed such good features as its conciseness, strength, vividness and wittiness.

Lu Hsun's satire is simply the most concise delineation and criticism of the dark side of society. "The life of satire is truth," he said. "There can be no satire without a portrayal of the truth." And he put these ideas into practice. His satire is forceful and irresistible precisely because it gives a true reflection of reality. His satire, combined with his "dagger" and "javelin" tactics, his fierceness in attacking the enemy, his boldness in analysing and exposing the forces of evil, becomes even more trenchant and sharp. Whatever disguise the enemy may assume, he cannot escape Lu Hsun's javelin or the surgeon's knife with which he calmly dissects a man's heart. Lu Hsun's satire is cool yet full of passion, sharp yet strong. He maintained that satire must be honest, and at the same time utterly opposed the cynicism which "serves only to make readers feel there is nothing good in the world and nothing can be done about it." In Lu Hsun's satire we can find the simple humour and mockery common to Chinese peasants and folk literature. We can also recognize in him the successor of the satirists in classical Chinese literature. Lu Hsun's genius in this field alone wins him an outstanding place in the history of Chinese literature. He developed the humorous wisdom of the Chinese people, and the satiric tradition of both classical and folk literature.

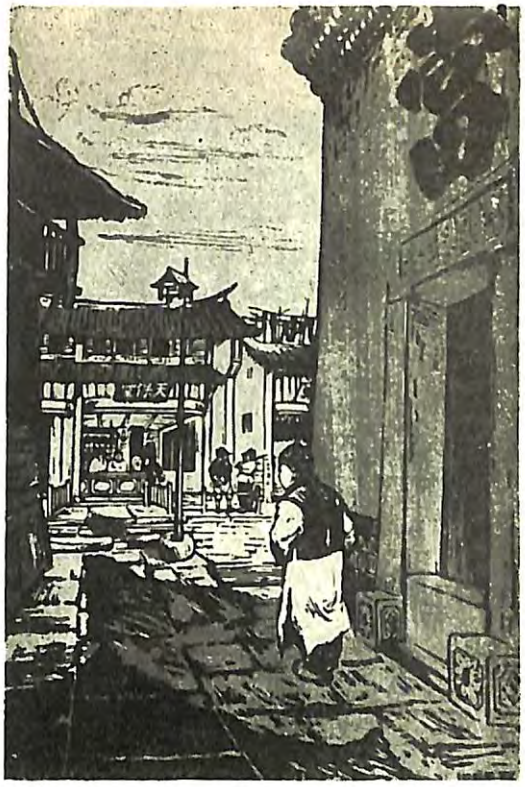
Finally, as a figure in world literature, Lu Hsun is distinguished by his close links with the working people of China, and the profoundly Chinese feature of his writing.

WOOD ENGRAVINGS COMMEMORATING THE 20TH ANNIVERSARY OF LU HSUN'S DEATH

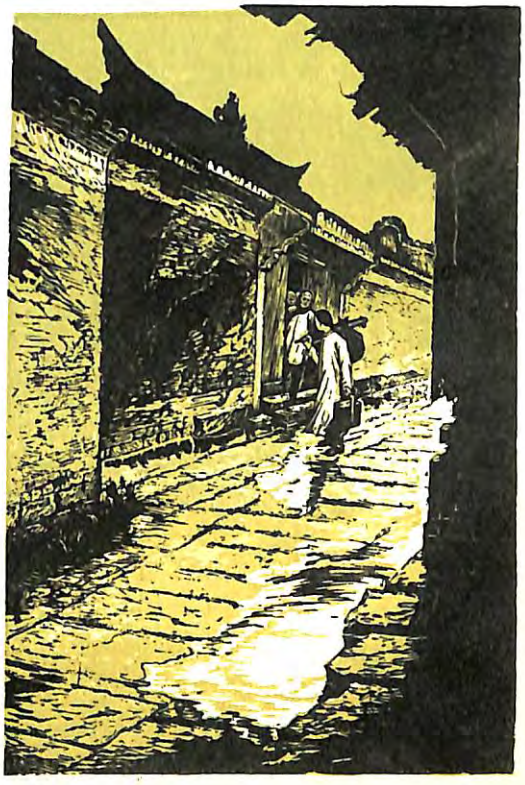
The ten woodcuts reproduced here are some of the works recently done by Chinese artists to commemorate the 20th anniversary of the death of Lu Hsun.

China's modern revolutionary school of wood engraving was founded by Lu Hsun. In 1929, he began to introduce Soviet woodcuts and those of Germany's Kaethe Kollwitz into China. At the same time he fostered the development of young woodcut artists. He organized several exhibitions and a woodcut class, and gave regular guidance to the militant school of wood engraving until a short time before his death in 1936. Lu Hsun laid a sound foundation for China's modern woodcut.

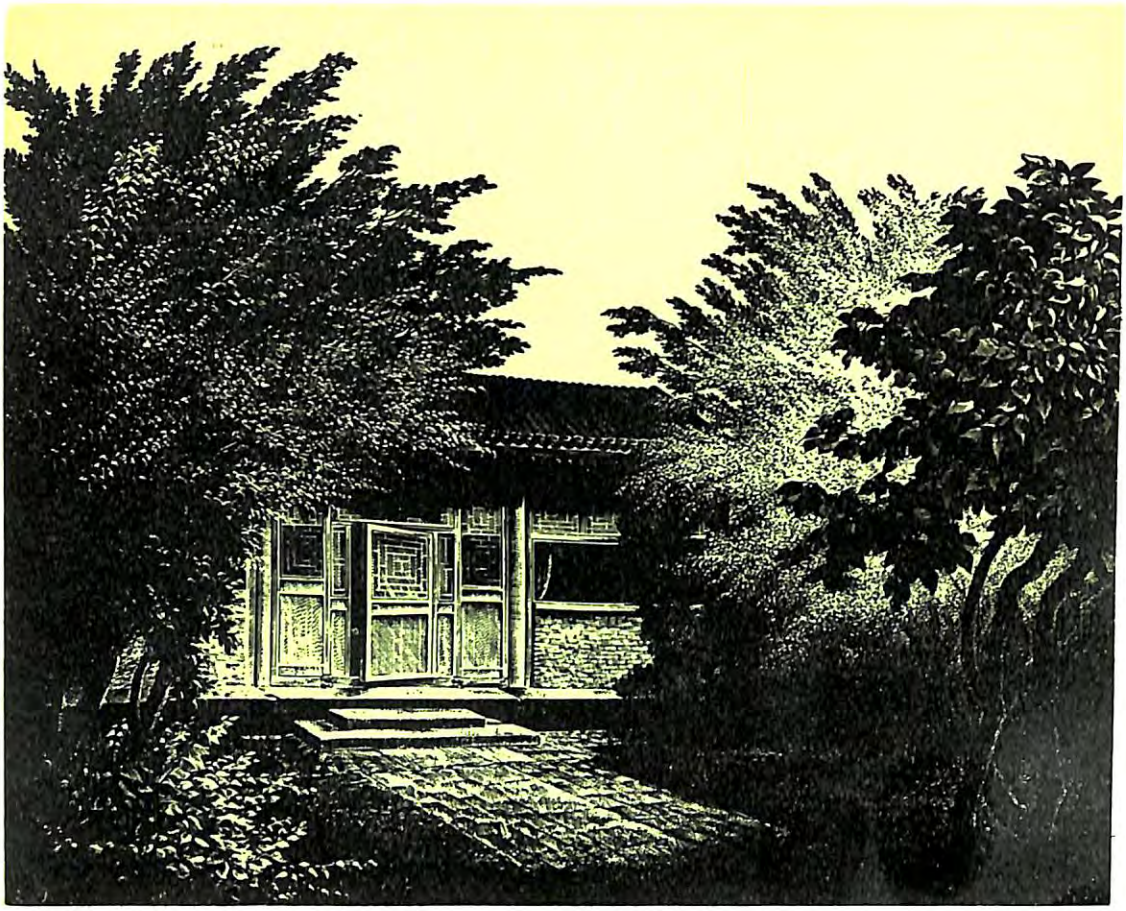
Portrait of Lu Hsun Yen Han



Young Lu Hsun Goes from the Pawnshop to the Apothecary to Get Medicine for His Invalid Father Yang Ko-yang

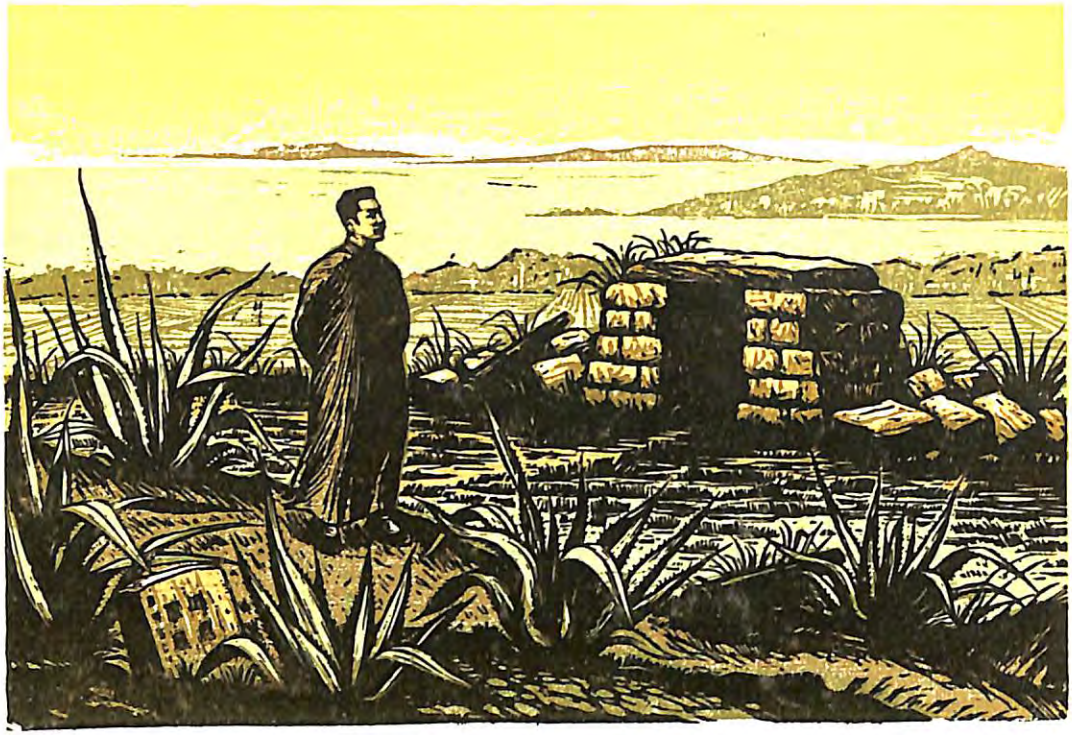


Lu Hsun Leaves Home for Nanking (1898) Chao Yen-nien



Lu Hsun's Home in Peking (1924-1926) Huang Yen

Jun-tu and Shui-sheng—Illustration to "My Old Home," a Short Story Written by Lu Hsun in Peking Ku Yuan



Lu Hsun in 1926 amid the Ruins of the Fortress near Amoy Defended by Cheng Cheng-kung, a National Hero at the End of the Ming Dynasty Yeh Fu

Lu Hsun in Shanghai Wang Jen-feng

Lu Hsun Lecturing to the Woodcut Class He Organized in Shanghai in 1931 Li Hua

Lu Hsun with Young Woodcut Artists Huang Yung-yu

Lu Hsun and Mao Tun Draft a Telegram to Congratulate the Chinese Red Army on the Successful Conclusion of Its Long March Chao Tsung-tsao

ME AND LITTLE YUNG

LIU CHEN

I. THE MARVELLOUS CREATURE

The comrades call me "Light Machine-gun." That's because I like to talk a lot and my voice is high and sharp.

One night in June 1942, Chao, our section chief, helped me tie my dispatch bag on good and tight and, as usual, I started off for one of our secret message relay stations in enemy territory.

June weather is screwy. A minute before the sky was full of winking stars. Then all of a sudden, a big wind rose, and black clouds raced overhead like half-tamed horses that had slipped their halters. A howling gale drove against me for all it was worth. I took a deep whiff of that icy air and every inch of me puckered into goose-pimples. But I planted my feet firmly on the ground and puffed up my chest.

"What about it?" I said to the wind. "Think you can push me around because I'm only fifteen? Well, think again. I'm a veteran—three years in the Eighth Route Army. The planes and big guns of the Japanese invaders don't scare me. Is small stuff like you going to do it? Huh!"

I struck out with long strides, but that wind was tough. It just pushed at me all the harder. I made a little headway. It pressed me back. But I wouldn't give in. I wasn't going to let it beat me.

Panting, I leaned into the wind and ground my way forward. I don't know how long I kept going like that. Finally, I raised my head and looked at the sky. The black clouds had joined together to make a solid endless curtain. The Milky Way, the Big Dipper, the whole sky was covered. My heart skipped a beat. Heavens! With no stars how could I get my bearings? I was lost.

The Japanese had built tower forts all over the place. At night their searchlights gleamed like ogres' eyes. The lights kept sweeping across my path. They seemed to be looking for my dispatch bag. I pulled it around from my back to my chest, fast, and hugged it tight. Aiya! Which way should I go?

Before I had set out that night, Chao, our section chief, had been a little worried. "Young Wang," he had said to me in a low voice,

"be careful, whatever you do! This is a very important document and it has to be delivered before dawn. You've a long way to go. Do you think you can make it?"

I got a little mad. "A small paper like that. I could deliver it with my eyes shut."

Chao reached for my dispatch bag. "I can't trust you. You're much too cocky. Something's sure to go wrong. I'll find someone else. . . ."

Hastily, I stopped him. "I shouldn't have talked like that," I apologized. "Anyhow, I was only kidding. That isn't what I think at all."

He gave the bag on my back a poke and shoved something into my hand bound in a handkerchief. "Get going."

Outside the courtyard gate, I untied the handkerchief. In it were four hardboiled eggs. Hah. I remembered. His wife had brought them from home yesterday. I could almost smell their fragrance through the shell. Really.

I felt right on top of the world then, but now I had to run into weather like this. Of all the rotten luck. The night was black as pitch. One mis-step and the enemy would nab me. And the document was very important. What to do? I wanted to stick on a pair of wings and grab a broom and fly into the sky. I could sweep those black clouds away and put a nice bright moon right up there in the middle. I thought about the sun too, that big red fiery ball. If only I could drag it back from the other side of the earth.

As these crazy ideas were whirling through my brain, suddenly, not far off to the left, I saw a tiny light flickering. If that's a man, I thought, he's sure not to be an enemy. When it gets dark, the enemy pull their head in like a turtle. They don't dare come out of their towers at night.

Pleased, I hurried toward the light. Before long, I reached a grove of old pine trees. The light disappeared. I was nearly frantic. Then, from somewhere behind me, a low voice said sharply:

"What are you up to?"

I gave a startled leap but quickly got hold of myself. "My Ma's sick," I said coolly. "I'm on my way home with some medicine I bought for her in the city. But I've lost the road. Can you tell me where it is?"

The shadowy figure of a man walked up to me, took my head in his hands and shook it from side to side. "Ha, ha, ha," he laughed. "Just an innocent peasant, eh? Don't kid me."

From the sound of his voice, I could tell he wasn't a bad man. The moon came through a rift in the clouds just then, and I was able to get a good look at him. He was a white-bearded old man carrying a tattered sack on his back.

"Speak up, quickly," he said. "Are you a comrade or not?"

"I'm a comrade," I said, and buried my head against his chest. For some reason I felt very abused.

Fondly, he raised my head. "Is there anything I can do for you? Just give the order, my little commander."

"I have to get to Tawang Village in a hurry," I told him promptly. "Can you take me there?"

"Nothing to it," he replied airily. "I've got winged feet and eyes that can see a thousand miles. I can take you right up to heaven if need be."

"Good. Let's hurry then."

He smartly drew himself up like a soldier. "Attention. Salute. Forward—march."

I giggled and took a tight grip on his hand.

Although he was old, he walked with his chest high, and he had more spirit than a man half his age. With him as my guide, the darkness and the wind didn't dare to pick on me any more.

It seemed kind of queer. How did he happen to pop up just when I needed him? He was like one of those Marvellous Creatures in Grandma's stories that could summon the wind and the rain, and ride around on a cloud. His beard was a foot long, like the beard the Sun Grandfather hangs through the clouds at sunset.

"What are you looking at me for?" he said with a flip of his hand. "I'm not your blushing bride. Keep your eyes on the ground or you're liable to trip and raise a lump on your noggin."

I had to tell him. "Old Grandpa, if I hadn't learned in the Eighth Route Army that superstition is a fake, I'd swear you were a Marvellous Creature."

He laughed. "A Marvellous Creature, eh? Nothing very special about them. I've got them beat a mile. I can knock off Japanese invaders. In that line there's nobody better than me."

Before I knew it, we reached the outskirts of a village. He gave me another salute.

"Reporting to the commander. Mission completed. Can I go now?"

Sure enough, it was Tawang. But I hated to part with him. I quickly blocked his path and pleaded:

"Please trust me, Old Grandpa. Tell me what you do. What's your name? Where do you live?"

He put his mouth close to my ear. "I do trust you, dear child. I'm a contact man in enemy territory. My family name is Sun. No need to ask my given name. Call me Grandpa Sun, if it suits you, or if it doesn't, Sun the Monkey King!* Don't call me Pigsy,* that's all.

* Both are supernatural characters in the popular classical novel *A Pilgrimage to the West.*

He was woman crazy, and how can I get sweet on a girl at my age? Even if I went sweet on her, she wouldn't go for me. No, it's better to be sweet on fighting the Japanese. That's a darling of a job. It doesn't care how old I am."

He began walking away with large strides. I ran in front of him.

"You needn't think you're such a secret fellow. Even if you go to the ends of the earth, I'll be able to find you again."

II. LITTLE YUNG, A GIRL OF TWELVE

By then it was already about two in the morning, but still before the first cock's crow. Everyone was fast asleep. The only sound was the rustling of the white poplar leaves, like a kind-hearted aunt softly whispering a long, long story without ever pausing for breath. Somewhere a baby began to cry, then, probably finding the nipple again, went back to sleep. A man's snores rumbled like thunder. I suddenly had the feeling that I was the hardest worker in the world, that no one's job was as interesting as mine. There had been many nights like this when I walked all alone through a silent village. Softly I walked, while millions of people slept. I talked to the moon and the stars. I saw owls. I saw flocks of migrating geese sleeping exhausted on the banks of a river. So as not to waken them, I stole past in a wide circle, just itching to grab one and take it home under my jacket. But I remembered Grandma saying that geese can only live in pairs. If one is lost, its mate never rests, but stands guard while the other geese sleep. It's very sad. Rather than harm a pair like that, I'd give up hunting for the rest of my life.

With these thoughts milling through my mind, I soon approached Aunt Li's gate. Her house was one of our message relay stations. It stood in a small compound on a hill at the east end of the village, quite far from the other houses. Outside the compound gate was a huge locust tree with a hollow trunk. Beside the tree was a well with clear sweet water. Aunt Li often sat beneath that tree, washing clothes for the comrades hidden in her house and acting as look-out at the same time. It didn't matter how bad the weather was, or how late at night, whenever any of our people stopped by, Aunt Li and Uncle would get up and cook them something to eat and bustle around as if the comrade was one of the family. As soon as I saw that compound gate, my legs went soft. I wanted to stretch out on their brick oven-bed and sleep for two days solid.

There were three in the family. The third was Little Yung, a girl about twelve, their only child. Little Yung is a swell girl, but she's kind of bossy. Usually, when I showed up, tired from the long walk, she'd heat me some water and say:

"Don't be such a dawdling slow-poke. Hurry and soak your feet. After you've finished washing, you can eat."

And another thing—she doesn't like to talk. You can't blame her for that. After all, everybody's got their own nature. It's nothing anyone can control. But she seems set on controlling mine. She won't let me say much.

"You don't have to keep gabbing," she tells me. "No one would ever mistake you for a dumb mute."

You'd think she was scared my voice would deafen her, or something. Really queer, that girl. Well, I had come again. I'd see how she'd treat me this time.

I gave three kicks to the back wall of their compound—the agreed signal. In the past, someone would answer with a cough, and softly open the gate. The gate was kept well oiled, and made no sound. But now, even after I gave the signal four times, there wasn't the slightest stir inside. Were they all sleeping too deeply? That had never happened before. I stole to the compound gate, took out a piece of wire I carried around for lifting latches, and prepared to slip it through the crack between the gate and the post. Oh mama mine! Not a chance. The space was sealed with three strips of heavy paper. I began to sweat. What had happened? Where had the three of them gone to? What was I going to do? This was enemy territory, only a few miles from the Peking-Hankow Railway. The document was supposed to be passed on to a relay station on the western side of the line. I had never made the trip and didn't know the way. Should I bring the message back? Nearly twenty-five miles. Not only would I be falling down on my job, but I'd also have to travel part of the way in daylight. The enemy might catch me and get their hands on that important document.

I was worried and mad too. Ripping off the paper strips, I forced the gate. A little dog yapped twice and crawled out from his hiding place. When he saw it was me, he stopped barking. It was Little Yung's Pekinese. I was really glad to see him. I snatched him up and hugged him and kissed his small black nose.

"Little Treasure, tell me. Where's Aunt and Uncle and Little Yung?" As I spoke, tears came to my eyes.

Suddenly a dark thing rushed toward me from the hollow locust tree and scared me so I fell back two paces. But I cooled right down and pulled out the dummy pistol I had stuck in my belt.

"Who are you?" I said in a low voice.

The figure didn't move, but cried softly, "Dear Young Wang. . . ."

"Little Yung?" My heart grew tight. Her voice had quavered so. I walked up to her with dragging steps. "What were you doing out there?" I asked cautiously. "Where's Aunt and Uncle?"

She grasped my hand. "There are traitors in this village. We can't talk here."

Hand in hand, we flew to the willow tree on the outskirts of the village, the little Peke racing behind us, his tail poked up in the air. It was beneath this tree that I had parted company with Grandpa Sun.

"Why have you come?" asked Little Yung. "Tell me, quick."

"No. Calm down. Where's Aunt and Uncle?"

"Don't ask. Tell me why you've come."

"I will ask. I want to know."

"I'm not going to let you ask." Little Yung wept.

My heart sank. I couldn't say anything. After a long while, I finally asked:

"What are we going to do about the document? Our section chief says it has to be passed on to the relay station on the west side of the railway right away."

Little Yung immediately stopped crying. "That's just what I've been waiting for. Give it to me." She reached for my dispatch bag.

I grabbed her hand. "Nothing doing. You won't be able to get through."

"Have you forgotten?" she said patiently, though I could see she was trying hard to hold herself in check. "I've been to that relay station a dozen times."

"But you went with your father then."

"I've delivered notes alone too."

"A note is much easier. If you run into the enemy you can swallow it down in one gulp. You can't do that with a big document."

"If I say I can deliver it, then I can. Don't stand here arguing with me all day."

I refused to be flurried. Counting on my fingers, I said, "You're twelve years old. Twelve, is that right? I won't let you do it. When I was twelve, though I joined the army, I was still afraid of ghosts on the road at night."

"Just because a person's twelve doesn't mean she can't do anything useful," Little Yung insisted stubbornly.

I shook my head. "That document is too important."

"Last week my aunt brought me five persimmons, and I've been saving them ever since, waiting for you to come so that we could eat them together," Little Yung said reproachfully. "But you, you're a fine one. You think I'm good for nothing." She punched me in the chest with her small fist and burst into heart-broken sobs.

What I said couldn't have made her cry like that. From the sound of it, she was crying for her mother and father. Though I didn't know exactly what had happened to them, tears began to roll from my eyes, and I wept with her. The Peke seemed to be grief-stricken too. He kept running from one of us to the other, first looking up at her, then looking up at me.

In the distance a cock crowed. Little Yung and I immediately be-

came as quiet as if we had never been crying. We stared at each other in alarm. "It's nearly dawn. What about the document?" we both said almost in one breath.

Little Yung frantically grabbed my lapel. "I tell you I surely can deliver it. You can cut off my head if I don't. Not another word out of you now."

I thought carefully. We couldn't afford to wait any longer. "Let's go together," I said. "Two minds are always better than one."

Little Yung smiled broadly. "Good. Let's hurry." Again she reached for my dispatch bag.

"You don't have to carry it," I told her.

"You've come twenty-five miles against a strong wind. You must be worn out. You only talk tough."

"But—"

"How you love to chatter. I hate you." And with no further ado, she angrily yanked off my dispatch bag and tied it on her own back. Then she turned around and buttoned my jacket.

"The dawn mist is going to settle soon," she said. From her pocket she fished out two sorghum cakes, both as hard as a rock, and handed them to me.

She was always like that. Because her father and mother were often away delivering messages, she became the mistress of the house. Little Yung could cook and sew, and she looked after everyone just like an adult. The comrades who used to stop over at her place called her "Little Grown-up." But whenever I was around, she seemed to turn into a "Big Grown-up." She petted me and at the same time insisted on making me behave.

Whenever she treated me like that, no matter how mad I might be at her, I'd forget it all in a minute. It was as if I had become her obedient kid brother.

"The way Little Yung manages Young Wang," her mother used to marvel proudly. "Well, every creature in nature has its master."

I don't know why things were that way between us. But the more Little Yung bossed me, the better I liked her.

III. "I CAN TAKE CARE OF MYSELF"

It was already turning light in the east as we neared the railway. A train was chugging north. Me and Little Yung sat down beneath some hemp stalks and watched it go past. It looked like a lot of small houses all strung together, longer than our village. Aiya, that train was really something. It could carry hundreds and thousands of people and piles and mountains of freight.

"Really fine," I said to myself. "I was figuring on driving a truck after we've won the war, but now I've changed my mind. I'm going to be a locomotive driver. Then whenever I see any comrades tired out from marching, I'll stop and say: 'Climb on, fellows. This train belongs to us. . . .' "

Little Yung's large black eyes shone like stars. She was smiling but not making a sound. Was she thinking of driving a locomotive too?

After the train passed, we jumped to our feet. "Don't do anything unless I give the order," Little Yung said in a hoarse voice, handing me the dispatch bag. Crouching, she ran toward the railway.

She had explained the set-up very clearly while we were travelling. She said the Japanese had a railway protection detachment. It was always patrolling. Sometimes it hid on both sides of the line, and watched. Little Yung had said that she would go first. If she ran into the enemy patrol, she would call out, and I could circle past them. If she didn't see any enemy, she would come back for me. I didn't agree, and we argued for a long time. I said I had been in the Eighth Route Army for three years. I had battle experience. I should be the one to go first. She said that, with my thick Shantung accent, if I met the enemy they'd know I wasn't from these parts the minute I opened my mouth. Besides, she said, I was a boy, with long legs. My job should be to carry the message and run fast. Scouting, giving orders, and covering up should be her work. What she said made sense. I had to give in.

Now I waited for her on pins and needles. My heart was pounding like mad and I kept my ears cocked for any sound of danger. Maybe the enemy had nabbed her. But she had said that even if she should be caught she would speak very loud to make sure I could hear her.

"Please don't let there be any talking," I muttered. "Hurry back, Little Yung. She will, she must come back. . . ."

Hey! Sure enough, a small dark figure came dashing toward me. . . .

Even before she reached me, Little Yung was motioning with her hand. "Quick. Come with me," she hissed.

I ran behind her, wishing we could fly to the other side of the railway in one jump. In the middle of the tracks, she suddenly halted and stood straight as a rod. She flung out her arm like a commander on the battlefield.

"Quick, quick. This way. Due west."

Seeing her so cool steadied me fifty per cent right away. I ran with all my might till I got to the western side of the railway, then slowed down. A few seconds later, she caught up with me. Ping, ping! — a rifle cracked behind us. Crouching, hand in hand, we ran at full speed. In a village ahead of us to the northwest, more rifles began popping too. Little Yung laughed.

"Those are our guerillas. They always try to protect comrades crossing the line."

After a while, the firing stopped. Little Yung was running with her mouth open, gasping for breath. Now she slackened her pace.

"It's all right here," she said.

We walked a little longer and it was daylight. The bird that always sings earliest on summer mornings burst into song. Me and Little Yung love that bird the best. We don't know his name. We just call him "Dawn Bird."

The sun, a big fiery red ball behind us, climbed the far eastern horizon. It made us cast long, long shadows, which were bigger than the tallest man alive. Little Yung took huge strides, trying in vain to step on her own shadow.

When we reached the village we were looking for, everyone was eating breakfast. Little Yung seemed very familiar with the place. She led me to a small courtyard where a woman about fifty came out of the northern wing to welcome us.

"Child," she said reproachfully to Little Yung, "why have you come alone? Your father can't be *that* busy."

Tears sprang to Little Yung's eyes, but she clamped her small mouth shut tight and didn't say a word. She led me to sit down on the brick oven-bed, just as if this were her own home. Then she helped the woman bring in firewood and light the cooking stove.

Our hostess didn't stand on ceremony. She spread some quilts on the bed, helped me pull off my shoes, and carefully took my dispatch bag.

"There's a very important document in there," I told her. "It mustn't be delayed. Send it right on."

"I know," she said with a smile. "I know all about it."

I was glad she didn't treat me like a child, but spoke to me as one comrade to another. Without waiting for me to ask, she introduced herself.

"My family's name is Chang. Every one of us earns his keep. My son's in the guerillas. The old man delivers messages in the relay station. The daughter-in-law and me look after the comrades who pass through. My six-year-old grandson is our orderly. He's learned how to serve the comrades drinking water and lay out chopsticks on the table. He's crazy about his job." She laughed heartily.

But when I looked at Little Yung, I couldn't speak. Chao, our section chief, said sometimes when he teased me: "The Light Machine-gun is jammed." That's just how I felt then.

Mrs. Chang kept her eyes on feeding the fire. "A long trip like that and your father lets you come without him. He's a cool one. He had a sore on his foot a few days ago. Is it better? And what about your Ma? So busy she never gets any sleep. Eyes all bloodshot. I've bought her a little medicine. You can take it back with you." Mrs. Chang

strung all her words out in one breath. She didn't seem to be expecting any answers.

Little Yung bit her lips. She rattled the bowls and chopsticks while washing them to stop herself from hearing what Mrs. Chang was saying. Suddenly two bowls crashed to floor. Little Yung began to weep. I never heard her cry like that before.

Mrs. Chang rushed over and hugged Little Yung to her bosom. "A couple of bowls is nothing to get upset about. You don't think I'd scold you for a thing like that? Of course not. A darling girl like you is hard to find. You ought to consider this place your own home. Every time your father comes he brings something to eat. But he'll never touch a morsel himself. Our two families are closer than any relatives could ever be. Your Ma and Pa won't say anything about the bowls either. Don't cry, don't cry."

At this, Little Yung cried all the harder. I was sure now. Her Ma and Pa were no longer in this world. Covering my face with my hands, I wept too.

"What's wrong?" Mrs. Chang asked, startled.

She raised Little Yung's face and peered at it long and carefully. I could see how sunken Little Yung's eye-sockets had become. It made her eyes look bigger than ever. Her face was colourless and her chin jutted out very sharp. Her usually neat braid hung scattered on the back of her neck. I suppose Mrs. Chang guessed the truth, for she also started to cry. . . .

The next morning, Little Yung, with tears in her eyes, begged me to take her with me back to the office of the District Party Committee. "Brother," she said, "I have no home." Of course I agreed, but Mrs. Chang was dead set against it.

"You're still too small. Wait till you're a little older. Live here with me. I have no daughter," Mrs. Chang said, and she cried again.

"All three of Young Wang's family are in the fight against the Japanese invaders," Little Yung said in a hurt voice, "but now my family doesn't have a one. He's only three years older than me. Anything he can do, I can do too."

Mrs. Chang insisted that Little Yung was too small, that in my work no one would be able to look after her. Little Yung flung herself on Mrs. Chang's bosom and wept.

"Don't you worry," Little Yung said, after she pulled herself together. "I can take care of myself. I could wash my face when I was four. At five I could dress myself. When I was six I could comb my own hair and make the bed. Anything I can't do, I can learn. I promise not to be naughty, and do what I'm told."

Mrs. Chang hadn't any answer to that. She got busy wrapping up a few things for us to eat on the road. After a lot of searching she

managed to find a white handkerchief of fine cloth. She handed it to Little Yung.

"We're poor, child," she sighed. "We haven't anything better to give you."

When we left, she walked with us a mile or two. She hated to part with Little Yung. As we said good-bye, she stroked Little Yung's hair and said:

"Go, child. I know you're going to grow up to be a fine young woman."

IV. WE BECOME EVEN CLOSER

By midnight, we still hadn't reached the office of the District Party Committee. It was raining cats and dogs. What a pain in the neck. I was leading Little Yung by the hand, with her trying to walk faster so as to get up front and lead me. Suddenly she slipped in the mud and landed on her rear. The next instant, my feet shot out from under me and I was sitting right beside her. Little Yung bubbled into peals of laughter. She was laughing so hard as she stood up that she skidded and took another tumble.

I could barely drag my weary legs by the time we finally arrived at the big compound gate of our office. My heart sank within me. No one had given me permission to bring in Little Yung. Conditions were very tough and we were right in the middle of economizing and cutting down on personnel. Suppose Chao, the section chief, refused to add her to our organization, then what? I had been working under Chao for two years and he loved me like a father. He always had a kind word and a pleasant smile for me. When his brain would get foggy from too much desk work, he'd say, "How about it, pal? Let's practise a few tricks." And we'd go into a hot session of tumbling and gymnastics for ten or fifteen minutes. He had been building me up till I was as hard as an iron egg. But if Chao thought something was wrong, you could talk yourself blue in the face and he'd never agree to it. I was really worried. What could I do for Little Yung if he wouldn't accept her?

I used my wire to lift the gate latch, then said to Little Yung, "You wait here. After I've fixed up everything, I'll bring you in."

She didn't answer, but sat down in the gateway.

Every time I went out on a mission it was the same. Chao wouldn't close his eyes till I got back. He said he couldn't sleep. He would read or write, and wait for me. Tonight, again, there was a lamp burning in his room. I peeked in through a crack in the door. He was pacing the floor as he listened to the rain beat against the window. I flung the door open and he turned his head.

"Aiya, young fellow, you had me worried stiff. Why have you come

back a day late? I bet you're soaked to the skin." He peeled off my sopping clothes.

I had prepared a whole speech, but now, somehow, I could hardly get a word out.

"I . . . I . . . I'm fine," I stammered. "The rain won't hurt me. I'm used to it. But she . . . she the Japanese killed her mother and father. She's hungry and pale and skinny and she's been out in all this rain. Please, hurry, ask her to come in."

Chao's eyes widened with surprise. "Who? Where?"

"Aunt Li's daughter. From the message relay station. Little Yung. She's—outside—in the gateway—"

Chao dashed out into the rain before I could finish. In a few seconds, he was back with Little Yung. He glared at me.

"A black night like this. Rain coming down by the buckets. How could you leave her out there alone in the gateway?"

"I was afraid you wouldn't take her," I mumbled, feeling sort of offended.

"You," Chao snorted, "you're a prize chump." His eyes were moist.

Little Yung stayed with us from then on. Chao said she was the daughter of war martyrs and she was very young, so we had to look after her. He said if the chance came, he'd send her to school at our Taihang Mountain base.

I delivered messages every day, as usual, or escorted comrades who were passing through. Little Yung wasn't allowed to do this, and she sulked. She pouted her lips so far out you could have hitched a small mule to them. It made her very unhappy not to be able to join in the work. Chao kept trying to console her, telling her she could do lots of work when she grew up.

"Why not right now?" she demanded. "Anything Young Wang can do, I can too. Just try me if you don't believe it."

One day Chao gave me a message for someone in a village about ten miles away. Little Yung heard everything Chao said—the name of the village, the name of the man. When I went out of the room for a drink of water, the message and Little Yung both disappeared. Little Yung came back before dark. She placed the receipt for the message on the desk before Chao without a word, her big eyes challenging him.

Chao agreed that she could work with me as a messenger.

After Little Yung's father and mother had been caught, a new relay station was set up in a village a mile or so from their home. Little Yung's and my main job was to deliver messages to this new station. It was about twenty-five miles away, and you had to get by many enemy fort towers, patrolled motor roads and deep blockade ditches. Now I had a companion on this tough route. The name of every village, the shape of every tree under the blue sky, became engraved on our hearts. When I forgot, she would remember; when she forgot, I would remember.

No matter how black the night or how wild the wind, we never lost our way. I used to think—By the time victory comes, our feet will have worn a path hard and shiny as crystal. Birds in the sky and people taking the path will be able to see a beautiful reflection.

Little Yung was livelier than she had been at home. She talked more. She even made up a jingle about me:

Young Wang, oh Young Wang is my friend's name,
As a big eater he's won fame.
Don't think he has no weapon
'Cause in his hands he carries none,
When that lad starts to chatter
He's like a light machine-gun.

I couldn't let her get away with that. I made up one about her:

There's a girl in our house with a perky stuck-up braid,
Like moons are her big eyes.
Don't think she's good 'cause she hasn't much to say,
She's full of tricks and surprise.

Whenever we went out on a mission, she was always wanting to lead the way. She would walk rapidly ahead of me, her neat little braid swinging jauntily from side to side.

I made her cry once. My mother was away, working in the women's association, but she found time to make me a school bag with a motto stitched in golden thread: "Study hard; see the revolution through." I thought the bag was wonderful. It made me want to dance for joy. I proudly showed it to everyone. Then Chao said to me in a low voice:

"Come with me."

He took me to the western end of the village and pointed toward a date tree. "See that girl there?"

Little Yung was standing beneath the tree with her head lowered. She seemed to be crying. I didn't understand.

"What's wrong with her?" I asked.

"Put yourself in her place," said Chao. "When you strut around with that school bag your mother made for you, how do you suppose she feels?"

Ah, so that was it. "I'll give the bag to her then, all right?"

"That's up to you. It's none of my business."

I ran up to Little Yung and handed her the bag. "This is for you."

She pushed it away. "No. That's not what I want. . . ."

I grasped her hand, not knowing what to say. Chao came toward us slowly with measured pace and took us each by the hand. We walked home in silence through the rows of poplar trees. The sun was setting in the west. Flocks of ravens were returning to their nests where little

birds were crying and opening their mouths, waiting for their mamas to feed them.

I wrote to my mother about what had happened. After that, whenever she gave me anything, she had something for Little Yung too. She made me a pair of black cloth shoes; she made Little Yung a pair of flowery ones. As for the school bag, Little Yung and I used it together. She was in charge of it, neater than me. Every day she put the bag in order. My grammar, geography and other textbooks—each had its proper place, not just thrown in any old way like before. If I wanted to read something, she would take the book out for me, so that I wouldn't upset the other contents of the bag.

We worked and lived in the compound of one of the peasant families. Little Yung slept with the lady of the house in the north wing. Chao and I stayed in the west wing. One night I woke up with a start. Our lamp was lit and Little Yung was sitting beside it, mending the holes in my socks.

"Why can't you do that during the day?" I asked her.

"If Aunt saw me sewing, she'd take it away and do it herself." (Little Yung called our hostess "Aunt.")

"Well, let her then."

Little Yung was silent for a minute. "Your mother does so much for me," she said finally. "I haven't done anything—"

I snatched the socks from her hands. "If that's why you're mending my socks I'd rather burn them, I'd rather go barefoot till my feet rot, I'd rather never wear socks again."

Little Yung looked at me, puzzled. There were tears in her large bright eyes.

"It's not because I want you to mend my socks that I'm good to you," I told her.

"My heart's in the right place," she hastened to explain.

I shook my head. "Not if you act that way."

"How else can I show it?" she said slowly. "This isn't my own home. . . ."

Chao sat up in bed. He looked as if he had been awake for some time. He draped a coat over his shoulders and pulled Little Yung to sit down beside him.

"This is your home, dear child," he said quietly. "It's my home and Young Wang's. This home has thousands and millions of comrades in it. If any one of them runs into trouble, it's up to all of us to help. Only bad people care about themselves, and never give a hand to others. . . ."

That night Chao talked to us for hours. He told us stories of Lenin, he told us about the Long March of the Chinese Red Army, about the war with the Japanese invaders. . . .

In the stillness of the deep night, not even a leaf rustled. The whole

world seemed to be listening to Chao, our section chief. His voice was deep and vibrant, and he spoke very clearly. I'll never forget the sound of his voice. Later on, in many such quiet nights, I often thought of it.

V. HOME

Who doesn't get homesick? I come from the banks of the Grand Canal. Some people say it's just an ordinary stretch of water, but to me it's the most beautiful river in the world. I love to hear the cicadas at dusk because they remind me of the cicadas along the Canal. Two days before I had to leave that home with Pa and Ma, I put some green pears in the pile of wheat stalks at the west end of our village. When pears get over-ripe, they turn brown, and then they're soft and sour, yet wonderfully sweet. If only for those pears alone, I wanted to return home. I wanted to see whether the pears were still there.

Whenever I wasn't busy I liked to walk to the outskirts of the village where we were now living, or climb up on the roof, and look toward the southeast. I'd look and look, because off in the southeast there were many, many villages, and one of them was mine. Our family's compound gate faced west. It opened right on the Canal.

Little Yung was the same as me. If we ever went near enough to her village to see it in the distance, she always wanted to stop and look at it a little longer. I remember a moonlit night in the middle of the eighth month, last year. It was Autumn Festival time. I was sitting on a big mat in Little Yung's courtyard with her and her mother and father. We were looking up at the moon and listening to Aunt Li tell stories. Her voice was warm and nice.

"Can you see it?" she asked. "In the courtyard of the Moon Palace there's a thick pine tree and beneath it sits an old lady working at a spinning wheel. Day and night, she spins and spins, and the thread she spins is fine and white."

"One of the first things I can remember is you telling me how she spins and spins," Little Yung interrupted. "She must have spun an awful lot of thread by now."

"One of the first things *I* remember is my mother telling *me* how that old lady spins and spins. She's spun mountains and mountains of thread. All the silver people use comes from those mountains. . . ."

On Autumn Festival Day, this year, Little Yung wanted to go home and take a look. We had finished our work and I wanted to see the place too, so I agreed to go with her. We slipped away that evening without a word to anyone.

There wasn't even a wisp of cloud in sight. The sky was a shiny transparent blue. Like a shy bride, the moon, just coming up on the eastern horizon, hid itself behind the leafy branches of the trees. In the

dense groves of white poplar trees, the endlessly rustling leaves sounded like a peaceful sparkling stream, flowing where nobody could see it. That must be how the Milky Way River flows too, I thought.

Far off in the moonlight we soon could see Little Yung's compound still standing proudly on the crest of a hill. The old locust tree, tossed by the breeze, moaned and sobbed. The compound gate, the door of the house, even the window frames, had been gouged out and stolen. Only a skeleton of the house remained. At our approach, sparrows nesting on the beams darted chirruping about with a whirring of wings. The floor was littered with twigs and pieces of brick and tile which children had thrown in. There were four or five gaping holes in the roof. Moonlight, shining in through trailing spiderwebs, seemed to be saying: See, this is what has become of your house.

Me and Little Yung stood in silence. We weren't able to say a word.

In the past, the pomegranate tree in the courtyard was bowed down with bright red fruit this time of the year. Its blossoms had probably been plucked by children as soon as they opened. Now it bore only leaves, and the ground beneath it was parched and cracked.

Little Yung had told me — she was her mother's first child; Aunt Li was forty the year she was born. That spring, her father had planted the pomegranate tree. It grew just as sturdy as Little Yung, putting forth lovely big red blossoms year after year. The tree and Little Yung — two sisters — were all that remained of the family. Now that Little Yung had joined the Eighth Route Army, there was no one left to look after the tree.

The Peke crept out from under a pile of rotting stalks, yapped, and approached us cautiously. When he recognized Little Yung, he jumped all over her, crazy with joy. Crying, Little Yung picked him up. The Peke whimpered and moaned like a child.

After we got back to the Party Committee Office, neither of us could eat a morsel the whole next day. Little Yung's eyes kept staring straight ahead. The section chief noticed us. In the evening, when he had finished his work, he called us to him.

"Was your job too hard last night?" he asked us.

"No," I said. Little Yung only shook her head.

"Have you been quarrelling?"

"We never quarrel," I said.

"Well, what's wrong then?"

I told him all about how we had gone to see Little Yung's house the night before. "It doesn't look a house at all now. It's enough to make anyone's heart ache," I sighed. "And Aunt and Uncle — gone for ever...."

Chao took Little Yung's hand and held it tight. After a long silence, he asked slowly, "Is Little Yung's the only family this kind of thing has happened to since the Japanese invaders attacked China?"

"Of course there've been others too." I answered all the questions. Little Yung said nothing. Her tear-filled eyes were fixed on some ears of wheat, drying on the wall for next season's seed.

"During the Japanese 'Mop Up,' comrades were caught. Men were killed, women were raped, children were hacked open. Did you see any of it?"

"I saw plenty."

"How did it make you feel about the enemy?"

"I hate them."

"Of course." Chao paused a moment, then went on. "That's the way it is. Thousands of mothers, wives and children want to avenge their dear ones. But if everyone only goes after his own personal vengeance without caring about the others, no one will get his revenge. Only if we're all of one heart, if everyone does his job a hundred per cent, if we all study hard, then our army will become very strong and be able to wipe out the enemy. Only in that way can everyone have his revenge...."

Chao's words made a deep impression on me.

Suddenly, he seemed to remember something. He stood up and walked to the closet and took out two packages wrapped in red paper.

"Yesterday was Autumn Festival Day. You two weren't home, but the comrades left these presents for you."

We opened our gift packages. Each contained a home-made moon-cake — made by the "Aunt" in whose house we were living, for sure. There was also a white pear and a red-covered notebook.

Chao had stitched notebooks himself. On the second page, he had written — "Only a determined, brave child, striving to progress today can become an excellent Communist Party member tomorrow." Little Yung and I pored over those words a long time. Then we took up our pears and tore into them with gusto. They were fragrant and crisp, and their juice ran down our chins. I looked happily at Little Yung. She looked at me.

"Go easy there, Young Wang," Chao cautioned. "Don't swallow it all down in one gulp. Those pits are liable to sprout in your stomach. The next thing you know, crows'll be flying into your mouth to get at the fruit on your pear tree."

Me and Little Yung began to laugh. We laughed and laughed till the tears rolled from our eyes.

VI. I MEET HIM AGAIN

Every time I was given a rush job, I felt fine and excited. One day Chao said to us:

"There's a very important message. If it can reach our militia forces in Yaoshan County before 10 p.m., they'll be able to catch a big

traitor around midnight. You'll have to pick it up at our secret relay point first at dusk."

That meant we had to start immediately. The sun had not yet risen, but there were twenty-five miles to be covered before it set again.

"It's only because you two are children and can travel openly in daylight that we're letting you go," Chao said gravely. "Whether a big fish can be landed depends on the ones wielding the net. Today the net is in your hands. Do you understand?" He thought for a few moments, then added, "This traitor is connected with the death of Little Yung's parents."

When I heard that, my body tightened all over. Little Yung turned pale.

We set out at a fast pace, only wishing we could take ten steps in one. Usually we told each other stories during the trip to relieve our tiredness. Little Yung knew lots of them — how the cuckoo got its name, why the bat doesn't dare to fly in daylight. . . . Today, she didn't say a word, just kept walking almost at a run. It was funny. We made the whole trip without resting a minute, yet neither of us felt tired.

All day we raced the sun. Now it had reached the western horizon. Our destination was a grove of pine trees. There wasn't anyone there when we arrived. Panting, we climbed up on a low branch and began to eat our muffins. All the time our eyes were darting in every direction. We waited for our contact impatiently. The sunset clouds toyed with us, painting Little Yung's face a beautiful rosy hue. White clouds became golden, then pink, then purple. The seventh and eighth months are famous for clouds with queer shapes, and this was the middle of August. One looked like a forest, one like an old man with a long beard, one like a tiger. They kept changing too. The forest turned into a tall building, the old man became a rooster. It was great fun. I've always loved to watch the changing clouds. I can do it for hours.

Ordinarily you couldn't see the big mountains in the west from this place during the day. But when the setting sun got behind them, they were clearly visible, outlined in gold. Me and Little Yung liked to look at those mountains, because beyond them and many more mountains far to the northwest was Yenan, where our beloved Chairman Mao Tse-tung lived.

Suddenly, the west wind brought the sound of the yells of Japanese invaders, like the cries of wild wolves. A woman and a child began to wail loudly. . . . Little Yung gripped my shoulder. My heart seemed frozen in my chest. I could hardly breathe. Tears filled my eyes.

The sky darkened. In the distance we heard a quiet cough. Little Yung happily got ready to leap down from the branch. I stopped her.

"Don't get excited. Maybe it's not our man."

We listened and strained our eyes. A shadowy figure drew near. Very relaxed, he sat down on a mound and lit his pipe, then drew on it

noisily as if enjoying its flavour. Gazing in the direction of the county seat, he mused aloud:

"Out here this is my kingdom. I can say what I please and curse anyone I please. Those d — Japanese." Beating time with his long-stemmed pipe, he began to sing:

In the sky is the Big Dipper,
In the Shensi-Kansu-Ningsia Border Region is Mao Tse-tung,
Our Eighth Route Army has Division Commander Liu,
Ai, ai,
And there's also this old peasant, me.

Don't act tough, little Japanese fiends,
Crawling scaly vermin can never become sprites,
So you'd like to make a good meal out of China, eh?
Ho, ho,
I guarantee we'll send you scuttling back to Tokyo.

I knew who he was then. No one other than my Marvellous Creature. Chao had told me that he belonged to the Liaison Section of our District Party Committee. Chao said he was the cleverest contact in this part of the country. He could find out anything and everything about the enemy. Because he was such a shrewd old man, the comrades called him "Grandpa of the Heavens." He lived under cover right in the occupied city. I hadn't seen him for several days and I thought of him a lot.

Me and Little Yung jumped down from the tree together and ran over to him. He quickly rose to his feet, and we stood staring at each other.

"Aha, so it's you," he laughed, hugging us both to his chest. "I've been wearing my eyes out trying to find you." He fumbled around in his pocket and dug up two poppyseed buns. "I've been carrying something good to eat every time I've come out, hoping and praying I'd meet my little pal again. Now I've run into you at last."

There was a drought that year, and we had to be contented with muffins of red sorghum mixed with husks everyday. And so when Grandpa Sun offered us beautiful poppyseed buns with slices of meat sandwiched inside, we weren't the least bit coy. We gobbled them down as fast as we could eat. Grinning, his head cocked to one side, Grandpa watched us. From the look of him, he couldn't have been more pleased eating them himself.

I wiped my mouth and formally stepped back from him a pace. "There isn't much time. Please give us the message."

He peered at me and Little Yung as if he didn't recognize us. "Give it to you?"

"That's right," I said. "What's the matter? Don't you think we're good enough?"

"No, no, you're fine," he said hastily, and he handed me a small envelope.

I still wanted to make sure. "Grandpa," I asked him, "what does it say in here?"

"I'm not supposed to tell," he replied thoughtfully. "But if you two weren't dependable the District Party Committee wouldn't have sent you."

"You don't have to worry about us."

"Good," he nodded. "The head of puppet plain-clothes squad in the city, Li Tien-kuei—"

"Oh," Little Yung gave a startled gasp.

"Do you know him?" asked Grandpa Sun.

"No," I said. "Go on."

"He's the big landlord of Tawang Village, and a dirty traitor. A couple of months ago he was the one who informed on a husband and wife named Li. The Japanese invaders caught them and buried them alive. Tonight at one o'clock he's going back to Tawang again to grab another one of our underground comrades. You hurry and send word to our militia. We've got to catch that dog. The people hate his guts."

"Grandpa," I said in a voice that shook, "this girl is the daughter of those comrades he betrayed."

"Ah." The old man pulled Little Yung into the moonlight and, tilting up her chin, peered at her face for a long while, speechless.

"It's getting late," I cried. "The important thing now is to deliver the message."

Grandpa Sun let Little Yung go. "Right. You kids get going."

Swearing we'd finish our job, I took Little Yung by the hand and rushed off toward where our militia was staying. We didn't say goodbye or even turn our heads. I knew the old man didn't want us to waste a second either.

VII. UNSETTLED ACCOUNTS

At nine o'clock we found the militia. I had known the commander a long time. He was of medium height, thin. When he finished reading the message, he gritted his teeth and said, "Good. Good."

The battalion was scattered over different parts of the county. That night there were only two squads with the commander — altogether sixteen men. As soon as he heard that Little Yung was from Tawang and that I had been there often, he agreed to take us along as guides. But he cautioned us that we had to listen to orders. He gave each of us a flashlight and said we could help the militia comrades search Tien-kuei's house after the traitor was caught.

The commander questioned Little Yung about the layout of Tien-kuei's compound. She told him how many rooms there were, who lived

there, and so on, while she sketched it out very clearly on a page of the commander's notebook. Surrounded by the comrades, she looked like a little hostess, sitting beside that low square table on the brick oven-bed. Her eyes had a special gleam, and her face was flushed. It was as if all the words she didn't say in the past she had been saving to spill out now.

Like a whirlwind, the militia swept down on Tawang. It was already eleven o'clock. The commander said no one was to make a sound.

A grove of date trees grew beside Tien-kuei's tiled-roof compound, and some comrades crawled from the trees on to the roof, then slipped down into the courtyard and hid themselves. A few took up posts at approaches to the compound. Luckily, most of the dogs in the village had been starved to death a long time ago. Otherwise they would have set up a racket and given the whole show away. I was ordered to keep a look-out from atop a small garret on the roof of the north wing of the compound. Little Yung, complaining that she was too short and couldn't see a thing, climbed a small white poplar near the compound wall. She used to search for birds' eggs in that tree, and she shinnied up it as easily as a cat.

Everything was ready. The night was still and peaceful. It was hard to believe anything was going to happen. On the branches of the trees, ravens lazily ruffled their feathers in their sleep.

The quieter it was the tenser I became. I didn't even dare breathe too loud. Suddenly I heard someone knocking at Tien-kuei's compound gate. Before I could make out who it was, the gate was flung open and several voices cried together:

"Hands up."

Then two shots split the air, and there was a veritable hubbub. My heart beat like mad. I was just itching to get my hands on that dirty traitor, to punch him, kick him. But I couldn't make a move without orders.

"After him, comrades," I heard the commander call. "Tien-kuei's getting away."

I was nearly frantic. The militia comrades were searching all over the compound.

From her perch in the tree, Little Yung pointed her flashlight at a pile of wheat stalks and yelled, "Over here. Hurry. There's someone here."

The men all ran toward where she was pointing. In that instant, Tien-kuei fired five shots at Little Yung's flashlight.

"Little Yung," I shouted, very frightened for her.

Her light went out for a second, then immediately went on again. I heaved a sigh of relief. By then the comrades had grabbed the traitor Tien-kuei.

Beyond the compound wall, someone cried in alarm, "Little Yung's fallen out of the tree."

Those were the most terrible words I had ever heard. I scrambled down from the roof and flew out of the compound. Many peasants had gathered near the poplar tree, some carrying lanterns. It wasn't so bad. Little Yung had been shot in the leg, but the fall hadn't hurt her. She had landed on a pile of sorghum stalks. She lay with her eyes closed, her lips slightly parted. I was trembling like a fool. I couldn't cry. I couldn't speak. The comrades bandaged her leg and the commander wrote a letter of introduction. He said she should be taken across the railway and sent to the military hospital in our Taihang Mountain base right away.

They put her on a stretcher and covered her with a quilt. An old man called her name, "Yung, Yung, Yung," but she didn't answer.

Outside the village there were two sharp reports. "That's the end of Tien-kuei the traitor," the comrades said happily, in a low voice.

Little Yung sat bolt upright as if nothing was wrong with her, then fell back again. Smiling, she closed her eyes.

I followed the stretcher outside the village. The comrades kept telling me to go back, but I was deaf to everything. I wanted to hear Little Yung's voice again, even if she only groaned. Walking beside the stretcher, I hardly knew what I was doing. I pulled the quilt down from her face and asked her, weeping:

"Can't you say anything?"

"I can speak now," she said. "I've come out of it."

Then at last I knew she'd be all right. The comrades again told me to halt. What could I do? I stopped. I stood motionless watching the stretcher moving west, disappearing into the darkness.

On leaden feet, I returned slowly to the village. My heart felt scooped out and empty.

An announcement about the execution of Tien-kuei was pasted on the wall. The comrades had also captured eight other plain-clothes enemy agents and trussed their arms behind them. With these traitors in tow, the militia unit marched away. Again the village became silent. There was only the sound of the white poplar leaves, rustling, rustling, like a flowing stream.

Little Yung's flashlight still shone down from the tree, its beam lighting the place where Tien-kuei had been captured. After she had been hit and couldn't hold on any longer, she must have wedged the flashlight into the fork of a branch to make sure it would keep pointing at the traitor.

Yes, my little partner was brave, and stubborn. I ought to be like her.

I wiped my eyes dry and headed straight for where I had to go.

Translated by Sidney Shapiro

OLD SUNG GOES TO TOWN

HSI YUNG

Early in the morning, Old Sung brought out the mule and harnessed it to the cart. As his wife hadn't turned up he stepped into the office to see Chang, the accountant, to get the money for the mules he was going to town to buy.

"Here's the money, Old Sung," said Chang, handing him a packet of neatly tied banknotes. "But you'd better take good care. If some ruffians were to get you on the way, we'd never see a hair of those two mules we want."

"Pooh, pooh!" said Old Sung, tossing his head jovially. "Let them get me. I've lived quite a long time."

"So you don't want to wait to see socialism?" said someone chaffingly.

"Who says I don't?" said Old Sung, turning on the speaker. "As long as I can keep from dying, I'll live to enjoy good days under socialism. Even if I'm an old man by then, I shall still be wanting to chuck up this old cart and learn to drive a car. Then when I want to go to town I shall simply start the car, tell my wife to hop in, and we'll be gone like a puff of smoke. That'll be all right!"

A woman's voice was heard through the window. "Dad, dad, mother's come."

Old Sung winked to those in the room. "I haven't time to gossip now, or I'll catch it from the old woman again," he said, putting the money away. He picked up his whip and bustled off.

His wife was already in the cart. She frowned when she saw her husband coming out, chuckling and talking. "You are a one!" she grumbled in a low voice. "Always chattering; you never seem to stop. It's a good thing lips don't wear out, otherwise you'd have none left, with all the wear and tear you give them."

Old Sung was accustomed to his wife's lectures. "I may talk a lot," he said, still smiling, "but I never say anything without a purpose. Take your going to town for instance. You want to get cotton material for some new clothes. But if you had listened to me and stayed home, you would have saved at least ten yuan."

"It's all very well for you to talk," the old woman was getting a

bit irked and her voice rose. "Me and my daughter here earn close to two hundred work-days a year, but you grudge us a new dress once in a while. Wait till there's an occasion in the village and we have to appear in rags. I suppose you think that'll make you feel good."

"It's hopeless arguing with you," Old Sung waved his hand helplessly. "The way you think you're still thousands of miles behind socialism."

The appearance of Chang, the accountant, cut short their squabble. "Hurry now, you've got to get into town early," said he. "You've got quite a few things to do. I've just remembered something else. Don't forget to look up our vice-chairman, Chang Fang-kuei, at the agro-technical training class. Tell him that pests have got into nearly fifty *mou* of our record cotton crop. Ask him what we must do to get rid of them. We won't be able to make our target of 120 catties per *mou* this autumn unless we do."

"Since you've got so many errands for me you ought to have written them down one by one," said Old Sung.

The accountant shot a glance at the daughter, Hsiao-hsiu, who was sitting quietly in the cart. "That's all right," he said. "We know that if you can't remember it all, we can depend on your Hsiao-hsiu."

Hsiao-hsiu moved closer to her mother. "Don't count on me. It's none of my business," she said in a low, embarrassed voice.

The accountant looked at Hsiao-hsiu meaningly and was on the verge of saying something when Old Sung turned to his daughter, "What are you going to town for anyway?" he asked.

"I've got something to see to."

"We're so busy now in the co-op. Couldn't I have seen to your business for you?"

"Um . . ." Hsiao-hsiu mumbled and looked at her mother. Her face flushed a deep crimson, and she tossed her hair back petulantly.

"Come on, we'd better get going," Sung's wife put in. "Why do you ask so many questions? Must you find out about every little thing?"

Old Sung thought there was something up from the look in his wife's eyes, but he wasn't quite sure what it was. He gazed searchingly at his daughter's face, but she looked him in the eye and pouted as if much displeased. He dared not question her further. Raising his whip, he cracked it smartly over the mule's head. "They're losing two work-days between them," he thought to himself. "I simply don't know what they could want to do in town, I'm sure."

The cart jolted on to the main road, as they soon left the village behind. The autumn crops along the roadside were so fine and sturdy that they gladdened Old Sung's heart. He knew these were co-op fields and his experienced eyes saw that they would be reaping an unusually good harvest this year. He felt so cheerful as he feasted his eyes on

the things round him that his little tiff with his family was completely forgotten. Everywhere people were working in groups, except in the cotton field of the peasant Wang Fa-hsiang, who was working on his own. Wang's wife, with two little ones trailing behind her, was tending young cotton plants by herself. Old Sung sent his whip cracking through the air. "Hi, there, old woman," he shouted. "Why are you working alone? Where's that old man of yours?"

The old woman straightened her back. "He's gone to town to sell two pecks of wheat," she said, when she saw it was Old Sung.

"Why didn't you let me know earlier," said Old Sung genially. "I could easily have taken it for you, even if it was a picul. Were you afraid that I'd take some off you?"

The old woman sighed. "Oh well, you know what my man's temper's like. He said he wasn't going to ask anything of the co-op since he hadn't joined it."

"Shucks, you wouldn't call this asking anything of us! It'd be just a bit of mutual aid." Then he asked in a loud voice, "Well, is there anything I can bring back for you? I'm going to town to get a few things for our co-op."

"There're plenty of things you could bring me if I had the money to pay for them," said the old woman.

"Never mind if you have no money," Old Sung said to tease her. "All you need do is fill a couple of sacks with wheat. . . ."

"Oh, you wicked old man," said the old woman, looking a little wistful. "It's all very well for *you* to talk rich, but you know our wheat harvest this year was far from good."

Old Sung would have settled down for a talk if his daughter hadn't put in a word then. "Dad, we really must hurry. Look how high the sun is already."

Old Sung looked at the sun, called out to the mule and shouted over his shoulder as the cart began to move, "Never mind, old woman. When I have time, I'll straighten out Brother Fa-hsiang's muddled old head."

His wife poked him with some impatience. "You are a nuisance! Do let's be on our way. How you love to meddle! Do you think you've got hundreds of years more to live?"

Old Sung smiled at his wife but didn't say a word. He jerked the reins, cracked his whip again and on the cart rumbled to town, leaving a trail of dust in its wake.

II

Today, Old Sung's cart was carrying wheat — part of the co-op's reserve fund. To fulfil their contract with the Supply and Marketing Co-op, he was going to deliver this wheat and bring back the new imple-

ments they needed in exchange. Such errands were usually entrusted to Old Sung. Usually he didn't only do the official co-op business, but did other small jobs for individual members, drawing money out of the bank for one and going to the hospital to inquire after the relative of another. That was why people had nicknamed him "The Diplomat." Old Sung liked to think he behaved like one, too. He was voluble by nature and had a vast store of knowledge, and got on well with everybody. He was especially talkative when he was working with young people. Once started, his lively tongue could entertain his workmates the whole day long and lighten whatever work they were on. His wife often told him that it was below the dignity of a man of his age to be such a chatterbox with everyone, young and old, but Sung never heeded her. According to his way of thinking he was getting younger and younger every day.

Old Sung's official duties in the co-op were to drive the cart, run errands and look after the livestock. But he was not content to limit himself to that. He considered himself to be one of the most progressive elements in the co-op, and whenever the co-op officials had a meeting he invariably took it upon himself to take part, without considering whether he was wanted or not. He always spoke his mind without reserve, too. There were some things in the co-op that others dared not mention for fear of offending people, but the co-op officials could usually count on Old Sung to blurt anything out. It was because of this that no one ever raised an objection when Old Sung appeared at all the meetings, though strictly speaking he had no business to be there at all.

Enjoying this privilege, Old Sung became even more enthusiastic. He did his own work with great zest, of course, but never hesitated to look into things only remotely his business. For instance, once, when the co-op pig-keepers, in a moment's carelessness, allowed a sow to overlay two new-born piglets, Old Sung fussed about it for a whole day. Another time, one of the members broke a wooden shovel and Sung made such an ado that the culprit criticized himself twice at a meeting. There were many such instances; it's quite impossible to cite them all. However, though he was such a busybody, none of his fellow members thought ill of him. Somehow or other, they were glad to have such a candid and critical soul among them to remind them not to treat public property or public business lightly.

Don't think that Old Sung himself never made mistakes, though. One early spring it happened he was taking a cartload of manure to the fields. On the way he dropped off to sleep on the cart, and as the cart was going over a bridge, one of the wheels brushed against the stone rail and damaged the axle. It shook Sung up himself, but it was the damage he felt bad about. Without waiting for anyone to raise the point, he paid for the repairs out of his own pocket. Then he criticized himself virtually to everyone he encountered, both in and out of meet-

ings. You see, he figured it out this way. It was undeniably his fault, of course, that the cart had been damaged, but it wasn't only the damage done. In making a fault he had to show the others how a progressive element dealt with such errors.

III

The cart rumbled into town.

It was market-day and the streets were more crowded than usual. Stalls, shaded by cloth awnings, flanked the thoroughfare. Keeping a firm grip on the reins, Old Sung cracked his whip with gusto, and shouted at the same time to the people to keep clear. Winding its way through the crowded street, the cart at last pulled up at the door of the co-op.

As Old Sung reined in the mule he heard a passer-by remark. "Just look at that old driver. He certainly knows what he's doing."

Old Sung gave the speaker a look, stroked his moustache and said with confidence, "If I didn't know my job, do you think our co-op would have asked me to be its driver? I don't want to brag, but I've been doing this for thirty years." And he held up three fingers.

"What've you got there?" asked another onlooker.

"Wheat."

"All yours?"

"I have a share in it," said Old Sung proudly, as he got up on the cart to loosen the ropes which held the sacks.

"You've got a tidy bit there," one onlooker remarked with envy.

"*This* isn't much," said Old Sung, with pride. "You should have seen the amount of surplus grain we sold to the state. Ten times more than this! Did you people get enough in to fulfil the state quota?"

"Yes. We sold the state our full quota, and had a bit over too," said a middle-aged man. "And I thought we'd done very well this year. But compared to you we were way behind."

"Agricultural co-ops certainly come first in grain output," another onlooker chimed in, eying the sacks of wheat with admiration.

The doors of the co-op were closed. Peasants waiting to do their shopping stood round talking and grumbling. Old Sung finished untying the ropes and made his way through the crowd. "Real bureaucrats they are," he muttered. "Look at the time! And they're still closed." Going up to one of the doors, he kicked it hard, and shouted, "Open up, here!"

"Who's that?" some one inside asked.

Putting his mouth to the crack of the door, Old Sung bellowed, "The Five Star Agricultural Co-op. Open up!" He pronounced "agricultural co-op" with special emphasis, and turned and looked complacently at

those round him, as much as to say, the mere mention of these two words ought to mean something to everyone.

True enough, in only a few minutes the door opened a little and half a head became visible. A disgruntled voice said, "It's not time yet. You wait!"

"*You* may think it's not time yet," Old Sung retorted. "But just the same you ought to be open by now. It's market-day, isn't it? You should open a bit earlier than usual. You townspeople go by the clock, but we countryfolk watch the sun. Look, it's quite high in the sky already. We've all come from a good distance. D'you think we've nothing to do but amuse ourselves when we come to town? We've got a job to do. Take me, now; after I've delivered the wheat here, I've got to go to the livestock market and pick out two first-grade mules for our co-op. Then I've got to go to the training class to find our vice-chairman. Before I know it, the day'll be gone. Everyone in our co-op is busy from morning till night. I know, myself. You'd say, wouldn't you, that night's the time to get a bit of rest? But can I get a whole night's sleep? No, I have to get up three times to feed our livestock. You know what they say: 'It's the night feeds that fatten a horse.' You've only to look at our mule here. If I hadn't got up every night would we get mules as sleek and plump as this one? But you people here can't even open up at a decent hour. Still closed at this time of day! D'you call that serving the people?"

The head behind the door bobbed and suddenly withdrew. The peasants around Old Sung burst out laughing.

Old Sung stroked his moustache with pleasure. "That's the opinion of the masses. It can't be wrong!"

Perhaps Old Sung's criticism had an effect, or perhaps it was already time to open. At any rate, a few minutes later the co-op doors swung open. The crowd rushed in amid a hubbub of voices. Old Sung went to his cart to unload his sacks and only then remembered his wife and daughter.

He looked round him, but Hsiao-hsiu had disappeared. His wife sat alone on the nearby kerb, her eyes darting left and right with great interest.

"Where's Hsiao-hsiu?" demanded Old Sung.

"She's not tied to my apron-strings." Her tone wasn't all that pleasant.

"How d'you reckon I'm going to get these down all by myself?" said Old Sung, pointing to the sacks.

But the wife had no sympathy for him. She said tartly, "You seem to do everything with your tongue. Why worry about a few sacks?"

This gentle snub sent Old Sung into the co-op without another word. He returned with two co-op assistants and with their help got the sacks down in a row beside the door, ready to be weighed.

More peasants arrived from neighbourhood villages, some to sell grain, others to buy household odds and ends. A long line of people gathered, all of them waiting to get their grain weighed. Old Sung was at the end of the queue when he started, but before long a line had formed behind him. He turned round to look at the others. Some had their grain in sacks on their backs, others had it in baskets slung across a pole. But nobody had as much as he did. The people directly behind him looked gloomily at his heap of sacks. "Just look at the amount that man's got. It'll take all day to weigh those!" he heard them muttering.

"What bad luck," said one young man, with a look of despair. "I've come just a step too late, and now I'm behind this big customer."

Old Sung heard him and stood up. "Don't worry, my friend. I'll let them weigh yours before mine. I've got a lot and it's only fair to let you go first."

The young fellow was grateful and began talking to him. "Where're you from?" he asked.

"Where from?" Sung paused dramatically. "Can't you guess? Now who would be harvesting so much wheat?" When he saw the man scratch his head and look puzzled, he told him earnestly, "The Five Star Agricultural Co-op in Changchiachuang."

No sooner had the words, agricultural co-op, left his mouth than the peasants became all interest, as if at last they were seeing something they'd always wanted to see. They surrounded Sung and showered questions on him. They wanted to know how much wheat the co-op got in, how many households were in the co-op. One old man made Sung laugh: he wanted to know if it was true that everyone in the co-op had to eat the same food from the one pot!

Now nothing pleased Old Sung more than a good chance to talk, and questions like this were just what he needed to set him off. He stuck his pipe into his belt, stepped up on one of his sacks and started off like a real orator. His wife, who had been with him most of her life, simply loathed this habit of his, and the way he forgot everything else as soon as he got into conversation. She shot a fierce look at him, but he was too absorbed to mind mere looks and went straight ahead with his story. He explained how their co-op was started, how they fixed the price for the members' farm implements, how they discussed the work-points, how they used new farm tools for ploughing and sowing, how they dug wells and planted cotton, how they used the new methods of sowing wheat so that it came up thicker, and how they used the new technique when they fertilized their fields. He told them about the co-op's vice-chairman, Chang Fang-kuei, and what a smart young man he was. He didn't even let them off the whole story of his accident on the bridge! His wife made a face at him, as if to say, "Haven't you any shame? How can you go on about that still?" Sung glared back at her as if to retort,

"This is part of our experience, isn't it? Might as well let them hear it and benefit from it."

When Old Sung got to the story of the co-op's record wheat harvest this year, his listeners asked to have a look at the wonderful wheat. Sung untied a sack, scooped up a handful and stretched out his hand to those round him, making sure that everyone had a good look.

The fat, round grains rolled in his palm and Old Sung fairly burst with pride when he heard the murmur of praise from the crowd. To him, this was more satisfying than eating ice in June. He could not stop talking about the bumper crop. "It's all thanks to the good work of our vice-chairman, Chang Fang-kuei. It was he who told us to plant the wheat closer together. We added a tine to our harrow so that it makes three furrows now where it used to make two. And with the furrows closer together, the wheat grew thicker than ever before. But that wasn't all. In early spring, when the young shoots were just up, we got a report from the higher-ups about the coming of what they called a cold wave. As a matter of fact, a sand-storm had been raging for several days and the sky was heavily overcast. By midnight that evening it got so cold that we felt as if our noses were frozen. But our Fang-kuei was ready for it! He had sounded the gong in the afternoon and told members when they came that they would have to stay up through the night to fight the frost. Have you ever heard of such a thing? Did you know that it was possible to fight frost? Sure enough we did it. With the Party and the Youth League members in the lead, our people spent half the night carrying straw and faggots to the wheat fields. At the crack of dawn, orders came from the loudspeaker and smoke rose in an area close to two miles in radius. The smoke was so heavy it completely shrouded the fields so that you couldn't see a thing. When the sun came out and the smoke dispersed, we found the young shoots were still green and luscious; not a single one died from the frost. Then came the time when our wheat was in ear. Our vice-chairman worked out another new idea. He said he wanted to experiment on the cross-pollination of wheat. He's a smart lad, is our Fang-kuei. He reads and studies all day long. You don't understand pollination, do you? It's just like having babies; a man must lie with a woman before there are babies. When he had explained it this way we got the idea. We found a few dozen lengths of ropes and working in pairs pulled it over the tips of the wheat, so that the ears shook and touched one another. That was cross-pollination. But those go-it-alone peasants like Wang Fa-hsiang wouldn't believe that this new method would work. Of course, their yield came out much lower than ours. If you don't believe me, try it yourself next year. You must admit our wheat turned out very well. Each *mou* yielded 120 catties more than in previous years. Look at these kernels, fat, full . . . and you get more flour out of them too, at least three to four catties more from every peck. When

you make steamed bread with it it'll taste better too. We tried them ourselves. Even our old people now say we haven't spent our time for nothing. Nowadays, unless you use new methods, just putting in heavy work alone won't get you very far. . . ."

Suddenly a hand smote him roughly in the small of his back. Turning, he discovered his wife. "Chatter, chatter," she said angrily, "isn't your mouth dry from all this babbling? Hurry up and get the wheat weighed."

Old Sung looked at the line and only then realized that the people ahead of him had finished and it was now his turn. "I'd better stop here," he told his audience. "When you people have time, come and visit our agricultural co-op. I'm afraid it would take me over three days to tell you everything about our co-op."

The wheat was weighed. The attendant slapped Sung on the back and stuck out a thumb. "I must say, old fellow, we've bought a deal of wheat today, but this wheat of yours really tops the lot."

Old Sung for once held his peace. By habit, his hand went up to stroke his moustache, while his eyes looked at the people round him. "See?" he seemed to be saying, "I wasn't bragging, was I, when I told you about our wheat?"

Old Sung went to the counter and settled the account. "These are the farm implements your co-op ordered," said the comrade at the counter, handing him a list. "Will you go into the yard at the back and check your goods over?" Old Sung took the list, and was turning to go when his wife came up. "Let's go and buy my cotton cloth first," she said.

"But our money is still in the bank," said Old Sung. "I haven't time now to go and get it. I tell you what, you go and draw it out yourself."

"Oh, I won't be able to manage that!" said his wife.

"If you can't manage that, sit down somewhere and wait," said Sung with mock scorn. "After all, business must come before private interest." Someone called out for him to go and check his goods. "Coming!" said Old Sung and breezed off without bothering to see if his wife was displeased.

He soon finished with the list and emerged from the yard. He told himself he should go to the bank and get the money for his wife. Someone was shouting and arguing at the door where people were still weighing their wheat. "My good fellow," it was the voice of the attendant. "I'm giving you a very good price when I grade your wheat Class B. You can take a look at the agricultural co-op's wheat if you want to compare it!" The last sentence caught Old Sung's attention. He wanted to see what it was all about. Getting nearer to the scales he saw an old man bend down and pick up his sack of wheat. "At this price, I won't sell!" he said, shaking his head vigorously.

"Look, old father, comparison is the best way to find out the real

quality of a thing," the attendant was explaining patiently. He stretched out his hand to the old man to show him the wheat held in his palm. "Take a good look at this wheat. We bought it from the agricultural co-op. If we were to grade yours Class A, what should we grade theirs?"

Old Sung elbowed his way to the scales. He wanted to let the old man see that he was the man from the co-op with the superior wheat. After a lot of pushing he finally got there. "Oh, so it's you, Brother Fa-hsiang," Old Sung cried out and sighed. "What have you got to argue about? Why don't you sell at the price the co-op gives? When they buy wheat they grade the stuff and give fair and reasonable prices. They aren't merchants out to cheat you. If you ask me, this wheat of yours shouldn't be graded any higher than Class B. Suppose you calculate the cost of the wheat. Now, our co-op not only spent a great deal in fertilizing each *mou* before sowing but we mixed insecticides with the seed. Then we manured it twice extra. Every *mou* was ploughed three times and raked twice. For seed we picked the best "Monk's Head" out of last year's reaping. There wasn't a single bad grain among it. The field was an even gold colour when the wheat was ripe, you couldn't have picked out a single green ear. And you, brother, how much work did you invest in your wheat?"

"All right, at least I can refuse to sell, can't I?" Wang Fa-hsiang was getting angry.

"If the bargain doesn't come off you've got your stuff still," said Old Sung, not in the least offended. "Our Supply and Marketing Co-op isn't a private grain shop. I can assure you it doesn't make a profit at our expense." Actually he knew full well that Wang had no ears for the things he was telling him. Still, what should be said must be said. Perhaps Wang would not listen, but the crowd looking on could, and benefit from it. Let them see the difference in the way of thinking between a member of an agricultural co-op and an individual peasant!

Wang took no more notice of Old Sung. Heaving his sack on his back, he walked off. "Brother Fa-hsiang," Old Sung called out behind him. "If you can't get a good price elsewhere, be sure to come back here. Don't be stubborn and take your wheat all the way home again. You'd lose both time and labour. Your wife is still waiting for you to bring back a few things for her."

All the onlookers were smiling. Sung's wife came over and pulled him by the sleeve. "Hurry up, can't you? Aren't you supposed to go and buy mules? You are a one!"

Old Sung continued to talk to Wang's retreating back, "Now, I would certainly have given you a good talking to if I didn't have other business to see to." He was going to say more, but he saw that his wife was getting impatient. He thrust a hand into his pocket, felt the money and strode towards the livestock market.

IV

Old Sung took a turn round the market, but it was still early and there wasn't much to look at. He looked at the few mules there were, but none of them was worth buying. Remembering that he was supposed to draw out money for his wife, he went to the bank, got ten yuan out of his account and made his way back to the co-op to give it to her. On the way, he noticed a sign-board on a door: The Agro-technical Training Class. He remembered the accountant had told him to see Chang Fang-kuei about the pests in the cotton fields. "Good thing I saw the sign," he ejaculated. "Otherwise I'd have forgotten all about it." He decided to go and see Fang-kuei first, and leave the other things for later.

Fang-kuei was not in. A comrade at the door told him that Fang-kuei's girl had just been there and the two had gone out together.

Old Sung was very much puzzled by this information. He couldn't remember having heard that Fang-kuei had a girl friend. Only a few days ago, Fang-kuei's mother had said to him, "My Fang-kuei did his best to run the co-op well for all of us. You people really ought to help him find a nice girl to be his wife." If Fang-kuei already had a girl, how was it his mother knew nothing about it? He wanted to ask more questions, but the man at the door was gone. He told himself he'd better get the question of wiping out pests settled first, and never mind about Fang-kuei's girl.

After Old Sung left the training class, he went up and down the main street twice. But there was no trace of Chang Fang-kuei. He decided to give up the search. He remembered that Tuan, the chief of the Agriculture and Forestry Section of the county government, often made trips round the countryside. Tuan was sure to know of the way to exterminate the pests.

When he got to the county government, Tuan was not in his office. Someone he didn't know told him that Tuan was in the west room talking with two cadres; would he care to take a seat and wait?

Sung sat down. Before he had time to finish a pipe, Tuan came in. "What brings you here?" he asked, as he came up and shook hand warmly.

"I don't approach the temple without a prayer. I've got something I want to consult you about." Old Sung lit the cigarette Tuan handed him. "There's some pest got into our bumper cotton crop. Our accountant wants me to ask Fang-kuei what to do. But I couldn't find him at the training class. . . ."

"You were looking for him, were you?" Tuan laughed and cut him short. "They're in the west room. We were talking about this question of wiping out the pests. Go and find him. I'll have to ring up the

marketing co-op to see how much 6-6-6* they've got. If they haven't got enough in they'll have to ask the provincial co-op to send some over right away."

Old Sung made his way to the west room. Of course, now he didn't really have to see Fang-kuei, or tell him about the pests, but he was full of curiosity. He wanted to know who else was there — Tuan had said "they" — it was most likely Fang-kuei's girl. Sung wanted to see her for himself. Then he would know who she was and which village she came from. As he neared the door of the west room he heard a woman's voice. He was right after all, whoever was with him was a she. But suddenly he paused in his tracks: that voice belonged to his daughter Hsiao-hsiu! She was saying, "Even my dad didn't know why I came to town today."

"You're a little devil," said Fang-kuei fondly. "Your dad always knows everybody's business, but you managed to keep our business from him."

Old Sung heard Hsiao-hsiu chuckle.

He stood by the door feeling very much put out. He was in a proper fix, not knowing whether he should go in or go away. While he was wavering he heard Fang-kuei say, "How's the work in the co-op these days? Very intense?"

"We're weeding the autumn crops for the third time, as we planned. We've also started on that plan of yours to make fifteen tons of green manure. Everything's coming along swimmingly. The only problem at present is the pests in the cotton fields."

"That'll be all right. The 6-6-6 will get rid of them."

"I'm sure we won't be able to mix it right! You'd better come back with us."

"All right. I'll ask for leave. Are you thirsty, dear?"

"Why? D'you want to get a water-melon?"

"No! Let's be economical this year. Next year, I'll treat you to my own Michurin water-melon."

Old Sung heard the clatter of cups and saucers and turned to go. At the entrance, Tuan who had finished his phone call saw him and asked, "Going already, Old Sung?"

Shaking his head and waving his hand at the same time, Old Sung rushed out. When he had left the county government office he slowed his steps and began to think about what he had just learnt. He was glad, all right, but a bit offended at the same time. He was pleased that his daughter got such a good husband for herself. Fang-kuei was twenty-six, an educated man, good technically, and a member of the Youth League. He didn't lack either looks or talents. But Sung was annoyed with his daughter for keeping things from him for so long.

---

* 6-6-6 (Benzene hexachloride, a chemical pesticide).

She must have thought him terribly backward. "As if I would have stopped you! As if your dad had such an old feudal head!" he muttered to himself angrily. But then he put himself in his daughter's place. After all, young people were probably shy about such things with their parents — he himself was much worse when he was their age. Having turned the matter over and over in his mind, he began to feel that his daughter was blameless, but his own attitude that morning, when he tried to make her tell him her business in town, wasn't quite the thing for a good father. "Ah me! What a fool I was!" he muttered and smote himself on the head.

Old Sung looked at the sky when he got to the main street, felt the money in his pocket again, and headed for the livestock market.

V

The sun had made its way west; it was late afternoon. The people at the market were gradually beginning to turn homewards. Old Sung's wife at this moment was sitting all alone on a bench in front of the co-op counter. She had selected a pile of bright printed cottons and was only waiting for her daughter to come and pick the right one, and for the old man to pay up so they could take the pretty material and go home. She waited and waited, but though group after group of people walked past there was not a sign of either her daughter or her husband. She began to get impatient. Remembering her husband's voluble tongue and his busybody nature, she was sure that he must have got stuck somewhere in the livestock market. Annoyed with him, she decided to go and look for him there.

As she had expected, there he was. The livestock market was crowded, but there was no need to use her eyes to find him. Her ears immediately caught the sound of his loud voice.

Old Sung was talking in the middle of a group near the eastern wall. "Look at you!" he said. "How can you be so tricky in business in the new society? Whatever you do, you should be honest and sell your goods at fair prices. You should have told the buyer there was something wrong with your animal right from the beginning. But no, you let him take it home, and he had to bring it back to you. You not only wasted his time but affected his work in the fields. The way you think, you're still thousands of miles from socialism."

Sung's wife elbowed her way into the crowd and cut Old Sung short. "You are dreadful!" she said angrily. "You're so busy talking you don't care about anything else. Don't you know what time it is? And you haven't bought the mules yet. Really, you are a slow coach!"

"I *have* bought our mules," said Old Sung, pointing to two handsome

mules tied to a nearby post. Then he explained with a smile, "I'm only mediating for these people."

"Look here," said a man in a straw hat to a man with closely cropped hair. "Our old friend here has to go. Will you take the animal back or will you cut the price and we'll take it. Say the word and let's be done with it."

"If I took it back I would still have to sell it," said the vendor, rubbing his shaved head in an agitated way. "I'll admit I did wrong. All right. You take it at a lower price."

"Fine," said Old Sung, with satisfaction, feeling that he had helped solve a problem. "You two settle it yourselves. As long as you are honest it's easy to make a deal. I must go. I've still got plenty to do." He untied his chestnut mules and led them away, his wife following close behind, complaining bitterly. But Old Sung didn't mind. As usual, he tried to soothe her, "Don't worry. Our cart goes fast, we'll get home before dark."

In the street, the couple ran into Wang Fa-hsiang with the sack of wheat still on his back.

"Haven't you sold your wheat yet?" asked Old Sung with real concern.

"I shan't sell it. I'll take it home and keep it, we'll eat it ourselves."

"I thought you meant to buy a few things in town."

Wang made no reply; he slipped into the crowd and walked away. Old Sung felt that he should go to him and persuade him to sell the wheat, but his wife stopped him. "Let's go. Why should you bother about other people's affairs?" She said, glaring at him, and then went on complainingly, "I've been waiting for you the whole day. You disappeared out of sight, and Hsiao-hsiu didn't come back for a look either. H'm!"

At the mention of Hsiao-hsiu, Old Sung suddenly pressed near his wife and asked in a whisper, "Your Hsiao-hsiu and Fang-kuei . . . ?"

"You know everything, of course. I don't," said his wife, with intent.

"Don't keep it dark, I lifted the lid and saw for myself today."

He began to tell the wife what he had seen but suddenly his wife nudged him sharply. Looking up, he saw his daughter and Fang-kuei coming towards them, smiling and talking gaily. Embarrassed, Old Sung turned his head a little and purposedly kept from meeting their eyes. Hsiao-hsiu blushed, but Fang-kuei spoke to ease the tension, "Uncle, what fine mules you've bought!"

Old Sung nodded, and grinned. He was at a loss for words. He who was so fond of the sound of his own voice suddenly didn't know what to say. It was a good thing that his wife started to scold their daughter, blaming her for going away and forgetting about the cloth. The airing of her little grievances made everyone feel more comfortable.

"You left us and stayed out of sight a whole day. I've picked out a whole stack of prints . . ." Sung's wife went on complaining.

"But mother, I was busy," said Hsiao-hsiu, tossing back her hair, her eyes on Fang-kuei. Turning to her father, she said, "Dad, there's something we want to say to you."

Old Sung looked first at his daughter then at Fang-kuei. What a fine couple they'll make, he thought; just right for each other; they even matched in height. Evidently they couldn't keep the news secret any longer. "Go ahead, tell me!" he said in his heart. "Dad's got no objection." But to his surprise Hsiao-hsiu said nothing about her friendship with Fang-kuei.

"You two are always fussing about something," said the old woman, getting impatient. "I'll walk ahead. Hurry up now and come along."

Hsiao-hsiu promised. When her mother was gone, she said, "Dad, have you any money on you?"

"What do you want it for?" asked Old Sung.

"We want to get a prescription," said Hsiao-hsiu.

Old Sung was startled. He asked quickly, "Who's sick?"

Hsiao-hsiu chuckled and Fang-kuei began to explain. "No one's sick. It's just that while I was studying in the training class I worked out a method of getting rid of mole-crickets. I want to get the prescription and try it out. If it works, we'll be solving our co-op's biggest problem. Don't you remember how the mole-crickets ruined our millet last year?"

Although Old Sung was an old man, he had always been an enthusiastic supporter of Fang-kuei's scientific experiments. "I've spent all the co-op's money," he said. "If you'd told me earlier I could have managed to get some."

"Can't you do something about it now?" asked Hsiao-hsiu.

"How much do you need?"

"I'd say about ten yuan," said Fang-kuei.

Old Sung hesitated a bit and felt in his pocket. "I've got the ten yuan I got out of the bank for mother — she wants some cloth. But you'd better use it anyway."

"Won't Auntie be annoyed?" Fang-kuei asked, holding back a bit.

"Never mind, I'll take care of that," said Sung, and took the money out of his pocket. Fang-kuei went off to get the prescription and Hsiao-hsiu followed her father to the marketing co-op.

The old woman sighed when they appeared. "Oh, you two, what a time you took." She drew Hsiao-hsiu to her and pointed out the bright coloured prints. "Look, do you prefer this pattern or that? You pick one."

"Mother, we can't buy anything today, there's no money left."

Sung's wife started. She jumped to the conclusion that Old Sung

had lost the money at the livestock market. Exasperated, she cried, "So you've lost the money, have you?"

"As usual you are too subjective," said Old Sung and laughed. "You didn't examine the case, but you've drawn a hasty conclusion."

"No, mother. Our co-op borrowed the money for something," said Hsiao-hsiu quickly.

Sung's wife plunked herself down on the bench, really annoyed. "You don't mind, I suppose, if you've got no proper clothes when there's an occasion in the village. All right! Why should an old woman like me care what people say!"

"Never mind, mother. It wouldn't be too late if we get the cloth next time," said Hsiao-hsiu consolingly.

Sung's wife gave her daughter a crushing look and said to Old Sung, "Next time! If I had known I wouldn't have wasted a work-day and made this trip for nothing."

"Don't blame me for it," said Old Sung. "I told you not to come this morning but you wouldn't listen."

VI

The sun had already set. Pink clouds glowed in the west when Old Sung's cart returned from town, loaded with the new kinds of waterwheels and ploughshares, disk harrows, a sprayer . . . and this and that. Sung himself sat in front humming a tune; his wife was close beside him but she still looked cross.

When they passed Wang Fa-hsiang's cotton field they saw that Wang's wife was still working there, alone except for her two children. On the east side there were six or seven people from the mutual-aid team hoeing the millet field. Old Sung cracked his whip three times and raised his voice in a long drawn out — "Whao!" Then he said loudly, "How well you're all working. Come over here and have a breather." He wanted the others to come and look at the things he'd bought.

The mutual-aid team came to the roadside.

"Look, they've bought so many things. The co-op's really wealthy."

Old Sung kept himself from looking at the others. He tossed his head with satisfaction and stroked his moustache. "This is nothing," he said. "Not much more than four hundred yuan's worth of goods. Our wheat harvest alone amounted to more than 20,000 catties."

"Listen to him!" said one of the listeners. "From the way he talks they've got real wealth."

"The real wealth is coming," Old Sung turned his head and indicated the road. "Our vice-chairman, Chang Fang-kuei, and Hsiao-hsiu are coming on two chestnut mules. They aren't expensive, this price each!" So saying he put up four fingers. "Oh, oh, four hundred yuan,"

his listeners murmured. "If our team were to sell *all* our wheat we still wouldn't have enough to pay for the two mules."

Wang Fa-hsiang's wife also came to the roadside. "Did you see that husband of mine?" she asked.

Old Sung sighed. "It'll take him some time to get here. But look, here come our two."

They looked down the road and saw Fang-kuei and Hsiao-hsiu riding bareback on the two mules. They galloped near. Greetings were exchanged and the mutual-aid team and Wang's wife crowded round to look over the mules. Fang-kuei dismounted and went to Wang's cotton field. When he came back he said, "You've got aphides, you must get rid of them quick."

"They came in hordes. How are we to wipe them out?" asked Wang's wife, looking worried.

"We've got the thing to do it with. Look!" Old Sung lifted the sprayer out of the cart and worked it a few times to show the others.

"A giant pump?"

"No, this is called a sprayer. It's specially made to get rid of insect pests. Get the insecticide ready, pour into this pail and then you press here to bring it out in a spray."

Not quite convinced, an old man remarked sadly, "It seems I've become an amateur in this line, though I've worked on the land these forty years."

"You've said it, brother," said Old Sung. "There're many things you've never seen or heard. When we get to socialism we'll be using machines to do everything. By then, you'll really become an amateur."

In the middle of their joking, the angry voice of Wang's wife said, "The old devil, getting back only now." Everyone turned to look. Sure enough in the distance Wang Fa-hsiang, carrying an empty sack, was trudging back with slow weary steps.

"Where did you sell your wheat?" shouted Old Sung.

"The Supply and Marketing Co-op," said Wang Fa-hsiang in a small voice.

Old Sung chuckled. "See, I've forecast your future already. There is no other way. You can jump here and there and turn in circles but in the end you must take this way! Ha, ha! . . ."

Translated by Tang Sheng

BREAKING OFF THE ENGAGEMENT

KAO HSIAO-SHENG

I

Chang Tsui-lan had not slept well all night. She had something on her mind, so that her brain went on working even if she did doze off. And then, when she got off finally, her father, Chang Ao-ta, coughed in the next room. This woke her up again. Directly she was awake that annoying problem was back, haunting her.

There were only the two of them, father and daughter, in this family. The mother had died long ago, and the father had been too poor to marry again. The liberation of China turned the scale of their fortune.

The father, Chang Ao-ta, was fifty-one. If you stretched a point, he could be considered enlightened, for he found no difficulty in going with the tide even when it was a question of new rules of decorum. But this did not mean he positively approved of new ideas. He just accepted them as things now "fashionable." Sometimes it was really very difficult to make him understand.

Chang Tsui-lan was nineteen. A capable, clever, good-looking girl, well able to express herself sensibly and eloquently in all everyday things. She knew her father had suffered greatly from adversity and hardship and she was always attentive and considerate towards him. The old grannies in the village often said: "Whoever gets Chang Tsui-lan for a daughter-in-law is getting a blessing!" Strictly speaking, according to old customs, she was already engaged. When she was still only a child, Chang Ao-ta betrothed her to one Chen Pao-hsiang, a young peasant from Chenchiachiao, a village more than ten *li* away. She didn't know even if she'd ever seen him, nor he her, so there could be no question of any attachment. But in her own village, there was a young man called Li Keng-liang. He had been bound by annual contract as a labourer to a local landlord. After liberation, he received some land and a cottage and began to live and work for himself. Tsui-lan and he grew up together. They knew one another very well. Temperamentally they had a lot in common, and, to put it in a nutshell, had become quite drawn towards one another. In fact, you couldn't exactly say when it was that the neighbours began to look upon them as destined for one another, but

it was by now taken for granted that they were a most suitable couple. No one could say, either, when it was that Tsui-lan and Keng-liang themselves decided tacitly that they had each chosen their marriage partner.

Father Chang was greatly disturbed by this development. He was in a quandary. On the one hand, he knew it was "unfashionable" for parents to arrange marriages for their children. On top of that, Tsui-lan had always been a most affectionate and good daughter to him, and he knew he would never have the heart to force her to marry anyone against her will. On the other hand, he himself was solemnly bound to this contract with Chen Pao-hsiang. What could he say to the Chen family if it were to be broken off? He would lose so much face! He could think of no way out of this dilemma. At first, in his heart, he was angry with Li Keng-liang. It was all Li Keng-liang's fault that he was faced with this knotty problem. But when he thought about it a bit more, he had to admit it was not with Li Keng-liang that he could find fault. There was no question of philandering on Li Keng-liang's part. Not even the young folks who loved to treat serious matters lightly could do so in his presence. There was nothing dishonourable about him at all. It would be patently unjust to say that he had maliciously lured Tsui-lan into loving him.

Poor father Chang racked his brains day and night — the problem weighed on his mind even in his dreams. Finally, he had hit upon a method which seemed to him quite "fashionable" and at the same time likely to bring about the desired end, from his point of view. And without a word to Tsui-lan he went off early one morning to see the matchmaker who had been the go-between with the engagement and asked him to invite Chen Pao-hsiang to come over to his home. He told the matchmaker that he wanted to meet his future son-in-law. In fact, what he wanted was to arrange a meeting between Tsui-lan and her affianced husband. He had heard that Chen Pao-hsiang had the reputation of being a promising, indeed, an outstandingly promising, young man. Mightn't it be that his daughter would be favourably impressed? That would be fine — it would prove that her old father had not made a mistake. He would be able to point out to his daughter how desirable this marriage was, and Li Keng-liang would gather that his attachment to Tsui-lan didn't meet with her father's approval, so that he would give up any further hope. The night before the arranged visit, Chang Ao-ta told Tsui-lan about it. It seemed to him that Tsui-lan, though rather reluctant, took it well and was not positively against it. But it was precisely his clever arrangement that was keeping Tsui-lan awake.

Little did he know what was passing through Chang Tsui-lan's mind! She had not made a fuss when her father told her about the invitation; it would not have been like her to quarrel with him. In any case she had made her decision long ago, and nothing could alter it. It was not that which was making her toss and turn all night. Nobody could separate

her and Keng-liang in life, and that was that. Anyway, even if she yielded to her father's wishes, what good would it do? It would undoubtedly lead to a sad future for her. And later on she would certainly blame her father for her unhappiness. Wouldn't that make her father miserable too? Would that be any way to show that she truly loved her father? Feudal ideas had made her father an old muddler. Just see how harmful these ideas were! There was her father, arranging this invitation with the matchmaker two days ago before he said anything to her, and telling her only the night before! "First meet him. The wedding can wait until you are in love with each other." Was it reasonable to her to love somebody he'd dragged into her life? As if she could fall in love like that! But amongst other things, her father had told her that Chen Pao-hsiang was a member of the Youth League. Who had told him that? If he really were, he might not even accept the invitation. But suppose he did come, what should she do?... Oh well, she would see what kind of a person he was. It wasn't likely that Youth Leaguers would do things rashly, without thinking whether they were right or wrong. It might be the best thing, really, if he came, so that she could get the whole thing settled and over, and be able to stop worrying about it.

II

Chen Pao-hsiang was twenty-one. His father and mother had both been dead for some eight years. He lived with his married elder brother. Their life was better in every way since liberation. They were hard-working and frugal. Pao-hsiang was an upright, straightforward lad, very intelligent. He had not been able to finish primary school before liberation, but since then he had studied two and a half years in the village adult school and learnt about four thousand characters. By now he was quite indispensable in Chenchiachiao. He had a hand in, and was welcomed in all the activities. He had the knack of being able to explain things and of knowing just how to deal with people. Attending meetings here, doing propaganda work there, running around all over the district and the township on business, always full of energy and enthusiasm, he was kept very busy indeed. Because of his progressive views, he had been admitted to the Youth League and chosen by the local Party organization as one of its propaganda workers. In his spare time he liked to read novels and stories and tell other people what he had read about. And out of the busy seasons he liked to undertake cultural activities, and help in the village amateur dramatics. He loved to sing and act himself. Through all this he became very tactful and experienced. To tell you the truth, he had even learnt to remain apparently calm and indifferent when he was teased in front of the village maidens!

So what with one thing and another, he hadn't much time to think about getting married. It was only recently that the subject had begun to cross his mind. At first, he only vaguely knew that before his parents died they entered into an engagement contract on his behalf. But he did not take such an engagement seriously. If he gave it a thought, he considered himself still very young. Plenty of time yet — why hurry to get a wife? But his sister-in-law seemed to be quite concerned, and often talked to him about his marriage. One of her relatives came from Changchiatsun, and she used to praise Tsui-lan to the sister-in-law, who passed on all the praise to Pao-hsiang, half in earnest, half in jest. After a bit of this Pao-hsiang began to feel well-disposed towards Tsui-lan. Little by little an ideal wife, worthy of his love, took shape in his mind and began to haunt him. As time went on, the outline of this girl became clearer and clearer, more and more perfect. When he saw the merits of the girls in his village, he would think his "fiancee" certainly had all these merits too; if he saw shortcomings in them — they were not added. Tsui-lan was certainly free from them! Thus he created an imaginary Tsui-lan who possessed all the virtues — the quintessence of all he admired in any woman he met. Tsui-lan, he decided, must be like the mother he remembered, who died when he was a young boy, and left with him a memory of perfection.

He knew that engagement contracts made by parents were no longer binding on the children nowadays. Still, he thought, if the partner chosen was good and acceptable, why shouldn't he keep to the contract and save himself the trouble of having to choose? This settled in his mind, he began to want to go over to Changchiatsun to see the girl for himself. He had to settle this important matter, he knew, but he never seemed to find the right time for it.

So when the matchmaker suddenly brought him Chang Ao-ta's invitation, he took it for granted that the girl's family wanted to see what kind of a person he was. Oh well, was there any doubt that a person like him was presentable? He had nothing to worry about, he felt. And the invitation fitted in very handily with his own inclinations. The busy season was just over, and he could easily get away. His sister-in-law was strongly in favour of it, too, saying that it was quite the right thing nowadays for a young man to go and see his future father-in-law. So Chen Pao-hsiang made up his mind, accepted the invitation, and on the fateful day went off to Chang Ao-ta's home, accompanied by the matchmaker.

III

Chang Ao-ta got up very early and went to the market to buy some delicacies for the midday meal. When he got back, he fussed around, got his neighbour's wife to come over to prepare the food, tidied up the room, and dressed himself in his best. All finished, he looked painfully neat and solemn. So there they both were, the father and the daughter, with very different hopes at heart, waiting for Chen Pao-hsiang to appear.

Chen Pao-hsiang and the matchmaker arrived bright and early.

The moment they entered the room, the matchmaker pushed forward and greeted Chang Ao-ta effusively. Chang Ao-ta stood up, still rigid and prim. The matchmaker went straight on with the introductions. "Now, this is Pao-hsiang. Pao-hsiang, this is your father-in-law."

"Uncle!" Chen Pao-hsiang used the formal respectful term at once, as though he were long ago prepared for it — but he snatched a quick glance at Tsui-lan at the same time.

Chang Ao-ta was rather embarrassed. He gave no answer to Pao-hsiang's greeting, pretending not to have heard it. All the same, he wanted to show good will towards his future son-in-law. So he fumbled in his pocket, took out a packet of "Winged Horse," thrust it into the matchmaker's hand without even opening it, and said: "Have a cigarette."

That did it. Now everyone, except the matchmaker, felt worse than ever. They didn't know where to look. The wily matchmaker, however, tried to keep the thing going, and said, "Now, Pao-hsiang, this is Tsui-lan."

"Comrade Tsui-lan!" Pao-hsiang greeted her promptly, without a second's hesitation. He was trying hard to pretend he was quite at ease, but it was obvious that he had these phrases ready prepared. His would-be cheery voice and his forced smile belied the flush he couldn't keep from his face. His thoughts were racing, however. "My sister-in-law was absolutely right. She *is* a marvellous girl!"

Tsui-lan stood up politely, in answer to his greeting, blushed, and smiled at him. She also had thoughts in *her* head. Hers were: "My Keng-liang is taller and bigger."

Chang Ao-ta looked at Pao-hsiang with great satisfaction. "Fine young lad: even better than his father," he concluded. He felt relieved, and wanted to give further expression to his feelings of good will. So he shouted in the direction of the kitchen: "Aunty, aunty, is the meat stewed? Is the fish fried? You'll find the sugar in the cupboard."

Pao-hsiang stood firm, with his toes turned slightly out and his chest well expanded. He was dressed in a nearly new blue cotton suit, with a fountain pen in his breast pocket, and a notebook bulging on

his hip. His round face, with its broad brow and lively eyes were softened by his chin, which, though strongly formed, dimpled slightly before he spoke. Altogether, he was a well set up lad, who gave an impression of pleasantness.

Each filled with his own thought, they sat down, drank tea and began to talk.

The conversation did not flow freely, but by fits and starts. No one felt that the things he said were really to the point, and no one really dared to touch on the heart of the matter. It was all they could do to find something to say, to while away the time. Yet the inconsequence of the chatter bore no relation to the burning thoughts they all nursed. The father was the only one who was perfectly happy. He looked proudly at Tsui-lan from time to time, as much to say: "Well, what do you say now? Now you can see your old father didn't make such a mistake in arranging your marriage!" Tsui-lan didn't open her mouth. She could tell from what Pao-hsiang said that he was really a fine person, and she was pondering how best she could explain things to him. Chen Pao-hsiang was hoping the old father and the matchmaker would go away, so that he could talk to Tsui-lan alone. The only thing on the matchmaker's mind was whether the meat and the fish would be well-cooked, and how many catties of wine Chang Ao-ta had ordered.

With difficulty, they managed to drag on some sort of conversation until after the midday meal. Then, almost immediately the matchmaker, at a hint from Ao-ta, stood up, belched affectedly, smiled, and said: "It's not much luck for me, eating with you young people—my thirst is not quenched! I must ask old brother to drink a few more cups with me." He winked at Pao-hsiang, as man-to-man, laughed and went out with Ao-ta. He was a hard drinker.

So now at last there were only Tsui-lan and Pao-hsiang in the room. They felt relieved, yet tense.

Chang Tsui-lan couldn't get a word out. She had made up her mind, and meant to stick to it.

Chen Pao-hsiang's lively face wore a serious expression. He looked like a normally playful child who now had to consider an important problem. His chin quivered slightly, and he blinked. His former dream-wife had disappeared at his first sight of Tsui-lan — there was no comparison with the real person. Now, as he looked at Tsui-lan, an extraordinary feeling came over him. He felt very excited, but all mixed up. In fact, he was like all young men faced for the first time with the need to try and express their sentiments to the girl they love. He wanted desperately to say something to Tsui-lan, but no adequate words would come out.

Several little children were peeping in through the door. Tsui-lan went out, pretended to rearrange the shoes she had put there to sun,

threw a disapproving glance at the children and scolded: "Run off, you imps!" The children made faces at her, and ran away.

Tsui-lan came back again. As she closed the door she thought: "If Keng-liang should come here now, how awkward it would be for all of us!"

Silence prevailed again. . . .

"Have you got the wheat in yet?" Chen Pao-hsiang broke the ice, but could have bitten his tongue off for asking such a meaningless question, under the circumstances.

"Not yet. The mutual-aid team will sow it for us the day after tomorrow," said Tsui-lan.

"Our team has already done all our sowing," said Chen Pao-hsiang. He began to calm down, and stroked his hair. His eyes shone, and sure enough, his chin dimpled.

He had decided on a plan of action—that he must let her know more about himself. And he began to talk on this interesting subject. His life, his interests, how he became a member of the Youth League, how he was chosen as a propaganda worker for the Party, how the district leader, Wang, had often stayed in his house before liberation when he was fighting guerilla warfare, how he had got messages through for Wang, how good his brother and sister-in-law were to him, what charming children his nephews and niece were, though rather naughty. . . . His narrative, he felt, was very vivid, very forceful and entertaining. And all the time he talked, he fixed his eyes on Tsui-lan.

Tsui-lan listened attentively. Again and again, she made a mental comparison. "Keng-liang is different from him."—Keng-liang was most sparing of words. When you talked to him, he would always look down and move his feet backwards and forwards, slowly, until he had made a little ditch on the ground. When you finished, he raised his head, looked at the sky, looked at you, smiled and answered simply, "Good scheme," "No," "I'll do that tomorrow," or some such pithy phrase. . . . Sometimes he did not favour you even with such a short answer, but you would find very soon that he had finished the work you had asked him to do. He always did more than most people, but said less. With him, approval or objection, love or hatred were all expressed in action.

Chen Pao-hsiang watched her, wondering why she didn't say anything. Surely she's not too bashful to talk, he thought; or is she thinking I'm boasting?

Tsui-lan was also puzzled as to how to set about it. He *is* quite progressive, she thought, but how was he going to take her suggestion?

An idea suddenly flashed across Chen Pao-hsiang's mind. "She is a girl. No matter how enlightened she is, she must be more bashful than I. Naturally she cannot say anything before I make my attitude clear." He pulled himself together, and told her he had heard how clever and capable she was, how progressive her ideas were and how

considerate she was to her father, etc. . . . But then he dried up—too abashed to declare his love. He looked longingly right into her eyes, trying to make her understand that way. But then he wondered immediately whether he had said the right thing, and if she had understood him. What were her feelings now? In a panic, he thought she might be considering him too glib, and he said, like a child, "My sister-in-law's brother's wife comes from here, and my sister-in-law often talks to me about you."

"He is really in earnest," Tsui-lan mused. "Walking over ten *li* here, and yet . . . he is waiting for me to touch on this subject first."

Silence again prevailed. Chen Pao-hsiang watched her expression closely. Her face gradually brightened up. Her bashfulness went. Her eyes shone. And once her lips moved. Pao-hsiang came to the conclusion that she would speak soon. He felt secure and yet anxious.

"Comrade Pao-hsiang, let's break the marriage contract!" Tsui-lan suddenly got it out in a whisper. Directly she said it, she thought regretfully she had not put it at all well. She blushed in embarrassment and said: "I don't know how to express myself properly."

Pao-hsiang went quite white, trembled, and asked, incredulously: "What did you say? Break the contract?"

Tsui-lan nodded, but looked anywhere but at him.

"Break it off!" Pao-hsiang muttered: "But why?"

His self-esteem had suffered a terrible blow. His first impulse was just to go away, but he checked himself, and asked: "Why? Aren't I progressive enough for you?" But he reproached himself for such a question immediately. He had never allowed himself to be backward in any way. How could he expect her not to find him progressive?

"It's not that," Tsui-lan answered quite frankly, but again stopped short. She knew perfectly well that he had not understood her, but she had no idea how to go on.

Chen Pao-hsiang was completely at a loss. There were thousands of whys in his head, with not an answer to one of them. To think he was quite happy five minutes ago! He'd never thought for a moment that this particular situation could arise, in the twinkling of an eye. Surely it was not real—such a sudden, unexpected change could happen only in a dream. Or was it that a few minutes before he had been dreaming, and now this was the horrid reality? One or the other of the two situations must be unreal. But there was no time for these flights of fancy. He had got to face the present. It was Tsui-lan's turn to fix her eyes on his face. Yet what on earth could he say?

Seeing his expression, Chang Tsui-lan felt even more strongly that there was nothing she could say, so she just waited.

"What are your objections to me?" This question seemed to be forced out of his throat.

"I have no objections to you as an individual. I think you're a very good person," answered Tsui-lan.

Well! She thinks I am very good! How can she say this when she wants to break the contract? This was the retort that came to his mind. He was in a thorough tangle and inclined to lose his temper, but he pulled himself together and recovered his self-control. "Look here," he said firmly. "You want to break the contract. Mustn't this mean you have some objection to me?" he asked.

Tsui-lan said: "I don't like a contract made over my head by my parents."

Aha! So this was the reason he was wanting! He cheered up and became quite himself again. "Comrade Tsui-lan," he said. "D'you think it's quite right to look at the problem like that? The Marriage Law doesn't necessarily overthrow everything that belongs to the old system. Some things we can still use from it, surely." He went on in this strain, like the experienced propaganda worker he was, doing his best to improve the situation. In his heart he was not so sure as he sounded, and when he had done his best, he finished up dejectedly: "Perhaps we can cultivate love."

Tsui-lan shook her head.

"Am I wrong?"

Tsui-lan again shook her head.

Pao-hsiang suddenly grew impatient. He said straightforwardly: "What is your reason then? Tell me the truth!"

Tsui-lan had made up her mind. She hesitated for a second, and then asked: "Isn't there somebody *you're* in love with already?"

Pao-hsiang was puzzled. He could not follow her train of thought. Suddenly an idea struck him: he thought he'd got it. She doesn't really want to break the contract, but she wants to make sure that I am free! Now he thought he had at last hit upon the right conclusion, and had really understood her. Quite happily he answered, "No, there's no one."

Tsui-lan again hesitated for a moment, blushed, and with downcast eyes said slowly: "What you've just said is quite right. And you are a very good person. But you're not the only good person in the world. I cannot love everyone good I meet."

A light came to Chen Pao-hsiang's mind: "I'm mistaken again. Perhaps *she* is already in love with somebody else," he thought gloomily, once more in the depths of depression.

Tsui-lan went on to explain. "You see, I strongly disapprove of fickleness. I'm not one to change my mind. Heaven and earth may be moved before I'm easily swayed." She got redder and redder as she said this, and her voice dropped lower and lower.

I see it now, he thought. She's already in love with somebody else. His feelings were terribly hurt, and his immediate reaction to his despair

was anger. He wanted to rage at her, ask her how she dared, while in love with somebody else, to ask him to come here to guess her riddles. His thoughts became blacker and blacker, and in a complete muddle. His fiancee, and she loves somebody else. . . . What effrontery to tell me—her own affianced husband—about another attachment. . . . The devil take it! What do I care? Let the engagement be broken off! . . . Almost unconsciously, he jumped to his feet, intending to stamp away.

Chang Tsui-lan looked at him in surprise, but immediately guessed what was up. "Comrade Pao-hsiang!" Her tone was solemn.

Chen Pao-hsiang came back to his senses. "Heavens," he thought. "What am I doing!" He sat down again.

"Are you offended with me?" asked Tsui-lan.

Pao-hsiang shook his head, not liking to explain.

"You don't agree with my views?" asked Tsui-lan.

Poor Pao-hsiang was silent. He was very sad. How could he answer such dreadful questions? Then he came back to being the normal Pao-hsiang. She's quite right, he realized. How can I blame her? *Is* she my fiancee? She's quite right. Today we shouldn't let parents arrange marriages for their children! He was the one to blush now, with a scarlet patch on each cheek as though he had been slapped in the face.

Tsui-lan said no more, but watched him.

"Oh, if I'd known, I would never have come here," he thought in deep remorse. "She is a marvellous girl! . . . The person she is in love with must be marvellous too. They will certainly be very happy together. . . ."

"Comrade Pao-hsiang, I know you have progressive views," said Tsui-lan, half comforting, half enlightening him.

He realized what a damned fool he'd been, and how nearly he had stumbled! Phew! The thoughts he'd been indulging in were highly dangerous! Didn't he know that now people were living on the bright earth but because there were still remnants of vices left over at the back of their minds, they could not but wander back and forth on the borders of light and darkness, without realizing the dangers they were in? One false step would precipitate them into the pit. What a near thing! But now a load was off his mind and he felt greatly relieved.

"Aren't we both Youth League members?" Tsui-lan said gently.

"Look at her—she's trying to help me understand my own mistake." Pao-hsiang was thoroughly ashamed of himself. The old man is hopeless. His daughter is already in love with somebody else, yet there he goes, asking people to come over to make idiots of themselves.

"Haven't we both studied the Marriage Law. . . ." Tsui-lan went on.

And him a propagandist for it! Pao-hsiang was in the depths of humiliation. He remembered only too well that when others were in

the same boat, he was the clever progressive one then who could criticize them and persuade them of the error of their ways. But then look what happened when he himself was the person involved. Who was it then who was blind to his own faults? Who was just like a parrot mimicking human language without having human sense? Suddenly he recovered. He was genuinely amused at his own absurdity. His heart lightened, and he became his lively self again, and was able to say quite easily to Tsui-lan: "All right, then. Only tell me who the lucky fellow is!" As soon as he'd said it, he thought that even that was none of his business, and before she could answer, he added: "Never mind—you've no need to explain anything. I agree with you!" He realized that he'd contradicted himself yet again, and that it didn't matter whether he agreed or not, but he felt more satisfied with himself now.

"You're not going to raise any objections!" Tsui-lan said, in joyful surprise. "He really is an enlightened person," she thought.

"Of course not," Pao-hsiang said, rather awkwardly. Then he felt there'd really been enough of this, and he must get away. "Tsui-lan, I must be going now."

"What, already? Aren't you going to have something to eat before you go? My father isn't back yet!"—Tsui-lan had become lively too.

"No, really, thank you. You see, well, I've got some business to attend to." Pao-hsiang wanted to excuse himself; he longed now to leave the place as soon as possible, and got up.

Tsui-lan also stood up. She didn't feel that she should keep him. Better, perhaps, if he did go before her father came back; it would avoid more embarrassment. She could talk better to her father when she was alone with him.

She went with him to the gate of the compound. Chen Pao-hsiang heaved a long sigh of relief. As they turned around the corner of her house, Tsui-lan seemed to remember something suddenly. She said: "Comrade Pao-hsiang, you've honestly got no objections, have you?"

"None whatever," Pao-hsiang answered, and laughed quite naturally. "All right, then," Tsui-lan said. "Since you have no objections, will you send back the engagement contract?"

Pao-hsiang didn't understand. "Why? Surely you don't attach any significance to that feudal document?" he asked, quite incredulous.

Tsui-lan said: "No, it's not for me—but my father. . . ."

Pao-hsiang understood her and said with a smile: "All right. I'll send it over tomorrow." Then he went on his way.

Tsui-lan watched him for a while, then turned around to go in. As she did so, she saw her father and the matchmaker shambling up the road.

"Where is Pao-hsiang?" asked the matchmaker. He smelt strongly of alcohol.

"Gone," said Tsui-lan, smiling.

"Gone?" said her father, suspiciously. "How have things turned out?"

"Very well." Tsui-lan, clever girl, spoke truthfully but deliberately ambiguously. . . .

Blue sky. Gentle wind. Warm sunshine. Chen Pao-hsiang walked on. The road was smooth. Every step brought him nearer home, and very soon his own village would be in view. He felt comfortable and at ease.

"Oh well! That problem's settled and off my mind!"

Translated by Tso Cheng

Stories by Young Writers from Sinkiang

Sinkiang is an area with a number of China's national minorities — the Uighurs, Kazakhs, Uzbeks, etc. All of them have long traditions in poetry. The third issue of "Chinese Literature" this year introduced the reader to poems by the Uighur poets Lutpulla-Mutallep and Teepjan-Eliev. Prose writing among these nationalities began to increase steadily only after the liberation, yet there are already some writers of promise. The stories below are by three such young authors.

LAYLI AND SEIT

TURHUN ALMAS

I

"Pick some apples to take back with you, son. It's a long time since Sister Tuhan came to see us."

Layli was picking cotton in the back yard when she heard her mother say this. She promptly emptied the cotton in her apron into the basket and skirted the courtyard wall to the corner of the front yard. A young man was climbing one of their apple trees.

"Oh!" she exclaimed. "It's Seit. . . ."

She walked into the house, pretending to have seen nothing.

"Who were you talking to, mother, just now?" she asked.

"Seit."

"Which Seit?"

"Your Aunt Tuhan's son, who lives in Krabak."

"What did he come for?"

"He happened to pass here on his way home from a meeting in

town, so he came to see us. . . . Why! How could I forget the cattle! I must go to see to them. Start getting the supper, lass."

By the time her mother had disappeared into the wood opposite, Layli was at the foot of the apple tree.

The ripe red apples among the thick green foliage were like bashful girls hiding behind a window curtain. Standing on a branch of the tree, Seit saw Layli approach. She had a gourd in one hand, her dress glowed scarlet in the brilliant sunshine, and as she looked up at him from under jet black brows, her round face glowed with excitement and her lips trembled. Seit had fallen in love with this girl of eighteen, and his heart started pounding at the sight of her. He loosed his hold on the branch.

"How are you, Layli?" he called before climbing down.

"I'm well. And you? How are Aunty Tuhan and Uncle Mamut?"

Seit's heart was afire as he slithered down the tree. With a meaning look he offered Layli a twig bearing two apples. She accepted it with a happy yet embarrassed smile.

"Thank you. . . ."

"Look, Layli! What a handsome pair they make!"

Before she could answer, a group of village children came running up to them. Layli covered her burning cheeks and said nothing, while Seit rather sheepishly mounted his horse.

"Good-bye, Layli! I'm off."

Layli looked at him as if she longed to keep him.

"Why are you in such a hurry? Is our village so disagreeable?"

"No, Layli, yours is a charming village and I like it very much."

Layli could not help blaming the children for making him leave. Hurriedly skirting the fields and running through the wood, she reached the road as he came riding by, and with both hands presented him with some almonds tied in her handkerchief.

"Take these, Seit! I chose these almonds specially for you—you won't find any of them bitter."

"Thank you. I'm sure none of your almonds are bitter."

As he gazed at Layli, she lowered her expressive eyes, as if to reproach him for hurrying off so fast.

* * *

After crossing the big bridge, Seit rode west along the river bank and sat down on the dyke. The stream flowed gently past, gleaming silver in the sunlight. He gazed at the opposite bank, at the peaks kissing the white clouds, and at the neat avenue of willows which stretched all the way from the valley to Saybak and were waving softly now like Layli's long braids. She might be hiding at this very moment in her orchard. He watched for a long time. It was very quiet there. Pulling up a blade of tender grass, he was soon lost in thought.

"Why are you sitting here, Seit?" someone accosted him.

The rough voice rasped on his ears. He looked up to see Hzam astride a mare.

"I'm grazing my horse."

"Is there no grass for your horse in Saybak?"

Seit was annoyed at this insinuation.

"Mind your own business!" he said.

It was Hzam's turn to be offended now. But, unwilling to quarrel with him, Seit swung into his saddle and rode off.

The encounter with Seit had taken Hzam aback. He dismounted and sat on the dyke to smoke a cigarette. He had noticed for some time now that Seit was paying frequent visits to Saybak, and had long been a prey to suspicion and jealousy.

The song Sayiti was singing carried back to him:

> "White *layli* bud, white *layli* bud,
> Does my sweetheart return my love? . . ."

This song was like a dagger in Hzam's heart. He snatched his knife from its sheath and hurled it into the turf, consumed with burning jealousy.

II

Seit was up early, and impatient to have his breakfast.

"What's the hurry, son?" Mamut asked in surprise.

"I'm going to the district, father."

"What for?"

"To see the district committee."

"What about?"

"About setting up an agricultural co-operative."

"Ha! That's the reason, is it? . . ." Mamut muttered something to himself, then shook his head.

"Don't you approve of starting a co-op, father?"

As Mamut raised his head, his son looked at him searchingly.

"I approve all right." He smoothed his long white beard with blue-veined hands. "It's only . . . this is something no one has heard of. None of our fathers before us had such a thing. What *is* a co-op really?"

"Don't worry, father. As long as we take the road pointed out by the Party, we can tackle much bigger things than co-ops."

Mamut said nothing to this.

As Seit left home, his mother muttered after him:

"May Heaven preserve my good boy! May he have peace and luck, and no misfortunes!"

It was only since the liberation, when they received land and a house, that Seit's family had been able to hold up their heads. Now the main

HUANG TSE-HSI: Joining the Co-op

preoccupation of the old couple was to find a wife for their son. His mother was secretly scheming to marry him to Masture, the daughter of their neighbour and kinsman Amat. Tuhan doted on her son, and often chanted sutras or offered prayers to avert all calamities from him. Seit, for his part, was simply amused by this habit of hers.

Seit reached the district town almost before he knew it, and found Secretary Wang of the district committee of the Communist Party waiting for him. Opening his notebook, Seit gave a clear account of the preparations that had been made for setting up a co-operative. Wang listened intently, making notes from time to time.

"That's the position at present," concluded Seit.

"Right," Wang raised his head. "I agree that it is time to go forward from mutual-aid teams to producers' co-ops. We will discuss this in the Party branches and in the committees for setting up co-ops. We'll call all the Party and Youth League members and other key people together to examine the mistakes in our ideas and methods and learn from our past experience. This is very important for our future work. And then we will use every means at our disposal to make matters clear to the peasants. We must provide full explanations — with plenty of concrete examples — to settle any problems they have, and find satisfactory answers to all their questions."

"Yes, that's the way," agreed Seit. "If we don't explain all that puzzles them, and they go on having misgivings about the co-ops, of course they won't want to join."

As Wang was seeing Seit out, they met Bardi from Saybak.

"How are you getting on in your township with setting up a co-op?" asked Wang.

"Not so bad. I came here to get some tips from Seit and his lot."

"Fine," said Seit. "We want some tips from you too."

"I'll tell you anything you want to know."

"Did you come by yourself?" asked Wang.

"Yes, by myself."

"You should have brought Layli with you." Wang glanced significantly at Seit, making the young fellow thoroughly confused.

"You and Seit had better have a talk first," Wang went on. "He's chairman of the preparatory committee for the co-op. Later you and I can have a talk."

"Very good," agreed Bardi.

III

Outside the gate of a compound with a whitewashed verandah was an earthen terrace shaded by trees. The girl sitting here had an anxious look on her face; but as soon as Seit arrived she smiled at him.

"How are you, Shervana?"

"Very well!" The girl stood up, and invited him to be seated.

"Did you succeed or not?" he asked, as soon as he had sat down.

"I'm still working on them!"

"How are things going?"

"I've almost talked my father round, but my brother is holding him back." She sounded worried.

"Never mind. Hzam will gradually see what's right."

"Go on in, Seit," the girl said, standing up.

Seit stood up too; but as soon as they reached the gate Shervana stopped.

"Let me go in first," she said, "and pretend your coming has nothing to do with me. Wait a bit before you come in, so that he doesn't think I brought you here again."

"All right," agreed Seit.

The girl found her father lying on the verandah in the courtyard.

"Where have you been, lass?" he asked. "You said you were going to sit at the gate for a moment. Why have you been so long?"

Shervana made no reply. When presently Seit came in, Hzam suddenly put in an appearance. He coldly shook hands with Seit and greeted him, then marched into the garden.

The grape vine on their trellis had grown right over to the eaves of the house, and clusters of grapes amid the green leaves were sparkling like jewels in the sunlight. Bees were flying to and fro beneath the trellis, and nesting swallows were twittering under the eaves.

Just as Seit was wondering what his best approach to Dervish would be, the girl brought a newspaper out of the house and started turning its pages. This gave Seit a good opening.

"What news is there, Shervana?" he asked.

"The paper is full of good news!"

"Fine! Why not read us some of it?"

She went on from where she had left off with her father. "The advantages of co-operation. . . ."

"Stop!" cried Dervish, who wanted to test the young man. "Seit's as good as any paper. Seit, you've been busy in the township all this time preparing to start a co-op, and we've been to a good many meetings and heard plenty of explanations. What *is* a co-op now? Please explain it to me once more. I don't suppose the Party would want us to do anything that wasn't for our own good."

"That's it exactly, Uncle Dervish! When has the Party ever deceived us? You saw the reduction of rents and land reform for yourself. Doesn't the Party always keep its word?"

"Yes. But these last few days I've been hearing some funny talk. . . ."

"What kind of talk?"

Dervish rubbed his head reflectively.

"My memory's too bad," he said at last. "I can't remember what it was, or who said it."

"Oh!" put in Shervana. "Wasn't it a fact that the government will store the co-op's entire harvest in its own granaries, and people will have to queue up in front of a little window and stretch out their hands for grain?"

"Yes, that was it." Dervish nodded.

"That doesn't sound like one of our peasants talking. It's more like the sort of rumour our enemies spread. We shouldn't believe such lies." Since Dervish looked rather put out, Seit went on: "Uncle Dervish, you can be sure the Party won't lead us up the wrong track. It's because we've followed the Party line for these last four years that our life has been improving day by day."

"Quite right, brother. That's a fact," responded Dervish. Shervana beamed at her father.

"Last year you saw for yourself, uncle, how much better the mutual-aid teams did than the peasants working on their own!"

"You don't need to remind *us*, Seit," put in Shervana. "In the mutual-aid team you headed, you raised 800 catties of maize on every *mou*, while we raised only 200."

Dervish was not pleased at his daughter's interrupting; but since what she said was absolutely correct, he had to express agreement.

"Yes, the mutual-aid teams left us behind. They reaped a much bigger harvest."

"Co-ops are still better than mutual-aid teams," said Seit confidently. "If mutual-aid teams can raise 800 catties of maize on the best land, a co-op can raise 1,200 catties, or more."

"That's a fact. I saw that in the paper. A co-op in Arabak reaped as much grain as that."

"Do you have that paper here?"

"Yes!" Shervana skipped inside to fetch the paper, and promptly read them the item. All this time, Hzam was eavesdropping under one of the grape trellises. He had overheard their conversation, and was shaking from head to foot with rage.

The animated discussion in the courtyard went on. Dervish received answers to all his questions, and his suspicions were allayed. Seit did his best to quote incontrovertible evidence, and Shervana put in a helpful word here and there.

"I believe all the knots in my head are unravelled," said Dervish.

"What do you mean to do then?"

"We'll talk that over later."

This shilly-shallying answer disgusted Shervana.

By now Hzam could no longer control his anger, and he tiptoed out of the gate, which was ajar.

The sun was setting by the time Seit left.

* * *

At last Hzam came back.

After Shervana had lit the lamp, she carried bread and tea to the terrace, and sat down with her father and brother round the tablecloth.

"Son! You missed all that was said just now — where did you get to? I propose we join the co-op. What do you say?"

"If you choose to listen to them and join, go ahead. As far as I'm concerned . . . you can cut off my head, but you won't get me to join!"

"Why not?" demanded Shervana.

Hzam angrily set down his tea.

"Get on with your supper!" he snapped. "This fool of a girl is a propaganda worker for the co-op!" As Dervish glanced at Shervana, Hzam went on: "People who live on the co-op do nothing but gab all day!"

"Would we lose out by joining?"

"Maybe *you* could make something out of it," Hzam sneered. "But land is the most precious thing we have. Aren't you always saying: Land is the greatest treasure? And all our land is first rate — how can we give it to the co-op? Now we take out our hoes and work or rest just as we feel inclined — isn't that the way to live?"

"People say there's a lot to be gained by joining the co-op," said Dervish, but without much conviction.

"You've really no sense, father, if you believed all Seit's foolish talk just now, and all that this silly girl reads out of the paper." Hzam glared at Shervana. "Get out!" he said. "Go and see to the cattle." As soon as he had got rid of her, he moved closer to his father and lowered his voice.

"We must on no account join the co-op. We can do without mutual aid. We've all the livestock and implements we need; and when there's nothing to do I can take the big cart and do a bit of trading. It's easy to make a few extra dollars that way. As soon as there's another chance like that last year, when we carted public grain, I can stow eight or nine measures of grain at the bottom of the cart, and carry it to the city."

This talk set Dervish thinking.

"That's all very well," he said. "But if people find out, there'll be trouble."

"Don't worry, father. After we've made a little money by trading, I can buy some cheap iron in town and smuggle five or six catties back in the straw and husks to sell on the sly to people who need iron. That's easy money!"

Dervish was more and more tempted.

"But I've promised Seit," he said.

"Never mind that! First thing tomorrow you can ride into town. If they ask where you are, I'll tell them you had a pain in the chest and went into town to see the doctor. By the time you've stayed in town for a few days, they'll have finished setting up this confounded co-op."

Dervish was won over. Indeed, he could not turn a deaf ear to this son of his who was both trader and carter.

IV

The stream murmured on its way to Saybak.

The rice was already golden in Krabak and Saybak, and group after group of girls — like blossoms in spring — were joking and laughing as they weeded the fields.

Layli looked across the fields, set down the hoe she had been carrying over her shoulder, dug up a few weeds, cleaned up the mouth of the ditch, and filled in the hollows. Then she wiped her perspiring face with the towel round her neck, and gazed towards Krabak. Not far away she saw Seit shouldering a hoe and walking down the slope. She hastily let down the apron she had tucked up, hurried to the end of the ditch to wash her feet in the irrigation channel, and put on her shoes.

Seit was drawing nearer. Layli looked around. The girls who were weeding were some distance away, and she felt inexpressibly happy.

"What are you doing here, Layli?" Seit had reached her side.

"I came to look at the rice." She kept her eyes on the ground.

Though they were only exchanging the most commonplace greetings, the glances they cast at each other were full of feeling. Suddenly Layli summoned up all her courage.

"Let's go to the spring!" she said.

"That's just what I was going to suggest!" said Seit.

They strolled to the quiet spring. Layli's fine braids were swaying in the breeze. Sitting down on the soft grass, they watched the fish swimming in the crystal water.

"Why didn't you go to the Party to celebrate setting up the co-op? I thought you'd be there, and I waited a long time for you."

"I wasn't able to go."

"Why not?"

"They wouldn't let me."

"Who wouldn't let you?"

"Don't you know? My brother Bardi scolded me, and said, 'You seem to feel, all of a sudden, you belong to Krabak!' "

After a moment's silence, Layli changed the subject:

"What name have you given your co-op?"

"The Red Flag."

"What a lovely name. We're going to call ours 'Forward!' "

"Fine! Are you planning to shoot ahead of everyone else?"

"That's hard to say. We shall have to see."

"After you've set up your co-op at Saybak, we're going to challenge you to see which of us can reap the better harvest."

"We mean to challenge you too. What are your terms?"

"Not too high. We plan to reap 1,000 catties of wheat a *mou*, and 1,200 catties of maize."

"That's too much! Our fathers and fathers' fathers never heard of such a thing!"

"It's not just a question of hearing of it now: we're going to see it with our own eyes," declared Seit excitedly. "When that time comes, we must hold a big meeting to celebrate our two co-ops' bumper harvests, and arrange for another ceremony too."

The girl blushed and hung her head. She thought of the next autumn, and of the secret happiness which would carry her through the winter.

Seit gazed at her searchingly.

"Why don't you say something, Layli?" he asked fondly.

"What can I say?" she answered with an effort. "You've said it all already!"

"That's true. The two of us think exactly alike. But what about your mother?"

"My mother's idea . . ." she broke off.

"Doesn't your mother agree?"

"No."

Then she told him how recently Hzam had bought two lengths of cloth and asked the old woman Henimak to go as his go-between to her house. Seit was taken aback.

"What did your mother say?" he asked hastily.

"She seems to have said: 'Thank you for asking for my daughter's hand. I'll be glad to have Hzam as my son-in-law. If Layli doesn't agree, I'll talk her round!' "

"Did your mother say this to you?"

"Yes. We had a regular scene at home this morning. I told my mother to give up the idea at once, or I wouldn't be her daughter. Mother cried and cried, and then she stormed at me."

"Well, whatever happens, you shouldn't make her cry and carry on. You must see what persuasion will do. Kind words melt iron, as all the old folk say."

"I did try to coax her at first, but she wouldn't listen. She must have been taken in by Henimak's clever lies."

"Why, what did Henimak say?"

"She said, 'You don't want the girl to eat poor food and wear rough clothing, do you? Hzam's family will give her the best of everything.' "

"Ha! That old go-between knows how to talk!"

"It would take more than talk to make me give in!" The girl spoke fearlessly. "No one can make me break my promise to you."

As they stood up to leave, the moving strains of a shepherd's flute could be heard in the distance.

V

In a flash, the winter passed.

One morning, the village awoke from sleep as the light of dawn kindled the eastern horizon, the early morning wind rustled the forest trees, and water flowed slowly along the irrigation channels. Far and near the carolling of skylarks sounded, and cow-boys were trudging off towards the Gobi Desert, rubbing their sleepy eyes as they staggered after their herds. You could hear the bleating of sheep and the lowing of cattle.

Presently the round sun lifted its smiling head from behind the mountains to shed its golden beams over the fresh green land. The ripening wheat looked like an emerald sea ruffled by gentle waves, and the air was filled with the scent of wild herbs. The members of the Red Flag Co-operative gathered in their maize fields.

"Is everyone here?" asked Seit, looking round.

"Kadir hasn't come," replied Amat.

"He'll be coming." Seit sighed, then rolled up his sleeves and shouldered his hoe. "All right!" he said to the others. "Let's get going!"

The maize, planted by a mechanical sower, was now knee-high. Rain during the last few days had packed the soil too hard round its roots, and the peasants had to hoe it carefully.

It was already warm by the time a well-dressed, pock-marked man in his thirties appeared beside Seit:

"So you've come, Kadir. You're late."

"I'm not feeling too good today," replied Kadir, and sullenly set to work. He kept pausing, however, to steal a glance at Seit; and instead of loosening the soil round the maize roots, he covered it up with earth. You could not detect this by looking; but if you brushed away the earth, you could see the hard clods round the maize roots.

"By hurrying a little, I can make ten points," Kadir was thinking. "Who's got the time to inspect the roots of every plant?"

Although it grew very hot after lunch, their team worked even harder. After some time Musa, the Party branch secretary, brought a group of men over to help the peasants on their own whose maize had been blighted. When he saw the enthusiasm with which the members of the co-op were hoeing the maize fields, Musa was delighted. Dervish had come along too. The previous year, after promising to join the co-operative, he had run away to the city pretending to be ill. Now his constant fear of "trouble" and the fact that his maize had been attacked by a

pest had left him extremely depressed. The sight of the co-op's fresh, green maize made the old man feel even worse.

Seit had to help Musa organize the assistance to the individual peasants. He laid down his hoe and walked to the end of the field, where he cheerily welcomed the new-comers.

"Can you finish the last hoeing in another two days?" asked Musa.

"We shall finish it tomorrow," was the confident reply.

"That means we can complete our work three days ahead of plan."

The individual peasants who heard this and saw the co-op's maize apparently growing before their very eyes exchanged expressive glances and muttered comments.

Accompanied by Kadir, Seit took them to the maize fields worked by individual peasants. The sparse shoots there, about one foot high, were a pathetic sight.

"Let's start with Barat's field. He's willing," said Musa, setting down a crate of fruit.

"Yes," responded Seit. "Tomorrow the peasants can catch the bugs themselves; the day after that we'll bring our co-op members over to help."

"If we don't hurry and wipe out this pest, even though this land belongs to individual peasants, it'll mean a lowered output for our township, and that isn't good for us or for the country. Isn't that right, Barat?"

"That's right," answered several peasants at the same time.

Seit began digging holes between the rows of maize, about half a foot deep and the size of a bowl. In these he laid slices of apple, which he covered with a fine layer of earth.

"The bugs will smell this, and burrow down to get it tonight. Tomorrow we can catch them," he explained.

"This is the good old way our fathers taught us," said Musa. "But some people aren't even willing to do this. Let's give it a trial now." The peasants agreed to this.

"If we'd flooded these fields last winter," said Barat ruefully, "we probably shouldn't be troubled with this pest today."

"It's all very well to say that, but this is fate," said another. "There's nothing we can do."

"It's no use sitting open-mouthed under the mulberry tree waiting for mulberries to drop into your mouth," declared Seit. "We must always think of a way out for ourselves. As the old folk say: If you're handy enough, you can make a basket hold water."

Dervish had taken no part in this discussion. Standing a little to one side, he was thinking over his troubles.

* * *

Dervish plodded slowly home with his eyes on the ground. All the way he was thinking over what Musa and Seit had said.

"We must think of a way . . ." he muttered. "We must think of a way."

Hzam, just back from town, realized that his father was quieter than usual. He knew where Dervish had been, and what he had seen and heard.

"Damn them and their help! Digging holes to catch bugs!" he exclaimed angrily. "I wouldn't mind anyone else, but I'd rather die than get help from a beggar like Seit."

He could see Seit and Layli as they had sat by the spring the previous year.

Lost in thought, Dervish said nothing for a while. "What's to be done then, son?" he asked at last.

"If the worst happens, why not plough the maize under and sow another crop?"

"It's too late for that, isn't it?"

"What do you mean to do then?" Hzam glared.

"I was reckoning on sacrificing a cock at the head of the irrigation channel, and praying to Ahuramazda before watering the maize again. Jamaldihan, the witch doctor, gave me the idea."

"Don't talk about him! He's no use at all!" Hzam remembered the charm Jamaldihan had given him to make Layli love him. It had cost him a pretty sum, but instead of falling in love with him Layli had grown to dislike him more than ever.

After a short silence, Hzam raised his head.

"If you want to plough it under, I'll let in water tonight," he said. "Then in two days the earth will be soaked. If the worst happens, we'll get some ripe maize at least, though some'll be green."

"We won't have enough grain if we do that."

"Why, what's come over you, father? Uncle gave me a good price for the rice I took to town on this trip, and told me to take as much as I could in future. He bought some cheap iron for me to bring back." Hzam looked round before going on: "Those rich peasants Haji and Ili are short of iron; so we should be able to make a good thing of it."

At this point, Hzam's mother came out of the house.

"Why! Look at the white linen Hzam's bought you for a turban, and the lovely dress length he bought me! He's brought us tea, sugar and cakes as well."

A little reassured, Dervish went inside to look at Hzam's purchases, and was very satisfied with what he saw.

"You're a clever lad!" he said.

"Business isn't bad," replied Hzam. "You needn't be afraid that we'll run out of grain before next year; if we keep on trading we've

nothing to worry about. We'll show our friends and foes that we can do quite well without the co-op."

Such talk both excited and puzzled Dervish. He was just about to say something when his wife interposed:

"May Ahuramazda protect us and make us prosper!"

VI

The golden wheat stretched as far as eye could see, waving in the breeze. Beautiful butterflies of every hue were fluttering over the milk-white cotton flowers. As they hoed the cotton fields the sun began to grow hotter.

Kadir was up to his tricks again. "Seit can't possibly find out," he thought. "And even if he does, he won't say anything because we're cousins." As for Amat's daughter Masture and the others in their team, he did not care what they thought.

Masture was working so hard that she did not look at Kadir, not even at Seit. For Seit's mother had often said to her: "What a pretty, clever girl you are! I want you for my daughter-in-law!" Even had she noticed what Kadir was doing, she would have felt shy about speaking to Seit—and Kadir knew this quite well.

When it was nearly noon, Seit began to notice how Kadir was hoeing, and remembered the other tricks the fellow had been up to all these days. Now he understood what a slacker Kadir was. But at this point the midday meal arrived.

Steaming noodles were ladled into earthenware bowls, and the wild herbs in the soup smelled delicious. Although the noodles burnt his lips, Kadir gulped down his bowl in two or three mouthfuls, and had finished two more helpings before the others had eaten one.

"I'm quicker than you in everything," he boasted, licking his lips and the spoon.

"No one's a match for you when it comes to eating or making senseless remarks," said Seit bitterly. "But why don't you do your work better?"

Kadir tried to treat this as a joke, but began to feel uneasy. Afraid Seit had seen through him, he started working slightly better. They had nearly finished work for the day when the sun began to set behind the western hills.

In the fields they reckoned up the work-points for that day, and how much each had done. The first few all received ten points—the standard quota. But Masture, who had carelessly knocked down a few cotton plants while hoeing, hung her head in shame; however, they decided to give her eight points. It was Kadir's turn last, and he kept his eyes on the ground.

"Well, Kadir," said Seit, "how much do you think you deserve?"

Kadir thought for a minute, then smiled and said: "Ten points."

"Why?"

"I worked the required time, and did more than anyone else."

"Is that enough?"

"I did the same as you, didn't I," muttered Kadir. "I didn't knock down a single cotton plant."

"The most you can have is five," declared Seit.

"What, less than a girl!" exclaimed Kadir angrily. "I'd better cut off my ears."

Seit looked at him sternly, then stood up and led the team to see what Kadir had done before lunch. Brushing aside the soil spread over the roots, he showed them the weeds. Some of them uncovered the roots of other plants, and found the same thing there. This was the case with nearly all the plants he had hoed. Kadir began to panic.

"This is the funny thing about Kadir's work," Seit told the others.

Kadir stood there crestfallen, with nothing to say for himself. By now it had become too dark to see.

All the way home, Kadir pleaded with Seit.

"Let's keep this to ourselves! Masture won't talk—I can see to that. . . . And Patam is my wife, so she doesn't count. Only Tohti's son Bahti, though he seems a quiet fellow, likes to gossip; you must talk to him, so that he doesn't gab."

"I shall do nothing of the kind. Everyone has the right to tell people what you've done: we can't close our eyes to the truth."

"We're cousins, aren't we? Won't you leave me a little face?"

"Cousins have got to act decently too. I don't recognize cousins who spoil the work of our team."

Kadir began to feel desperate.

"What can I do then?" he faltered.

"First make a public admission of your fault, then redeem yourself by working properly."

"I promise to work harder, and I swear I'll never tell a lie again. But . . . I can't admit my fault in public that way."

"Don't talk like that. You must acknowledge you were in the wrong. If you don't, I'll expose you in front of the whole co-op, and force you to admit it."

Kadir felt utterly confounded.

VII

The members of the co-operative divided the wheat fields into several large plots, rolled up their sleeves, tucked up their skirts, and started reaping the wheat. There was not a pause in the whirr of their scythes.

Seit was one mass of energy. A quick, expert reaper, who cut a swath three paces wide, he was the first to reach the end of the field.

Soon several *mou* of wheat had been harvested, and one of Seit's team started singing loudly:

"Scything wheat in the blazing sun,
You reap, I bind the sheaves;
We work like a house on fire;
None of us are going to slack!"

By the last day of the harvest they were working as never before. Carts laden with wheat were drawn by horses and oxen from the fields to the threshing floor amid singing, the tinkle of bells and the creaking of wheels.

When there were only a few *mou* left, Seit assigned four men to finish the reaping and sent all the rest to help the other teams. Even so, they had gathered in all the wheat two hours before sunset.

"Each of us has reaped over a *mou*," said one.

Seeing Dervish, Hzam and Shervana still reaping, Seit and his friends went over to help them. Shervana welcomed them with a smile, but Hzam only looked sullen.

"May Ahuramazda reward you!" said Dervish.

Just before Seit left at nightfall, he showed Dervish an ear of their wheat. The old man rubbed the grains out into a wooden bowl, and carefully blew off the chaff. Shervana rubbed the grains from one of their own ears into her skirt to count them too.

"Our largest ears have only thirty grains," she announced ruefully.

"How much has the co-op's?" asked Hzam.

"Nearly a hundred," said Dervish.

"That's a lie!" cried Hzam.

"Let's count them and see," said Shervana.

Hzam counted for himself.

"It does seem to be a hundred," he had to admit.

It would take another two days to finish reaping the wheat on Dervish's long, narrow plot. He lay sleepless in bed for a long time that night, turning things over in his mind. A high wind sprang up, and rustled the window paper.

The next morning when Shervana and Hzam ran to the fields, they found their father standing woodenly there gazing at the ground. The old man seemed half-crazed. He paid no attention to them, but kept muttering to himself; and his eyes were filled with anxiety, grief and regret.

"We shan't even get back our seed," he said at last, and heaved sigh after sigh.

Grains of wheat blown down by the gale during the night lay scattered on the ground.

VIII

On two large, adjacent threshing floors, from a long way off you could see the small mountains of threshed wheat. The members of the Red Flag Co-operative gathered here as soon as it was light. A simple matting shed had been set up on the east, two red flags with a portrait of Chairman Mao Tse-tung between them hung from the stage wall, and in front of the stage were slogans on red cloth. A five-starred red flag fluttered from the roof of the shed.

Presently the shack was surrounded by people, some of them representatives of distant co-operatives, mutual-aid teams and peasants. Nearly all the Karabak villagers were here too. They were all drawn by the Red Flag Co-operative's magnificent harvest. Seit seemed to be on the look-out for someone.

"Have the folk from Saybak arrived?" he asked Amat.

"Yes, brother, can't you see them?" A grizzled peasant standing beside him pointed out a group of people. Seit scanned them eagerly, and when he caught sight of Layli a smile lit up his face.

Soon after this the air was rent with the sound of tambours, flutes and fiddles. The crowd formed a circle round the stage, while some others were thronged beside the threshed wheat. Unwilling to lose this opportunity, Seit made his way towards Layli, who was talking and laughing with a group of girls. When the others saw Seit, they whispered to each other and burst out laughing; then one after another slipped away. As the bewildered Layli turned round and saw Seit, her heart beat faster. In her confusion she wanted to run away, but something kept her rooted to the spot, and a delicious warmth enveloped her.

"How are you, Layli?"

"I'm well. How are you?" she put out her hand.

Masture, near by, sighed softly to herself.

Seit saw that Layli looked lovelier than ever. The two young people walked slowly into the crowd.

When the performance was over, the members of the two co-operatives divided into two groups and ran towards the heaps of threshed wheat. The crowd surged after them. They packed the wheat into new sacks, and some weighed them with great balances while young checkers ascertained the weight of each sack and jotted it down in their notebooks.

By the time all the wheat had been sacked, everyone had gathered round the threshing floors. Two or three men who were handy with the abacus added up the figures, while the peasants tried to guess the exact yield per *mou*. They waited quietly.

Soon the exultant Seit made an announcement.

"The average yield per *mou* is 1,007 catties!"

"Ahuramazda! How can it be so much!" excited comments were exchanged.

Before long, they heard from the second threshing floor: "605 catties per *mou*."

People raced towards the shed. Representatives of Saybak's Forward Co-operative were sitting in front of the stage, and one of them said:

"This time they've won."

Bardi felt thoroughly uncomfortable. But just then Secretary Wang called for silence, and the crowd quieted down.

"Comrades!" said Wang with a smile. "The Red Flag Co-operative's bumper harvest is a model for our whole district. But when they drew up their plan to raise a thousand catties of grain on each *mou*, you didn't believe it could be done, did you?"

"We didn't," came the answer from the crowd.

"Under Seit's leadership, and acting on the directives of the Party and the People's Government, the members of the Red Flag Co-operative overcame all manner of difficulties, and by working with might and main raised a harvest of 1,007 catties a *mou*."

Barat was so excited that he shouted: "That's three times as much as peasants on their own can raise!"

"True. . . ."

Wang went on. He outlined the chief reasons for this co-operative's success. His speech went home to every hearer's heart, and the moment he finished a storm of applause burst out. Then Seit mounted the platform, laid his right hand on his chest and bowed to the crowd.

"The chief reason for our fine harvest," he said, "was that we took the Party's advice and organized ourselves into a co-op. In our farming, as far as possible, we adopted new ideas and new methods, and so we were able to reap this amazing harvest which our forefathers never dreamt of."

"He's right. That's a fact," agreed the excited peasants.

"So today, on behalf of all our co-op members and the other comrades here, I want to express our hearty thanks to the Party and the government." He spoke incisively, and the peasants were deeply moved. "We express our thanks—our heartfelt thanks—to the Party!" The thunderous applause did not die down for a long, long time. Then the meeting was thrown open, and one after another mounted the platform. Shervana made the shortest, clearest and most forceful speech.

"In the old days," she declared, "we never even dreamed of a harvest like this; but today we have all of us seen it with our own eyes. It shows us more clearly than ever that the road along which the Party is leading us is the road to happiness, the only right road for us; and we peasants who didn't join the co-op are more sorry than we can say. My father Dervish meant to join, but didn't, and we only harvested between 160 and 170 catties a *mou* from our land. Why did we get so little? My father understands the reason quite clearly, and how he wishes he had

never stayed out! . . . You know the rest." The peasants nodded their heads when she had spoken, and agreed that she talked sense.

"That's true. Quite true!" could be heard on every side.

Hzam felt acutely uncomfortable, but Dervish said with feeling: "My girl was a thousand, ten thousand times right! We didn't look at the question from every side." He had more to say, but decided not to speak.

IX

Walking back from the fields, Dervish saw Kadir and Seit in front of him when he was half way home. They were driving five donkeys loaded with sacks of wheat. Dervish followed about twenty paces behind them. Willows bordered each side of the winding lanes through the village, and the angular branches of date trees forked out in all directions. Kadir and Seit were deep in conversation.

"Before joining the co-op, we got only 340 catties of wheat from our two *mou*," said Seit. "But now our income is 1,830 odd catties, if you count what dad and I get for our labour."

"Mm. I know it is, but I've not much of a head for figures. Will you explain it to me in detail?"

"When we put our land in the co-op as shares, it was graded, wasn't it?"

"Yes."

"And what grade was our land?"

"First."

"What's the rent fixed for first-grade land?"

"It's 135 catties of wheat."

"Right, you've a good memory. So for our two and a half *mou* of land we got 337 catties as rent."

"Yes, that's how it should be."

"Well now, isn't another part of our income reckoned according to work-days?"

"Yes."

"Apart from rent and other expenses, isn't all the rest of the co-op's income divided between us according to our work?"

"It is."

"How much wheat for one work-day?"

"Twelve catties."

"Right. Well, I was reckoned as having 90 work-days, and my father 40."

". . . ."

"How much is that altogether?"

"Isn't it 130?"

"Correct. And at 12 catties per work-day, 130 work-days means 1,560 catties."

"That's about it."

"Very well. Add that to the 337 catties of rent, and how much does it come to?"

Kadir's brain was not working too well, and to his embarrassment he could not answer.

"If you add them together, it's 1,897 catties."

"That's right, brother," said Kadir, satisfied. "That's it."

"Think how much we got for our labour! Amat and his children did even better—they got 3,600 catties of wheat!"

"You don't need to remind me . . ." he could not go on for shame.

"Now you understand. The best thing you ever did was to admit your fault at that meeting to divide up the produce!"

"I was wrong, and you tried to help me. . . ." He was rather tongue-tied again. "In future I shall put all I've got into the work."

Behind them, Dervish listened carefully to all they said, and was so lost in thought that he reached home before he realized it. He recalled how Seit and the others had helped him reap his wheat, the contrast between a hundred grains of wheat to one ear and thirty grains, the big meeting to celebrate the recent harvest, and—most of all—what Seit had just said to Kadir. . . . He had no doubts left in his mind. But he did not know how to face Shervana and the co-op members after his mistake, and wished he had never taken Hzam's advice.

* * *

"I admit I was in the wrong!"

When Shervana heard her father say this, she ran out of the house and found Dervish and Hzam sitting together in the courtyard.

"What's wrong with you, father?" asked Hzam. "What's the matter?"

"What's the matter? We didn't do a single thing right!"

"What do you mean?"

"You know what I mean!" Dervish went on angrily: "Last year I made the mistake of listening to you, and didn't join the co-op. Because we worked on our own, our crops were a failure. All the co-op members got a dozen to twenty sacks of wheat; but although we sowed so much we got only seven sacks."

"Last year I nearly wore my mouth out talking," said Shervana indignantly, "but the two of you wouldn't listen. Goodness knows what you were thinking of!"

Dervish heaved a long sigh.

"We've paid for staying out of the co-op, father," she went on. "If we'd joined, even though brother's been ill our horse and cart needn't

have stood idle—you get 40 catties of wheat a day for the use of a horse and cart."

Hzam sat glumly down, feeling thoroughly disgruntled.

"Just because we'd laid by a little money," said Dervish, "you wanted to trade. You didn't make any money in town, but lost a hundred yuan; and I had to sell our two sheep to make good the loss. And if the government workers and our kinsmen in town hadn't vouched for you, I don't know how much more trouble you'd have landed me in!"

Hzam slowly hung his head. It mortified him to remember how he had been caught selling grain on the black market.

"No one can get away with breaking the law," put in Shervana.

"Stop scolding a fellow, can't you?" said Hzam sheepishly. "How were we to know things would turn out like this?"

"I *didn't* know—that's why I listened to you!"

"Let bygones be bygones, father," said Shervana.

"You must find some way out for us, lass. All Seit said was right. You must fix it up so that we can join the co-op."

"How lovely, father!" She jumped up in delight. "I'll go and do that at once. We shall have to hurry. There are over eighty households now who want to join the co-op."

"We mustn't lag behind the others, girl!"

"What does Brother Hzam think?"

"Do as you like," replied Hzam, looking up.

"You won't change your mind this time, will you, father?"

"When rice is cooked, it's cooked. I won't change my mind."

Shervana was satisfied.

X

Layli walked home from the district town by way of Krabak, hoping to meet Seit, but was disappointed to see no sign of him. Just outside the village she saw Masture at the dam.

"What are you doing there, Masture?"

"Oh—I came to draw water." She spoke impatiently, both her manner and tone contemptuous. Layli was taken aback by her rudeness —Masture was generally so soft-spoken.

Filled with misgivings, Layli was following a path through the forest when she came upon Hzam and a boy, who were driving several donkeys loaded with fertilizer.

"Ah, Layli, how are you?"

"Quite well." She continued on her way.

"Please wait a moment. I've something to say to you, Layli!"

"All right. What is it?"

"Are you still dreaming of living in Krabak?"

"What do you mean?"

"Don't you know? The rice is already cooked as far as Seit and Masture are concerned." When Layli was silent he went on: "So don't go on hoping for Seit! Put that idea out of your head! There's another fine young fellow ready to court you."

With a leer he stepped forward to take her in his arms.

"Don't touch me, Hzam! What are you doing?" She jumped aside, as if he were a snake.

"Why act like that, Layli? If you go on taking it so to heart, you'll go mad!"

"Don't talk nonsense! Get on with your work! We've done with feudal, autocratic ways!" Layli walked boldly on.

"I'll kill you!" shouted Hzam angrily. "I don't care if the whole district knows it! A man can only die once!"

* * *

All the way home Layli was wondering why Masture should have treated her so coldly, and why Hzam should have talked to her so strangely. Upon reaching home, she was just about to rest when a familiar voice outside called her name.

"Come in!" her mother answered.

Layli went to the gate, and admitted her best friend, Patima.

"When I went with the others to weed the river bank yesterday," said Patima, "Amat's daughter, Masture of Krabak, asked me to give you this letter. She said no one else was to see it." She handed Layli a note.

"What's this?"

"Who knows? Read it yourself!"

"Please come in and sit down!"

"Thank you, I must be going." With this Patima turned and left.

Layli went inside and opened the letter by the lamp. At once she turned pale, and her eyes clouded over with distress. She shivered, and began to sob.

* * *

Two days later, Layli went to Krabak with her friends. They reached the courtyard of the co-op just as the meeting was about to start. The Saybak villagers were sitting in front.

Seit, who was about to make a speech, smiled radiantly at Layli. But she rested her chin on one hand and sat there in silence, ignoring everyone. Seit's smile vanished, and he frowned. Then he started telling all the mutual-aid team members, peasant representatives and members of the co-operatives about his trip to a collective farm.

"We ought to see further, and cut our clothes bigger," the peasants commented.

As soon as the meeting ended, Layli left. Seit promptly followed her, calling her name.

She pretended not to have heard, and quickened her step. And before Seit could call her back someone stopped him.

"I've a dreadful pain in my chest," said this fellow. "Will you arrange for me to go to the hospital?"

* * *

When Seit reached home that evening, his father gave him a black look.

"What's the matter, dad?"

"Nothing. What do you think is the matter?"

"For the last few days you've been in very good spirits. Why this sudden change?"

"Son, why do you take up first with one, then with another?"

"What are you talking about?"

"As if you didn't know! The thing is done, yet you act deaf and dumb. The idea!"

"I don't understand what you mean, dad. What is all this?"

"When your mother first proposed Masture, you wouldn't have her; and later we heard you had an understanding with Layli. Now you've written to Masture again. What do you mean by it?"

Seit was flabbergasted.

"Now what does it matter?" put in Tuhan. "Can't you leave the boy alone? There's not a better girl than Masture in the whole district. Crows should pair off with crows, and phoenixes with phoenixes. Did I bring Seit into the world for Layli? I want no daughter-in-law from across the river!"

"It's not good to become engaged to a girl and then jilt her. This is going to set folk talking, and then what will you do? Besides. . . ."

"Let people talk if they like! This isn't a crime! People with sons can marry them to any girl they please."

Tuhan's remarks left Seit more bewildered than ever.

XI

Hzam was walking along with lowered head. Knowing no good could come of his trick and wanting to repair the damage he had done, he had told Kadir his secret. They were taking a message now across the fields.

During the break for lunch, Hzam had revealed the secret he had kept all these days, and asked Kadir's advice. After thinking for a long time, Kadir looked up.

"That was a dirty, low-down thing to do, Hzam, separating Layli and Seit!"

"I know. . . ." Hzam quivered.

"Well, if you know it, why don't you hurry up and make it up with them? Wouldn't that be better?"

"How, Brother Kadir?"

"Go to the Party secretary after work today, and make a clean breast of it to them."

"I daren't."

"What are you afraid of? There's nothing to be afraid of in admitting a mistake—the fearful thing is to keep it a secret and not make amends."

"Will you go with me?"

"If you like."

On the way home from work, Hzam took Masture aside.

"I've something to say to you, little sister," he told her beseechingly.

"What is it?"

"Did you find a letter in your pocket recently?"

"Yes." Masture blushed scarlet.

"I put that letter in your pocket that evening when we watched the show together."

"What are you saying?"

"It wasn't Seit who wrote you that letter."

Her eyes bored into him.

"I wrote it, using Seit's name," he admitted wretchedly.

"You hateful thing!" Masture dropped her basket, trembling and speechless with rage, and her eyes filled with tears of distress and shame.

"Hit me as hard as you like, little sister, I don't mind. But please give me back that letter."

* * *

That evening when Seit went to see Musa, hearing someone talking to the Party secretary he did not go in. He recognized Hzam's voice.

". . . Brother Kadir's told you everything. It's all true. The more I think about it, the more ashamed I feel."

"Quite right, Hzam. It's very good that you admitted your mistake so quickly. If you'll admit it publicly, I think you'll be forgiven. As for Seit, I'm sure he won't hold this against you. How about it?"

When Hzam and Kadir had left, Musa explained the situation to Seit, and so this misunderstanding was straightened out.

* * *

One cloudless evening before the moon rose, stars were twinkling in the sky. Seit rode slowly through the tranquil night, deep in thought.

Suddenly he heard someone behind call "Layli!" Several people crossed the road in front of him, and one of them left the rest to stand at the roadside.

"Who is it?" asked Seit, reining in his horse.

"It's I." The reply came very softly.

"Isn't it Layli?"

"Let's pretend it is."

Seit deftly lifted her on to his horse, and pressed his mount's sides with his knees.

"Where shall we go?" he asked.

"You know best." Her voice was very soft and sweet.

Seit turned his horse's head to the right, and they crossed a narrow bridge.

"Who was it who called you just now?"

"Probably one of the girls who went with me to the bazaar. I thought you'd gone home long ago."

"I could have done; but I didn't want to go home."

The two of them fell silent. . . .

Layli was seated sideways in front of Seit, who held the reins over his arms, encircling her waist. Seit felt as if he were on fire. His soul seemed to be taking flight, and he let the horse wander as it pleased.

The girl stirred gently in his arms.

"So this is the end of that strange misunderstanding!"

"Please don't talk about that. Hzam has looked uglier than ever to me since then."

"But Hzam has changed, you know. He acknowledged his fault in public and promised to make good."

"Really and truly?"

"He's working much harder now too. And he often says: 'I'll never forget how well you've all treated me.' "

"Well, I shan't believe it till I've seen it for myself." Layli was still sceptical.

"That's all very well, but how did you come to be taken in by that forged letter?"

"I'd no experience of such things before! I'd never even heard of such a thing."

"I'm very glad to know that," said Seit with a laugh. After a little he went on: "Of course, it would be a fine thing for you to see the change in Hzam for yourself; but how can you do that if you stay in Saybak?"

"I shall see it when I move to Krabak."

"When will that be?"

"I don't know," Layli laughed.

"You must come after the maize is harvested."

"When that time comes, we'll see!"

The girl heaved a gentle sigh, and buried her burning face against Seit's shoulder.

XII

Layli came running into the house.

"Good news! Good news!" she called.

She was in too much of a hurry to pick up her hat as it fell, but thrust a paper into Seit's hands.

"What's the good news?" he asked.

Since Layli was too excited to speak, he started reading the paper.

"There it is!" She pointed at the headline: Well-known Red Flag Co-op.

This news item described the founding of their co-op, the good harvest of wheat, the expansion of the co-op, and the new methods they had used. Special mention was also made of their outstanding yield of maize. Seit read it avidly.

"The average yield of maize was 1,500 catties per *mou* — a record for the whole province."

"So the district secretary was right!" Seit looked up.

"What did he say?"

"He said our harvest of maize was the best in the whole province."

"Read it aloud, lad, so that I can hear it too," said Seit's father, Mamut. Tuhan had no idea what had happened, but stepped up to her son.

"I must tell all the villagers!" Mamut hurried out.

"Headstrong old fool!" said Tuhan.

"There's nothing to be so excited about. Next year we shall do even better. Wasn't that Sino-Soviet Friendship Exhibition fine! Remember how collective farmers live in the Soviet Union?"

"I remember."

"We shall be living like the people in that film *Happy Life* we saw that evening."

As they were talking, a messenger arrived from District Secretary Wang to summon Seit.

"I wonder if it's for a meeting or some other business?" he asked himself on the road.

When he found Wang alone in the district committee office, he knew there was not to be a meeting. Wang greeted him warmly, and asked after Layli.

"I've fine news for you, Comrade Seit." Wang announced smilingly. "We're sending you to Urumchi, on instructions from above."

Seit's eyes gleamed with excitement, and a smile illumined his ruddy face. The district secretary told him that since time was short he would

have to travel by air, and asked him to lose no time in writing a report on their co-op, to be discussed by the township's Party group. After asking for detailed instructions, Seit went home.

Seit and Musa set to work on the report. They worked hard all day, and sat up writing late into the night by lamplight.

The day before he left for Urumchi Seit told his wife of Secretary Wang's instructions. Layli was glad for his sake, but could not help regretting that they would be parted, if only for a few days.

* * *

The jeep sped down the road, and after ten minutes reached the smooth airfield. Presently the door of a green plane was opened, and in a few minutes all the passengers had mounted and taken their seats. The door was closed, a pilot in his twenties looked out from the cockpit at the passengers, and then withdrew again.

The engines roared, and the propellers began to move. In a couple of minutes they had taken off. Seit looked down from the window at the buildings hidden among the trees, and his heart beat faster. He thought of the exhibition and collective farm he had recently visited. The happy life of Soviet farmers passed before him like a film. He felt certain that Krabak would turn into a collective farm like those in the Soviet Union. He could already see their lovely village in his mind's eye. He seemed to be standing in front of a snow-white building, watching the tractors drive swiftly up and down the unending fields. In the golden sunlight, as far as eye could see, stretched rippling cotton fields. He could see most of the peasants reading books and magazines in their spare time. He even thought he could see a new middle school, and the lively, innocent youngsters studying there—his own among them. He could see these youngsters in the evenings doing their homework by electric light, and the whole countryside one sea of lights. . . .

Seit looked up, and said to himself:

"I know this dream will come true. A mountain that's in sight can't be too far off."

The roar of the engines sounded in his ears.

Translated by Gladys Yang

A MOTHER'S HEART

YUSUF ALIEAS

Maema had spared no efforts and hardships in bringing up her oldest son. But now he told her he was going away to join the army! She could hardly believe her ears when she first heard him say so; her heart sank at the thought of parting from him.

"Who knows what may happen?" she was worrying. "If he joins the army, he may be asked to go to some faraway place I haven't even heard of. And here I'm getting old and full of pain — if it's not a splitting headache it's a pain in my side. And suppose he has to take his rifle one day and go to war . . . if he runs into trouble. . . ." A cold shiver ran down her spine when she thought of this possibility.

"Good heavens!" she said to herself. "Surely it can't be true! Nobody has asked him to, yet he wants to go and join the army. . . ."

Tursoon saw what state his mother was in and said to her tenderly, but firmly: "Why should you carry on so because I'm joining the army, Ma! I'm not the only one in our village who wants to join the army — you know that! A dozen young chaps like me have already enlisted. They all wear army caps with a red star on them, they even have a rifle each. . . . I don't want to lag behind them, Ma!"

He could see that his mother was gradually coming round, so Tursoon pressed his point. "If I were going to be a soldier like in the old days, robbing from the people, then it'd be natural for you not to feel happy about it — you even could forbid me to go. But it's different now: I am going to be a soldier of the People's Liberation Army, there's glory in that name!"

At that, Maema was thinking to herself for quite a while. "Isn't it true that the others who've enlisted have parents too? Do they feel sorry or sigh the way I do? Or couldn't it be that they're even happy about it?" Maema felt her face was burning. Wouldn't her women neighbours begin to whisper to each other: "Maema doesn't allow her son to join the army. . . ." She began to think that perhaps she hadn't behaved the way she should. But there was one thing that really worried her — that she would be left alone with her other son Kaji who was still so small. . . . But finally Maema came to a decision. "All right, son," she began in a firm tone of voice. "Go and join the army, if that's your wish. I've nothing to say. But I hope that you'll always do what is expected of you. . . ." She couldn't help herself — her voice faltered when she got so far.

Next morning, several young men rode up to Maema's house on their sturdy horses. All their relatives and neighbours came running to see them off; there was quite a hubbub of excited talk and laughter. Among

the riders was a broad-shouldered, sun-tanned youngster on a sorrel horse, with a red pennant. It was Tursoon saying good-bye to his mother.

"Keep well, dear child!" Maema said. "May peace be with you all the way!"

Tursoon was on the verge of riding off, when she remembered something else she wanted to say. "Write me as often as you can, don't forget! And see that you do everything well — at least as well as the others!" she added for emphasis.

Among the crowd that had gathered to see the young men off was an old man with a white beard who shouted after them in a quavering voice: "Good-bye to you boys! Go safely and return safely!"

The youngsters were off across the wooden bridge between the cliffs. Gradually they vanished into the distance. Maema stood for a long time by the road-side, looking after her son, her eyes wet with tears.

* * *

"How long have I had this headache and the pain in my side now? There seems to be no end! It's more than six months since Tursoon went away, but there's been only one letter from him. Now Kaji is ill, his whole body seems to be burning. . . ."

Seven-year-old Kaji's coughing interrupted Maema's brooding. He had been ill for the past five days now and his cough, getting worse and worse, made his breathing difficult. He tossed and turned, coughing and sneezing intermittently, his eyes and nose running. Maema gently helped him to sit up — lifting his head from the pillow, straightening the bedding and new mattress with a gay floral print over it. Suddenly, with the loud sneeze Kaji gave, there was blood running from his nose and blood from his mouth. . . . Maema was beside herself with fright, her heart was thumping like a hammer. Gently she rubbed the blood off her son's nose and mouth and held him in her arms. . . .

Thus absorbed, she hadn't heard the sound of a lorry grating to a stop. On the lorry was a unit of the People's Liberation Army. It had luckily been discovered in good time that one of the props of the wooden bridge across the cliffs had rotted, so that the bridge might have given under the weight of the vehicle. The men got off to repair the bridge. Some went to look for timber nearby.

Medical Officer Chao Teh-hua and Medical Orderly Nureli came into Maema's courtyard where the geese honked as if in welcome. Only then did Maema notice that there were people coming in. She hastened out to give the visitors a warm reception. Her eyes red from crying made them wonder what was amiss. It didn't take long to find out — inside the house, they found sick little Kaji gasping for breath. The room itself was neat and tidy. There was a fine mat on the *kang*, and the edge of the kitchen stove had carvings. The medical officer hurriedly took off

his great-coat and looked the boy over. Then he asked Maema: "Has he had the measles yet?"

"No, he hasn't," Maema replied.

"Then it probably is the measles he's having now. He'll be all right in a few days."

"Measles?" Maema recoiled in horror. She had had eight children, but six of them had died after they came down with the measles, because quack doctors gave them mercurial preparations and herb medicine.

"We'll give you some medicine for him, and an injection right now," Nureli said. "Don't worry, he'll soon be well again!"

Chao went out, took his medicine kit from the lorry and put on his doctor's gown. Maema looked him up and down scrutinizingly. So this was one of those who wore caps with a red star, as Tursoon had put it, and he was going to save her little boy!

After the injection, Chao took some medicine from his kit and gave it to Maema. When he examined the boy, he had found something wrong with the lungs too. But since Maema was worried enough as it was with the measles, he did not tell her this.

Maema did not know how to thank enough these two men who had dropped from the blue as it were. What anxiety they showed for her boy's life! She would have wanted to give them all the money she had in her purse if she hadn't felt it was too little. So she decided she'd have to give them something else. But when she was going to open the chest on which there were quilts and an eider-down pillow Chao and Nureli, who guessed what she wanted to do, quickly stopped her — it was unthinkable to accept payment for the treatment they'd given.

Nureli was quite emphatic about it. "No, no, Auntie, that won't do!" he said. Then he took out a notebook from his kit and said: "Give this notebook to your little boy when he gets well, to remember us by!"

Although at first Maema would not have it for all their kindness, she was finally persuaded to accept the gift.

Chao patted Maema on the shoulder comfortingly: "That's what the People's Liberation Army is for — to help mothers like you and people everywhere in the country to live happily and in peace. Don't you worry any more — the little boy'll be all right. We've got to be going now."

When they'd made their farewells, Maema's mind turned to things that had happened long ago.

It was the time for harvesting the barley. One late afternoon her husband Kasim was sitting in the doorway sharpening his scythe. Suddenly the gate opened with a bang and in came Masum, the village head, with two armed soldiers. Their eyes were bloodshot and their faces terrible to look at.

"There he is," said Masum, "that's Kasim, the rebel!"

At that, the Kuomintang soldiers had immediately fallen upon Kasim and tied his hands behind his back.

"That's how everyone will end who dares to grumble about our government!" Masum said arrogantly before leaving.

Only then did it dawn on Maema why her husband was nabbed....

When she thought back to this heart-rending scene, her husband's pale face and slight figure seemed to rise before her — her poor husband who had died in a Kuomintang prison, these six years ago....

She heaved a long sigh in spite of herself. "What a pity that he did not live to see this day," she said to herself. . . . "Poor Kasim, how happy he would've been in these days of Chairman Mao Tse-tung!"

Caressing Kaji's face, Maema started thinking again. "How different these two were — how anxious about a poor widow like me! In all my life, I never knew such kindness! And I was so obstinate when Tursoon wanted to join this army. . . . May Heaven keep Kaji — I'll send him myself to military academy so that he'll become a soldier of the People's Liberation Army like those two that were here just now. . . ."

She began to feel more at ease, the weight seemed to have rolled off her heart. Kaji was now breathing evenly, he had dropped into a sound sleep.

Very soon after this event, Maema asked the village teacher Asim to her house. She wanted him to write a letter to Tursoon for her. A clean table-cloth with a floral design was spread over the table for the occasion, and the lamp on the table lit up the whole room. Little Kaji, looking just a trifle thinner than before, was singing a popular song:

March on! Friends, forward!
March on! Friends, forward!
Let's build a New China
In the days of Chairman Mao!

"Asim," said Maema when he had finished writing, "will you please read the letter to me now?" And to her little son she said: "Now hush, Kaji, stop your singing just this while, please!"

Asim threw back the lock that had fallen over his forehead as he read out loud:

My dear son,

Your letter with the photo reached me only recently. I looked and looked at the picture — at first I didn't seem to recognize you. Fancy my Tursoon as a real soldier now! I'm very happy about it. Your little brother Kaji got seriously ill some days ago, but he is quite well again. Imagine — when I felt the most helpless and did not know what to do, two soldiers dropped into our house out of a blue sky. One of them was a Han doctor, by the name of Chao Teh-hua. He examined your little brother and gave him an injection as well as some medicine. The man with Chao gave Kaji a thick, beautiful

notebook for a present. I was so happy I nearly forgot to thank them. Now Kaji carries that notebook around all day long. It has the pictures of Chairman Mao Tse-tung and your Commander-in-Chief Chu Teh in it.

Chao came back several more times to see Kaji and to give him injections. Each time we could talk only by sign language. I really was very annoyed that I could not say to them in their own language: "Thank you for all you've done for us, thank you from the bottom of my heart!"

Tursoon dear, remember what I'm telling you here. Write to Chao, he is such a wonderful young man. Give him a handshake for me too. I wish you two may become fast friends! You can learn from him how to give your best service to the people.

That's all for the present, son. Please write to me often. Just one more word: Little Kaji is boasting that when he grows up he is going to be a soldier just like his big brother!

Till we meet again,

Your ever-loving mother,

Maema.

Translated by Huang Pin-chang

THE RIGHT ROAD

A. MAISWUD

"Hey, get up! Haven't you slept long enough? Just look — the sun is two poles high. Get up! Everyone else went down to the fields long ago."

"What?" Jamal grunted and turned over without opening his eyes.

"Get up! If you don't get up now you'll be late."

Jamal slowly propped himself up on one elbow, yawning, and looked sleepily at his wife.

"Didn't I tell you yesterday? I'm going to the back of the mountain* to make some money. See if I don't make a lot more than our share of grain from the mutual-aid team! I'm not going to the fields today. Can't you let me alone?"

"It's true when people say there's strength in numbers. It's silly to leave the group and go off on your own to try to better yourself."

*Since they live in Turfan, the back of the mountain means Urumchi.

"Stow it, and mind your own business! I prefer Urumchi to this Gobi of yours."

"How can you say such a thing! Haven't you heard the saying: A stone holds dear the place in which it falls?"

"Stop nagging, will you. . . ."

Without another word, Helichihan walked to the stove.

When Jamal had washed his face, he flopped lazily down with one hand beneath his head and his legs crossed in the air, staring dreamily at the ceiling.

"If I don't go to the back of the mountain, I can't find a job that suits me," he was thinking. "Gaeit didn't have much capital either when he started out; yet now he's a top-notch merchant. I'd better take his advice and go into business. Where'll I get the capital though? I know, ten *mou* of green shoots* should bring me a sizable sum! No, that won't do: I shall need some grain to eat. . . . Well, never mind, I'll sell half the green shoots on the plot! That'll leave me enough grain, and provide me with capital too. . . . Molla Ahun said: 'You can get cloth worth 1,500 catties of wheat for half of the ten *mou* of green shoots; then the two of us can till it together!' I'll clinch with him . . . 1,500 catties of wheat can be exchanged for five and a half bolts of cloth further east, to be sold here. . . . One bolt is forty-five metres, and sold retail here one metre will fetch ten catties of wheat; five and a half bolts are over 240 metres, and are worth more than 2,470 catties of wheat. If I take that to the bazaar and sell it to the grain merchants I shall get 490 dollars at the very least. With this sum I can buy over 700 catties of raisins at the bazaar, which I shall sell in Urumchi at a dollar a catty, making over 700 dollars. Then I'll go to Manaz and buy over 3,500 catties of rice for twenty cents a catty; when I bring that back I can realize more than 870 dollars on it. Ha! That's a tidy sum of money! Could I get that much in our mutual-aid team? Of course not, nothing like it! . . . With this money I'll buy material for clothes. . . ."

While Jamal was indulging in these day-dreams, his wife came in again. She put a red-flowered cloth on the table, set on it some maize bread so light that it had split open, and filled the bowls with tea. Her indignant face put a stop to her husband's flight of fancy.

"I advise you to stay here," she said disapprovingly. "You can't go wrong working in the team. Didn't you go to the back of the mountain to work once before? And what did you get out of it? It'll only be the same story all over again. My father says so too."

"You keep out of this! Who's the boss in this house? There's no

*If the peasants were short of money in spring, merchants would buy their newly planted crops while they were still green shoots, collecting the harvest in autumn. Naturally, the price paid was a low one.

need for you to worry. . . . I'm not going to take up the hoe this time, but to trade! Get that? To trade!"

"That's just where you're wrong. . . . All right, I won't stand in your way. Don't keep flying into such a temper. Hurry up and drink your tea. How can you be such a fool. . . ."

After gulping down some tea, Jamal went out. Helichihan went on muttering to herself beside the stove.

At noon a large cart stopped before their gate, and their team leader called out:

"Jamal! Hey, there! Jamal!"

"He's out. Please come in! How are you?" Helichihan walked to the gate.

"Where's he gone?"

"I don't know. He went out quite early."

"We're carting manure to the fields today. We've waited all this time, till now it's noon. We wait and wait, but still he doesn't show up. What does he think he's doing? I've come to look for him."

"He wants to go to the back of the mountain to trade. When I told him I didn't agree, he shouted and stormed at me. He won't listen to a single word I say."

"Oh! So that's the way things are — he wants to go to the back of the mountain to trade, eh?"

"That's it."

They were talking at the gate when Jamal came back.

His shirt was thrown over his shoulders, his embroidered cap was stuck rakishly on his head, and a cigarette hung from his lips. As a matter of fact, he had recently given up smoking the local tobacco and taken to cigarettes.

"Why aren't you working, Jamal?" asked the team leader.

"I'm quitting as from today. I'm going to the back of the mountain to trade. I shan't be joining your mutual-aid team." Jamal spoke indifferently, his eyes on the ground. Apparently he had no particular complaints about the team, and was leaving simply because he hoped to grow rich by trading in Urumchi.

"We can't force you," said the team leader, who was very much put out. "You must do as you please, of course. But I advise you to think this over very carefully. For a farmer like you the right road to better days is by joining the mutual-aid team."

"I happen to think that going to the back of the mountain is better, that's all. Tilling the land is a thankless, back-breaking job."

"Is it such a great thing to go to the city to trade? Is tilling the land just a thankless, back-breaking job? If we all left the land, who would grow grain? You should take a longer view of things, Jamal."

"We can join the mutual-aid team or not as we like. That applies to leaving it too. . . ."

"Act your age, brother! Think it over carefully. We're not forcing you, but it's up to us to make things clear to you."

"Stop the propaganda, will you? A gentleman keeps his word, and I've told you what I've settled. I'm going to the back of the mountain. . . ." Jamal stamped his foot as he spoke. Then he raised his head and gazed at the distant fields. "This won't be like last time when I went to harvest wheat. I'm going into business."

"Are you going to be a pedlar?"

". . . ."

"Say something, can't you, Jamal?" put in his wife.

"What I say makes no difference. I'm a grown man. I can settle my own affairs."

Early the next morning Jamal hurried to the house of the merchant Molla Ahun.

"I've been thinking over your suggestions, brother Molla," he declared. "Let's do as you said!"

To go in with this merchant, Jamal wanted to sell half of his ten *mou* of green shoots which he had watered, ploughed and manured himself.

"No. Really! You're a smart lad," answered Molla. "But things have changed since last I spoke to you. Cloth was cheap then: now it's risen. So I can't give you more than four bolts. You can take it or leave it. . . ."

Jamal scratched his head and thought.

"Remember the good old proverb," said Molla Ahun. "A tiger never turns back, and a gentleman's word is his bond. Don't back out now, brother!"

"All right. I've. . . ."

"Fine! Let's draw up a contract."

"Right. . . ."

They asked a few traders who lived nearby to act as witnesses, and signed a contract. For four bolts of cloth Molla Ahun bought half the crop of Jamal's ten *mou*. He tucked the contract complacently into his diary.

"That's that," he said. "Here are two lengths of dress material for your wife and son as a sign of my goodwill. You can pay me what you like for them in the autumn. You'd better leave tomorrow for Urumchi. Go to X Warehouse and ask for Mamat Ahun. He's got cloth. I'll give you a note to him."

"Won't I lose money that way?" objected Jamal.

"Aw, don't be such a child! Business is like that: you can't expect to make money without losing a little first. There's no need to think it over. Just make up your mind to go. You can't lose, and even if you

did, I'd help you out. A young fellow like you should enjoy seeing something of the world. . . ."

The foolish, puffed up, inexperienced young peasant did not know he had fallen into the wily merchant's trap.

Soon after this, Jamal prepared to set out with a small roll of bedding for Urumchi.

"Old folk are experienced and see far ahead," said his wife angrily. "What the team leader said was right, but you just wouldn't listen!"

"I'm going to find bread for you! Not for fun."

"I don't want bread earned that way. . . . Can't you remember what things were like before, when we knew every hardship there was? It wasn't till the Communist Party came that we could live like human beings. Can't you get that into your head? Now you won't do honest work with the others, but want to find a short cut to wealth yourself. Is that the right way to repay the Party?"

She made no impression at all, however, on Jamal.

Finally, much against her will, Helichihan saw him off. But to show her disapproval, not a bite of food did she give him for the road.

Jamal reached Urumchi one snowy, windy evening. Though spring, it was bitterly cold. He found his way to X Warehouse, asked for Mamat Ahun, and gave him Molla's letter. Mamat was a short, pursy, old merchant with a double chin, goatee, and deep-set eyes, whose belt dangled to his knees.

"You must enjoy yourself for a day or two, my boy," he said. "My goods are still on the road; they'll soon be here. Once they arrive, I'll give you four bolts of flowered prints." He slowly picked up the kettle from the floor.

"Wait a day or two?" echoed Jamal. "But I haven't any money."

"Haven't you even four or five dollars?" The merchant's breath was foul.

"No, I haven't."

"All right, take these thirty dollars to be going on with. We'll settle later." With the "open-handedness" peculiar to merchants, he added: "Just write a receipt."

"All right."

After writing a receipt, Jamal put the thirty dollars in his purse and set off for Second Bridge. As he walked, he fingered the money in his pocket, and several times he took it out to count it. . . . Thirty dollars was enough to go to this young peasant's head. Waiters were calling from the taverns: "Walk in! Take a seat! . . . Ten dumplings: one, two, three. . . ." And the bustle and excitement before the club that evening drew Jamal like a magnet.

Some loafers who hung around in front of the south transport station opposite the White Mosque in Urumchi took to looking Jamal up. These

men had also once believed they could grow rich by trading in Urumchi. They were a lazy lot who had left their farms to enjoy life in a big city; and though some of them had been given work by the Labour Bureau, they disliked hard work and preferred to roam the streets. Jamal soon joined their gang. Though he tried to live as cheaply as he could, in less than four days his thirty dollars was spent. He went back to the warehouse to see Mamat Ahun.

"Have the goods come?" asked Jamal.

"Not yet. God willing, they'll be here tomorrow morning."

"God's tomorrow never comes. . . ."

"Now don't you worry. I'm sure they'll come tomorrow."

"That's really too bad."

"Why, have you spent all that money? Take another twenty dollars."

In this way Jamal spent a hundred and seventy dollars the merchant advanced him.

The summer flashed past, and it was early autumn. Jamal's clothes were not fit to be seen, and he trudged through the crowds in shoes that gaped at the toes.

When you're rich, the whole world's your friend; when you're poor, not a dog comes near you. When Jamal's "friends" came to the end of his money, they left him without a word.

Jamal went back to Mamat. But the merchant's manner had changed, and he gave the peasant an icy look.

"Well, my friend, you'd better be leaving," he said coldly. "Why should you keep coming to me? What do you suppose is still owing to you here? Figure it out for yourself. Molla Ahun wrote four bolts of cloth in his letter. Since the price of cloth is forty-five dollars a bolt now, four bolts cost a hundred and eighty. You had two lengths of material from him too. See. . . ." He showed Molla's letter to Jamal. "At the very cheapest they would cost ten dollars; so you've already spent more than the hundred and eighty dollars which four bolts of cloth are worth. What more do you expect? Go on, be off with you. . . . And don't say I haven't paid you, because here are the receipts you gave me after counting my notes. This is for thirty dollars, this for twenty. Add them up with the rest and how much does it come to?"

The wheat on Jamal's ten *mou* of land would yield at least nine to ten piculs; but he had been tricked out of half the fruits of his labour by these unprincipled merchants. Like a starving python, they had swallowed him up. He had only himself to blame, though. He had brought this on himself, and had no one to whom to complain.

As Jamal was cudgelling his brains, he met a friend named Tursoon who worked in a factory. When Tursoon learned what had happened he was very angry, and with no thought for Jamal's feelings he said bluntly:

"You must be crazy. A crow has been pecking at your head!" Jamal felt bitterly ashamed.

"Listen, friend!" Tursoon advised him finally. "Go to the Labour Bureau and they'll fix you up with a job. If that doesn't suit you, go home and join that mutual-aid team. Don't cut yourself off from everyone else, but stick to your farming; and don't ever try to find another soft job as a trader again, or you'll win yourself a bad name."

Jamal thought it over and sighed. He stroke his moustache and scratched the back of his neck. He knew if he went on like this, it would be the end of him.

"Wait a bit," he said to himself. "How did I land myself in such a fix? I know that scoundrel Molla for what he really is now. Ah, Jamal, a crow has been pecking at your head. . . ."

Later he met a relative who also urged him to go back and join the mutual-aid team. When first he had been given this counsel, he was so set on going into business that he did not take it to heart. Now he understood the value of this advice.

He began to feel homesick, but was ashamed to go home. . . . Still, that was his best way out. He would have to go through with it boldly and not mind the loss of face. "Mistakes can't be hidden," he told himself. "It's home I must go! But she's sure to ask me! 'How much have you brought back with you?' And when she knows the truth, she's bound to give me a scolding. She never wanted me to leave home to trade in the first place. Still, what else can I do?"

A week later, Jamal had made enough by odd jobs for the fare back to Turfan.

He went straight from the station to Molla Ahun's shop, and demanded furiously that they settle scores. He did not know what a slippery customer this old merchant was.

Molla opened a dirty notebook.

"All your receipts are here," he said, pointing at them. "Isn't this your signature?"

"Yes. . . . But. . . ."

"But what? Mamat Ahun sent me these yesterday from Ürumchi."

"Aiya!" Clutching at his collar, Jamal swore beneath his breath: "These merchants are the devil!"

He was silenced and had to leave.

Just as he had expected, as soon as he reached home his wife looked at him searchingly. He began to burn all over. He lowered his head, and started a different subject.

"How are things with the mutual-aid team?"

Helichihan had guessed that her husband would not come back of feeling too pleased with himself.

"Tell me your news first," she said crossly. "Go on!"

". . . ."

"The mutual-aid team has been doing pretty well. After you left, the boy and I were hard put to it; but the team helped us reap half the wheat we still own on our farm. I work in the fields during the day, and in the evening spin yarn, make caps or do embroidery work. . . . We haven't gone cold or hungry."

Jamal was relieved to hear this. He started thinking hard. He dared not look at his wife, but kept his eyes on the ground.

"You did this all alone?"

"No, all of us worked together. Haven't you heard the saying: Working alone you're no better than a beggar? I didn't have crazy ideas like yours. Hah! You despised the others; but they're a generous lot, and they helped me just as if I was one of them. After I joined the team, they were very good to me. . . . I knew long ago how that merchant of yours would let you down. While you could only count pebbles, Molla could already count sand. Everybody here knows what a crook he is. I guessed what would happen to you if you refused to let the Party educate you and couldn't tell friend from foe."

The more she talked, the more indignant she grew. His eyes on the ground, her husband could only sigh.

"The team has done ever so much for us," Helichihan went on. "My own parents couldn't have done more this summer than they did. I felt very bad about it, thanks to you! But they didn't look down on me because of you. How could you, as head of the family. . . ."

Jamal said nothing, as he felt he was not in a position to speak. "My wife's right," he thought with shame. "How can I show my face round here again?"

He could not sleep all night.

The next day after the morning tea, he gave a long, long sigh and scratched the back of his head.

"I've been a fool," he said.

Helichihan knew that he was really repentant, but she wasn't going to comfort him.

"If you'd known that this spring, you wouldn't be so ashamed now."

"Tell me, what ought I to do?"

"Why should I tell you? Think it out for yourself!"

Jamal heaved another long, long sigh.

"I've found . . . I've found the right road. . . . If I don't stick to the others in future, may a dog bite off my head!"

The room was very quiet.

Jamal very nearly broke down.

Translated by Gladys Yang

FIFTEEN STRINGS OF CASH

A *Kunchu* Opera

Original Libretto by Chu Su-chen

Revised by
Chou Chuan-ying, Wang Chuan-sung, Chu Kuo-liang
and other members of the Chekiang
Kunchu Opera Company

Final Version by Chen Sze

LIST OF CHARACTERS

YU HU-LU, *a drunkard*

CHIN KU-HSIN, *his old neighbour*

SU SHU-CHUAN, YU's *stepdaughter*

LOU THE RAT

HSIUNG YU-LAN, *an agent for a merchant*

KUO YU-CHIH, *magistrate of Wusih*

KUANG CHUNG, *prefect of Soochow*

GOVERNOR CHOU CHEN

WARDEN HSIA

FOUR NEIGHBOURS

FOUR RUNNERS

GAOLER

SERVANT

FOUR EXECUTIONERS

ADJUTANT

INSPECTOR

LIEUTENANT

FOUR CONSTABLES

GUARDS

ATTENDANTS

SCENE I

THE RAT COMMITS MURDER

(*The back of the stage is curtained off.*)

(YU *staggers into the main street, drunk, carrying fifteen strings of cash over his shoulder.*)

YU: Phew! What a weight!

*The more I drink, the better I feel;**
The more I lose, the less I have;
I was in despair—my shop had been closed so long—
And I've been running around to borrow money.

Since my pork shop closed, I've had to live solely by borrowing and pawning, and things have been looking black. Luckily my dear departed wife has a sister at Kaochiao who's a warm-hearted, generous woman. Today she treated me to two pots of wine, and lent me fifteen strings of cash to get my business going again. What luck!

Who's as kind as my sister-in-law?
Few women will do as much for the poor as she.
I left her house at dusk,
Now the watch has sounded and I'm nearly home.

In the past I always got Uncle Chin to buy pigs for me. Tomorrow when I go to the market, I shall have to ask him to help again. Here's his house. I wonder if he's in. Uncle Chin!

CHIN (*offstage*): Who is it?

YU (*in a falsetto voice*): It's me! (*He makes faces.*) Oho!

(*Enter* CHIN.)

CHIN: So it's you, Old Yu! You always must have your bit of fun. It's growing late; what do you want me for?

YU: Look, uncle! (*He points proudly to the money.*)

CHIN: Where did you get so much money?

YU: I picked it up on the road.

CHIN: There you go, joking again.

YU (*laughs*): To tell you the truth, these fifteen strings of cash were lent me by my sister-in-law at Kaochiao as capital for my business.

CHIN: Good! With this you can open your shop again, and you won't have to worry where your next meal's coming from. My sales of wine

*The lines printed in italics are sung or recited.

and oil will go up too. Tomorrow if you want to buy a pig, let's go together again.

YU: Thank you, uncle.

CHIN: I'm afraid you're too drunk to remember. Tomorrow I'll come to fetch you.

YU: Thanks, thanks.

CHIN: See you tomorrow then. (*Exit.*)

(YU *walks to his own door.*)

YU:

Leaving Chin's grocery shop,
I've come to my pork shop.

(*He knocks.*) Open the door! Open up!

(*The inner curtain is drawn back to reveal* YU's *house. Enter* SU SHU-CHUAN.)

SU: Coming! (*She opens the door.*) So you're back, father.

YU: Yes, daughter. (*He puts the money down.*)

SU: Where did you get so much money?

YU: Where do you think?

SU: Did you borrow it?

YU: Who's kind-hearted enough to lend me so much money?

Su Shu-chuan

SU: How did you get it then?

YU: Ah, it's no use hiding it from you now. This morning when I went out, I happened to meet Mrs. Chang the go-between, and she told me that Mr. Wang's daughter is getting married and needs a slave girl; so I sold you to them for fifteen strings of cash.

SU: You don't mean it?!

YU: You've to go over there first thing tomorrow morning; so you'd better start packing up.

SU: Oh, mother! (*She goes out crying.*)

YU: I was speaking in fun, but she's taken it seriously. I'll let her fret tonight, and tell her the truth tomorrow. What a joke this is! Now let's put away the money and have a good sleep. (*He stretches himself out on the bed and falls asleep.*)

(*Enter* SU.)

SU (*wiping her eyes*): I want to cry my heart out—

I feel like a lonely boat on the wide, wide sea,
When billows heave and roll, and no shore can be seen!
I'll plead with him, for my dead mother's sake,
To take pity on her child and give back that money.

Father! Father! Ah, he's fast asleep.

He's not my real father, so he treats me like a stranger;
He's made up his mind to sell me, so why should he pity me?
I'm afraid I shan't be able to talk him round.
In vain I pray to Heaven in my panic,
My heart seems pierced with arrows,
And I call my mother till my lips are dry!

(*She sees the chopper on the table and is about to kill herself when she remembers her aunt at Kaochiao.*) Wait! I remember my aunt at Kaochiao once said: "If you're in any trouble, just come to me." Now things have reached such a pass, I'd better go to her.

I hope my aunt will save me!
While he's in a drunken sleep,
I'd better go as fast as I can to Kaochiao.

(*She slips out and runs away.*)

(*Enter* LOU THE RAT.)

RAT:

Having gambled and lost all my ill-gotten gains,
I'm out to find a new victim!

I, Lou the Rat, am neither tradesman nor peasant—I live by my wits. I don't care what trade men follow or what they are like; if they've money I try to cheat them of it or steal it. I may have a bad reputation, yet I've plenty of sworn brothers in the gambling houses and plenty of friends in the yamen; so I'm treated with respect. Yesterday I swindled some money out of a fellow, but luck was against me and I lost it all at dice. These dice of mine are loaded, but all

those players tonight were old hands at the game, and I wasn't able to trick them. I want to get back my money, but I've nothing left for a stake. I must hurry up and find someone I can fool. (*He looks furtively round.*) Ha! Why is Yu Hu-lu's door open and his lamp still lit? He must be killing pigs again. Let me get a few catties of pork on credit, and have a good meal before I do anything else. (*He enters* YU's *door.*) Uncle Yu. . . . Sister Yu. . . . Why, he's sound asleep. He must have got drunk, and forgotten to blow out the light and close the door. Well, there's a chopper on the table. I may as well take that to raise a few cash. Oho! I see a pile of cash under his pillow. Fine, fine! (*He puts down the chopper.*)

A lucky star shines on me,
Now I am happy,
(*He steps forward to take the money, but hesitates for fear of waking* YU.)
Yet I quake with fear.
I was just worrying about having no money, but now—
With this cash I need worry no more!
I can go to the gambling house,
And play for high stakes.

Lou the Rat

And if I win,

I shall buy myself a good meal,

Then visit the singsong girls.

(*He starts to take the money, but* YU *wakes up.*)

YU: Who is it? Help! Thief! Thief! (*He seizes the* RAT.) So it's you, Rat! You owe me money, and now you want to rob me!

(YU *tries to get his money back. They fight, and finally the* RAT *kills* YU *with the chopper.*)

RAT: Now, Yu Hu-lu, you can't blame me for this. If I hadn't killed you, you'd have made such trouble for me I'd never have been able to hold up my head again.

I was driven to desperation,

That's why I killed this man;

Now let me make off quickly with the money!

(*As the* RAT *is about to leave he hears the night-watchman approaching. He hurries back into the room, blows out the light and hides behind the bed. Some of the cash slip off the strings, but he has no time to pick them all up. When he hears the watchman has gone he peers out and, finding no one there, runs quickly off. He has left his dice behind the bed.*)

(*Enter* OLD CHIN.)

CHIN:

Kinsmen help kinsmen, friends help friends;

The rich help the rich, and the poor help the poor.

The door is open; I dare say he's up already. (*He goes in.*) Old Yu! Old Yu! Ah, what's this on the ground to trip people up? It's Old Yu. Hey, you! Wake up! Why sleep on the ground instead of in your bed? (*He shakes* YU.) Help! Help! He's covered with blood! The man's been murdered! Shu-chuan! Shu-chuan! The girl has disappeared too. (*He goes out.*) Neighbours, neighbours! Murder! Here, all of you!

(*Enter four* NEIGHBOURS *and the* RAT.)

FIRST AND SECOND NEIGHBOURS: What are you shouting about?

CHIN: Help! Murder!

THIRD AND FOURTH NEIGHBOURS: Who's been murdered?

CHIN: Yu Hu-lu!

NEIGHBOURS: Ah!

RAT: I don't believe it.

CHIN: Go in and see for yourself.

NEIGHBOURS: Come on. Let's go in and see.

(*They go in and are horrified at the sight of* YU*'s corpse.*)

His throat has been cut; there is blood all over his chest;

His face is like wax; he is lying dead in the dust!

CHIN: Look at all that blood on the chopper.

NEIGHBOURS: He was obviously killed with this chopper.

HSIANG SHENG-MU (1597-1658):
The Wind-Swept Tree

RAT: Oh, look at all the blood! Doesn't it give you a turn?
NEIGHBOURS: How did you come to find him, Uncle Chin?
RAT: That's right: how did you know?
CHIN: Last night he came and told me he'd borrowed fifteen strings of cash from his sister-in-law at Kaochiao, and asked me to help him buy a pig this morning. So I came first thing to fetch him; but he was already dead.
SECOND NEIGHBOUR: Where are the fifteen strings of cash?
CHIN (*looking round*): They seem to have gone.
THIRD NEIGHBOUR: And where is his daughter?
CHIN: She's gone too.
NEIGHBOURS: Strange!
The father is dead and the daughter has gone;
This certainly looks suspicious.
FOURTH NEIGHBOUR:
The strings of cash must be the root of the trouble.
He was destined to be poor, so he came to this frightful end.
CHIN:
Some thief may have stolen the money and murdered him,
And kidnapped the girl as well.
SECOND NEIGHBOUR:
But you'd think a murderer would bring his own weapon;
It's very strange that he should use this chopper.
FIRST NEIGHBOUR:
Perhaps it was Shu-chuan
Who killed her father and ran away with the money.
THIRD NEIGHBOUR:
No, Shu-chuan is a good, honest girl;
She would never do a wicked thing like this.
RAT:
You know the proverb: When a girl has grown,
To keep her at home will only make for trouble.
Shu-chuan must have had a lover;
Together they killed her father and stole the money,
And now the guilty love-birds have flown away.
CHIN AND SECOND NEIGHBOUR:
But has anyone ever seen her with a man?
FIRST, THIRD AND FOURTH NEIGHBOURS:
Have we ever seen any lover?
RAT:
A wench of that age has her own ideas,
And is lonely without a man.
If she had a lover, of course she'd keep it a secret;
But whoever used this chopper wasn't a stranger.
No, she put on dutiful airs, but all the time

The minx was plotting evil.
She is certainly the murderess;
No need to look any further!

CHIN: Whether this was done by a thief or by her, the murderer can't have got very far. Let's divide up our forces. (*To the* SECOND *and* FOURTH NEIGHBOURS.) You two had better report this to the yamen. (*To the* FIRST *and* THIRD NEIGHBOURS *and the* RAT.) We four can chase the murderer.

SECOND AND FOURTH NEIGHBOURS: All right, we'll report this to the magistrate. (*Exeunt.*)

FIRST AND THIRD NEIGHBOURS, AND CHIN: Come on. Let's catch the murderer! (*Exeunt.*)

RAT: I'll go with you! I'll go with you! (*Exit.*)

(*Curtain.*)

SCENE II

THE INNOCENT ARE SUSPECTED

(The back of the stage is curtained off.)

*(*HSIUNG YU-LAN, *carrying money over his shoulder, hurries down the highway outside the town.)*

HSIUNG: Here I go!

My family is poor,
I've a job to keep my parents,
And a bitter time I have of it
Serving another man.
My master is a rich merchant,
And many the hardships I suffer,
Buying and selling all day
To make money for him.
I travel through Soochow, Hangchow, Huchow and Kwangchow,
Anhwei, Kiangsi and Fukien,
Trading in silk, medicinal herbs, and dainties of sea and mountain.
(Exit.)

(Enter SU SHU-CHUAN, *very tired.)*

SU:

My legs ache, my feet hurt. (She stumbles.)
My throat is parched, I'm drenched with sweat;
But I hurry on, for fear they come after me.

I've been running till I'm exhausted, and my head is reeling. I wonder how much further it is to Kaochiao. What a hard life I've had!

An orphan with no folk of my own,
Like a withered leaf in the wind,
I have no one to pity me or think of me.
My one hope now
Is to go to my aunt at Kaochiao,
And tell her all my troubles. (Exit.)

(The NEIGHBOURS *cross the stage in pursuit. Enter* HSIUNG YU-LAN.)

HSIUNG:

I toil like an ox till my strength is spent,
Still it's hard to support my parents;
And who knows when I'll be able to keep a wife,
And live happily with her?

SU (*offstage*): Please stop a moment, traveller!
HSIUNG: Ah, it's a young woman!
Does she want to ask the way?
Why is she all alone?
(*Enter* SU SHU-CHUAN.)
HSIUNG: What can I do for you, sister?
SU:
I very seldom leave home;
Now I've lost my way, and I'm worried,
That's why I called to you.
Can you tell me, please, which is the way to Kaochiao?
HSIUNG: Why are you in such a hurry, sister?
SU: I'm going to Kaochiao to see a relative.
HSIUNG: Why are none of your family with you?
SU: Because—because—
They're all of them busy at home,
And my parents couldn't come;
I have to go to Kaochiao on urgent business,
But I don't know the way—can you direct me, please?

Hsiung Yu-lan

HSIUNG: So that's how it is. If you want to go to Kaochiao, sister, I happen to be travelling that way myself. We can go together.

SU: Thank you.

HSIUNG } :
SU }

I walk ahead.
He walks ahead.

She walks behind.
I walk behind.

Though we travel together, we are strangers.
We are strangers.

I haven't asked her name;
There's no need for strangers to ask.

FIRST NEIGHBOUR (*offstage*): There are two people in front! Can they be the murderers? Let's make haste to catch up with them!

HSIUNG } :
SU }

Suddenly we hear shouting!

NEIGHBOURS (*offstage*): Hey, stop, you two in front!

HSIUNG } :
SU }

We see men rushing towards us.

(SU SHU-CHUAN *falls down in fright, and* HSIUNG *is just helping her up when* CHIN, *the* FIRST *and* THIRD NEIGHBOURS *and the* RAT *come in. They are shocked to see* SU SHU-CHUAN *with a strange young man.*)

NEIGHBOURS: Aha!

We know men's faces but not their hearts!
We never thought it of her—
That she'd have an affair with a wicked murderer!

CHIN: A fine thing you've done, Shu-chuan!

SU: I'm going to see my aunt, Uncle Chin. What's wrong with that?

NEIGHBOURS: Your father has been murdered.

SU (*horrified*): What? Is father dead?

NEIGHBOURS: Of course he is!

(SU SHU-CHUAN *wants to start home, but they bar her way.*)

NEIGHBOURS: Where do you think you're going?

SU: I'm going home to see what's happened.

NEIGHBOURS: Pah!

Whom do you think you're deceiving?

SU: If father has been killed, why won't you let me go back to have a look?

NEIGHBOURS:

Hand in glove with your lover, you killed your father,

Stole his money and thought you'd run away.
Now we've caught the pair of you,
Don't think you can escape!

HSIUNG: No wonder she was in such a hurry! (*He turns to go.*)

NEIGHBOURS: Hey! You can't go!

HSIUNG: Why not?

CHIN: If you go, who's going to take the blame for your crime?

RAT: That's right. Do you want to leave *me* to take the blame?

THIRD NEIGHBOUR: Don't waste time talking. Let's see whether he's got the fifteen strings of cash.

(*They take* HSIUNG*'s money from him after a scuffle.*)

HSIUNG: Hey! That's *my* money!

NEIGHBOURS: We'll count it and see.

CHIN: Let me count it: five, ten, fifteen! You see, not a string more, not a string less, but exactly fifteen! Do you still want to brazen things out?

NEIGHBOURS:

You robbed, you murdered, you kidnapped a girl,
You cur with the heart of a wolf!

RAT:

You out-and-out villain,
You bold, bad man,
You wicked murderer!

HSIUNG: Gentlemen, my name is Hsiung Yu-lan, and I work for the merchant Tao Fu-chu. My master gave me these fifteen strings of cash to take to Changchow to buy wooden combs. I've never set eyes on this young woman before—how can you accuse me of murder?

SU: I've never met this young man before—you mustn't wrong an innocent person!

NEIGHBOURS: Why should we take your word for it? How do we know you're not lying?

HSIUNG: My master, Tao Fu-chu, is staying in Welcome Inn in front of Yuanmiaokuan Temple in Soochow. If you gentlemen don't believe me, you can send someone to find out.

NEIGHBOURS (*looking at each other uncertainly*):

Can we believe him or not?
Is this true or false?
This is a difficult problem for us to settle.

RAT: We've got the culprits, we've got the loot. If *they* didn't kill Yu Hu-lu, who did?

(*Enter two* RUNNERS *with the* SECOND *and* FOURTH NEIGHBOURS.)

RAT: Here are the murderers, brothers. Hurry up and arrest them!

(*The* RUNNERS *put chains on* HSIUNG *and* SU.)

RUNNERS:

When you murder a man

You must pay with your lives;
You've only yourselves to blame!
Come on!

NEIGHBOURS: Steady on! We'd better get to the bottom of this first!

FIRST RUNNER: Never mind about that. It'll all be cleared up in court!

SECOND RUNNER: Come on! The rest of you had better come too.

NEIGHBOURS: All right.

(*They troop off, followed by the* RAT.)

(*Curtain.*)

SCENE III

AN UNJUST SENTENCE IS PASSED

(*The Wusih county court. Enter the* THIRD *and* FOURTH RUNNERS, *followed by* KUO YU-CHIH, *magistrate of Wusih.*)

KUO:

The people here are unruly,
What with shrews and rogues we have no end of lawsuits;
To keep the peace I rule with a rod of iron;
Unless I make myself feared there will always be trouble.

Since I came to this post, I've had to deal with many difficult cases. Fortunately, though the people here are a cunning lot, with my keen power of detection, I can get to the bottom of nine cases out of ten. My brilliance and integrity are known to all, from the governor down to the common citizens. Today I am trying Yu Hu-lu's murderers. They've already been arrested; so I'll take my seat in court to deal with the case. Here! Open the court!

THIRD AND FOURTH RUNNERS: Yes, Your Honour!

KUO: Bring in the dead man's neighbours!

THIRD RUNNER: The neighbours are wanted in court!

(*The* NEIGHBOURS *enter and kneel.*)

NEIGHBOURS: We greet Your Honour.

KUO: Are all of you Yu Hu-lu's neighbours?

NEIGHBOURS: Yes, Your Honour.

KUO: Stand up to answer my questions.

NEIGHBOURS: Yes, Your Honour. (*They rise.*)

KUO: How did you know Yu Hu-lu had been murdered? How did you catch the two murderers?

CHIN: Please, Your Honour, it was like this: Yesterday evening, after borrowing fifteen strings of cash from a relative in Kaochiao, Yu Hu-lu came to ask me to help him buy pigs. I was afraid he might oversleep because he'd been drinking, so I got up early to call him—only to find he'd been murdered! And his daughter Su Shu-chuan had disappeared too. Some of us reported the matter to the authorities while the rest of us hurried off to catch the murderers. We'd nearly got to Kaochiao when we saw Su Shu-chuan walking with a man. The man had exactly fifteen strings of cash on him. . . .

KUO: Ah! So Hsiung Yu-lan was carrying exactly fifteen strings of cash?

NEIGHBOURS: Yes, Your Honour.

KUO: And they were walking together, eh? (*He thinks.*) In that case, Hsiung Yu-lan and Su Shu-chuan plotted this murder together—no doubt about it!

NEIGHBOURS: We don't know about that, Your Honour.

RAT: If His Honour says they plotted this murder together, then that's what happened.

KUO: All right. You're dismissed.

(*The* NEIGHBOURS *leave.*)

RAT: Ah! His Honour is truly a shrewd and upright judge. Aha! A shrewd and upright judge! (*Exit.*)

KUO: Call for Su Shu-chuan.

THIRD RUNNER: Su Shu-chuan is wanted in court!

(*The* FIRST *and* SECOND RUNNERS *drag her in.*)

FIRST RUNNER: Here are the stolen fifteen strings of cash.

SU: Your Honour!

KUO: Look up!

SU: I dare not.

Kuo Yu-chih

KUO: If I tell you to look up, do as I say! (SU SHU-CHUAN *raises her head.*) Pretty as a blossom — of course she had a lover, a hot-blooded young girl like that in the springtime of life! Once she fell in love with that scoundrel, she naturally wanted to run away with him. Since her father stood in her way, she killed him and stole his money — that was only to be expected. I can guess without asking pretty well what happened. Su Shu-chuan, why did you plot with that scoundrel to steal fifteen strings of cash, kill your father and run away?

SU: I did nothing of the sort, Your Honour!

KUO: Ha! She denies it all! Then answer me this: How is it your name is Su while your father's is Yu?

SU: My own father died when I was a child, and my mother took me with her when she married again; but I kept my father's name. That's why I'm called Su.

KUO: There we have it! Because you weren't his own daughter, when he saw you flirting and spoiling his reputation he naturally spoke to you sharply. Then you started hating him, and decided to kill him. Isn't that the way it was?

SU: I never did any such thing!

KUO: Nonsense! The proverb says: To call a man thief you must catch him red-handed. To call a woman adulteress you must catch her with her lover. Now you and this scoundrel have both been caught, the fifteen strings of cash are here, and we've the neighbours as witnesses. In the face of all this evidence, you can't say I'm accusing you unjustly!

SU: But I did nothing wrong, Your Honour!

My father sold me
Because he needed money;
But I couldn't bear to be a slave,
So I ran away by night;
When I didn't know the way,
I asked a man on the road;
Then suspicion fell on me
And, trying to escape from one trouble,
I found myself in much worse!

KUO: A pack of lies! The neighbours just told me that your father borrowed those fifteen strings of cash from a relative. Now, to blacken his name, you accuse him of selling you! For all you're so young you are thoroughly depraved — a hardened criminal! I've got to the bottom of many cases much more difficult than this! However cunning you are, you can't deceive *me*!

SU: Heaven!

KUO:

You thief and parricide,

How dare you deny your guilt?
Unless I have you punished
You will go on defying me.

Hurry up and confess!

SU: How can I confess when I've done nothing wrong?

KUO: Here! Take her away and give her a taste of the thumb-screws!

(*Three* RUNNERS *drag* SU SHU-CHUAN *off. Presently the* FIRST RUNNER *comes back.*)

FIRST RUNNER: The girl can't stand torture: she's fainted away.

KUO: Stop torturing her then.

FIRST RUNNER: Stop the torture!

(*Two* RUNNERS *drag* SU SHU-CHUAN *in. She falls fainting to the ground.*)

KUO: Make her sign the confession!

FIRST RUNNER (*thrusting the confession into her hands*): Sign!

(*After her torture,* SU SHU-CHUAN *cannot hold the brush. The* FIRST RUNNER *forces her to make a fingerprint.*)

KUO: Take her away. Have her chained and thrown into gaol!

(*Two* RUNNERS *drag* SU SHU-CHUAN *off, then return.*)

KUO: Bring in that scoundrel Hsiung!

FIRST AND SECOND RUNNERS: The scoundrel Hsiung is wanted in court!

(*They drag him in.*)

HSIUNG: Your Honour!

KUO: Hsiung Yu-lan! You plotted with Su Shu-chuan, stole fifteen strings of cash, and murdered Yu Hu-lu. Hurry up and confess!

HSIUNG: I beg Your Honour to hear me:

I arrived here the day before yesterday only from Soochow,
On my way to buy goods in Changchow.
That girl didn't know the way,
And because I was taking that road I accompanied her.
I had never seen her before,
Never had a love affair,
These fifteen strings of cash were to purchase goods.
What crime have I committed?

KUO: Glib, smooth-tongued rascal! Who do you think believes you? If you are on your way from Soochow to Changchow, how did you happen to meet Su Shu-chuan just at that particular time? If you had never met her before, why was she walking with you and nobody else? If the fifteen strings of cash were to purchase goods, why was the amount exactly the same as the sum stolen from Yu Hu-lu? Su Shu-chuan has admitted the truth. Hurry up and confess!

HSIUNG: How can I confess when I am innocent?

KUO: Here! Take him away and give him forty strokes!

(*The* RUNNERS *lay hands on* HSIUNG *to drag him off.*)

HSIUNG: You can beat me to death, but can't force me to confess!

KUO: What!

You can stand a little punishment;
But not real torture.
If you refuse to confess,
The leg-screws are waiting for you!

HSIUNG: I am innocent!

KUO: Here! Get ready to torture him!

RUNNERS: Yes, Your Honour!

(*They drag* HSIUNG YU-LAN *off. Soon the* FIRST RUNNER *comes back.*)

FIRST RUNNER: The felon has fainted away.

KUO: Stop the torture then.

FIRST RUNNER: Stop the torture! (*Exit.*)

(*The* RUNNERS *drag* HSIUNG *in. He falls to the ground.*)

HSIUNG:

For walking with a girl I was accused of murder:
This was a bolt from the blue!
The torture is hard to bear!

RUNNERS (*crowding round*): Confess!

(HSIUNG *says nothing.*)

KUO: Make him sign!

RUNNERS: Sign the confession!

HSIUNG (*angrily snatching the brush*):

Injustice deep as the ocean!

(*The* RUNNERS *force him to sign.*)

KUO: Here! Take him away, have him chained and locked in the gaol!

(*Crying out that he has been wronged,* HSIUNG *is dragged off by the* RUNNERS.)

KUO: Oho! It didn't take me long to get to the bottom of this important murder case, and make it as clear as day! Yes,

Only a brilliant man
Could settle a case so fast!

The court is dismissed!

(*Curtain.*)

SCENE IV

AN EXECUTION IS ORDERED

(*The back of the stage is curtained off.*)

(*The Soochow gaol. Enter two* EXECUTIONERS.)

FIRST EXECUTIONER:

I carry the executioner's sword,

SECOND EXECUTIONER:

To execute criminals.

(*They walk to the gate of the gaol.*)

EXECUTIONERS: Open up!

GAOLER: Coming! (*He opens the gate.*) Well, friends, so it's you. What's your business?

FIRST EXECUTIONER: The governor wants Prefect Kuang to see to the execution of two criminals from Wusih County in Changchow Prefecture tonight. Our orders are to take Hsiung Yu-lan to the execution ground!

GAOLER: Just wait a minute, friends. (*The* EXECUTIONERS *withdraw.*) Come here, Hsiung Yu-lan!

HSIUNG (*offstage*): Heaven help me!

I am bursting with rage at my wrongs! (*He comes in.*)

Curse that dolt of an official

And his irresponsible judgement!

GAOLER: Congratulations,* Hsiung Yu-lan!

HSIUNG (*dismayed*):

I shudder to hear this greeting!

Do you mean . . . do you mean. . . .

GAOLER: Though a man lives to be a hundred, he has to die some day. Don't take it too much to heart.

HSIUNG:

I am going to be killed unjustly;

How can I rest quiet in my grave?

GAOLER: Now the magistrate of Wusih has passed sentence, the prefect of Changchow has confirmed it, and the provincial governor has got an order for your execution from the capital. The case is closed,

*When a man condemned to death was congratulated it meant that his execution was near.

the matter's clinched. Even if you were wronged, there's nothing you can do about it now.

HSIUNG:

A stroke of bad luck and I lose my life!
Who will look after my white-haired parents now?

GAOLER: If your case had been tried by our Prefect Kuang, there'd have been no miscarriage of justice. Everyone knows that Prefect Kuang loves the people like his own children: he's a second Prefect Pao.* He's to supervise the execution today.

HSIUNG: Is Prefect Kuang to supervise the execution?

GAOLER: Yes.

HSIUNG:

If only he would investigate my case,
And make the dead live again!

GAOLER: His orders are just to see to the execution: it's not in his power to re-open the case. Even if he knew you were innocent, he couldn't do anything for you.

EXECUTIONERS (*offstage*): Hurry up! It's time to go!

GAOLER: Coming!

(*They leave.*)

(*The inner curtain rises to show the Soochow prefectural court. An* ADJUTANT *and a* SERVANT *enter, followed by* PREFECT KUANG.)

KUANG:

Strictly upholding the law,
Both loved and feared,
I try to understand the people's sorrows,
And study their conditions,
Striving to be another Prefect Pao.

Since I became prefect of Soochow, we have had good harvests and the people are well content. I have received an order from above to supervise two executions tonight. The executioners have already set out with their prisoners. They should be here by now.

EXECUTIONERS (*offstage*): Get a move on!

(PREFECT KUANG *takes his seat in court.*)

EXECUTIONERS (*offstage*): Hurry up!

(*Enter four* EXECUTIONERS *with* HSIUNG YU-LAN *and* SU SHU-CHUAN.)

EXECUTIONERS: The felons are here! (*Announcing themselves.*) We have brought the felons to court!

HSIUNG } : I am innocent, Your Honour!
SU } : Save me, Your Honour.

KUANG: What!

Whoever commits a murder
Must forfeit his own life;

*Pao Cheng, prefect of Kaifeng, capital of the Northern Sung Dynasty (960–1127). He was loved by the people for his justice.

In the statutes of the law
This is clearly stated.
Look up!
(*Two* EXECUTIONERS *help* HSIUNG YU-LAN *and* SU SHU-CHUAN *to raise their heads.*)
You should have been loyal, hard-working citizens,
Instead of thieves and murderers.
Because you broke the law of men and Heaven,
You are sentenced to lose your lives.
(*The two* EXECUTIONERS *return to their former positions.*)
Yes, guilty lovers meet their death through lust,
And grasping thieves through greed!
Take off their chains!
(*The* EXECUTIONERS *assent. They remove the prisoners' chains and offer them wine; but* HSIUNG *and* SU *refuse it.*)
KUANG: Take off their clothes and tie them up!
(*The* EXECUTIONERS *assent. They bind the prisoners.*)
The wicked must feel the severity of the law,
Undue clemency draws no line between right and wrong.
EXECUTIONERS: We have bound the prisoners!
HSIUNG, SU: Your Honour!
My wrongs are higher than a mountain!
My wrongs are deeper than the sea!
KUANG: Silence!
EXECUTIONERS: Silence!
KUANG:
If you are innocent, how was your guilt established?
Where were the witnesses and evidence found?
Executioners!
(*The* EXECUTIONERS *respond.*)
As soon as the fifth watch sounds. . . .
HSIUNG, SU: Your Honour!
KUANG:
You must draw your swords!
(*The* EXECUTIONERS *draw their swords.*)
And strike off the prisoners' heads!
(*One of the* EXECUTIONERS *presents the order for the execution, and the* PREFECT *picks up his brush to endorse it.*)
HSIUNG, SU: Your Honour!
(*The* EXECUTIONERS *shout to silence them, but the* PREFECT *checks them with a glance.*)
HSIUNG: They say you love the people like your own children, and are

a second Prefect Pao. Then will you close your eyes to a terrible wrong, and let me die unjustly?

SU: If you execute innocent citizens, how can you call yourself a good official, or say you love the people?

(*The* EXECUTIONERS *shout to silence her.*)

KUANG (*checking the* EXECUTIONERS): Consider how many courts your case has passed through. After three trials and six interrogations, the case is already closed. You both insist you are innocent; but without any evidence how can I believe you? You say you have been wronged —prove it!

HSIUNG: Your Honour! I was sentenced for plotting murder with this girl, but there's nothing to support that charge!

KUANG: Why is there nothing to support the charge?

HSIUNG: My home is in Huaian, hers in Wusih: we had never met before. She lost her way and I happened to show her the road; but does that mean we had a secret affair? I travel all the year round for the merchant Tao Fu-chu, buying and selling local products for him. The fifteen strings of cash I was carrying were given me by my master to buy wooden combs in Changchow. I didn't steal them!

KUANG: Where is your master now?

HSIUNG: At the time I left, he was living in Welcome Inn opposite Yuanmiaokuan Temple in Soochow. When I came back with the goods, we were both going to Fukien to sell them. If you don't believe me, Your Honour, send a man to find out.

(KUANG *thinks.*)

SU: I don't know this young man. I was going to Kaochiao to see my aunt, but because I asked him the way, people suspected us; and now he's condemned to be killed although he's done nothing wrong. I got him into this trouble! If you can find out where this gentleman comes from, Your Honour, you'll know that it isn't true that we plotted murder together.

KUANG (*to the* SERVANT): Here! Go as fast as you can to Welcome Inn opposite Yuanmiaokuan Temple, and check this story.

(*The* SERVANT *takes the order and goes out.* PREFECT KUANG *picks up the documents on the case and studies them carefully.*)

KUANG: One lived in Huaian, the other in Wusih,
How could they be lovers?
One was going to Changchow, one to Kaochiao,
But that needn't prevent them travelling together.
There's no positive proof of their guilt,
And it's hard to say whether Hsiung's fifteen strings of cash
Were money for goods or not.
How could sentence of death be passed
Without checking the prisoners' stories
And finding out the truth?

(*Enter the* SERVANT.)

SERVANT: Your Honour! I went to make inquiries, and it's true. Tao Fu-chu has already left for Fukien on business. The innkeeper says this Hsiung Yu-lan does work for Tao Fu-chu, and Tao did give him fifteen strings of cash to take to Changchow. Here's the register from Welcome Inn. Will Your Honour please look at that?

KUANG (*reading from the register*): Tao Fu-chu, Hsiung Yu-lan. (*To* HSIUNG.) When did you come to Soochow, Hsiung Yu-lan?

HSIUNG: On the eighth of the fourth month.

KUANG: When did you leave for Changchow?

HSIUNG: On the fifteenth of the fourth month.

KUANG (*to himself*): It does look as if this man has been wrongly accused.

SU: Your Honour! Now that you've found out about this gentleman, won't you make amends to him?

KUANG: Su Shu-chuan, we can investigate further to see if you and Hsiung Yu-lan plotted murder together or not. But how did you come to leave home just the day that your father was murdered?

"This brush weighs a thousand pounds"
— Kuang Chung

SU: Your Honour, when my stepfather came home that evening, he brought fifteen strings of cash which he said he'd raised by selling me. I didn't want to be a slave girl, so I ran away late that night to look for my aunt. What proof is there that I stole the money or killed my stepfather?

KUANG (*to himself*): If she didn't kill him, we must find the real murderer. If she did kill him, we must find genuine proof. How can we trump up a story and pass sentence of death so lightly? They mustn't be executed! They mustn't be executed! (*He suddenly remembers his position.*) Wait!

My orders are to supervise this execution,
I have no authority to re-open this case.
What can I in Soochow do about wrongs in Changchow?
Besides,
The order has come from the ministry,
And will have to be obeyed!
(*He takes up his brush again, but hesitates.*) Ah, no! No, no!
This brush weighs a thousand pounds:
It can sign away two lives!
(*He is completely at a loss.*) Ah!
Since I know injustice has been done,
I should have the sentence reviewed;
If I kill the innocent,
How can I call myself a good official?
Executioners!
(*The* EXECUTIONERS *respond.*)

KUANG: I want you to take the prisoners into the ante-room for the time being, and wait for further instructions.

EXECUTIONERS: Please think again, Your Honour! Our orders are to kill them! We mustn't delay!

KUANG: That's enough! I know what to do.

(*Just as the* EXECUTIONERS *are about to lead* HSIUNG YU-LAN *and* SU SHU-CHUAN *off, the third quarter of the second watch sounds.*)

EXECUTIONERS: Your Honour! They must be killed by the fifth watch at the latest. If we're any later than that, how can we answer for it?

KUANG: Ha!
The order is to kill them by the fifth watch,
And the third watch is nearly here.
This case will be hard to re-open,
And I have no plan of action—
What can I do?
(*Thoroughly upset, he thinks hard.*) Since injustice has been done, it's my duty to save them. I shouldn't hesitate to defend the people! (*To the* EXECUTIONERS.) Take the prisoners away!

EXECUTIONERS (*helplessly*): Come on! (*They lead* HSIUNG *and* SU *off.*)

KUANG: Here! (*The* SERVANT *responds.*) Bring me my civilian dress and seal, and fetch a lantern. You're coming with me to the governor's headquarters to see the governor!

(*Curtain.*)

SCENE V

THE PREFECT CALLS ON THE GOVERNOR

(*The back of the stage is curtained off.*)

(*Enter the* SERVANT *and* PREFECT KUANG. *They walk up to the* GOVERNOR*'s headquarters.*)

SERVANT: Here we are.

KUANG: Look, wait for me outside the gate!

SERVANT: Yes, Your Honour! (*Exit.*)

KUANG: Is anyone there?

(*Enter an* INSPECTOR.)

INSPECTOR: Who is it?

KUANG: It's Prefect Kuang.

INSPECTOR: So it's you, Your Honour. Is the execution over?

KUANG: It's because of this execution that I'm here. I want to see the governor. Please announce me.

INSPECTOR: His Excellency went to bed several hours ago, and he doesn't like being disturbed. Won't you go back now, Your Honour, and come again tomorrow morning during business hours?

KUANG: I have come on urgent business which can't wait.

INSPECTOR: I have my career to think of. I dare not announce you.

KUANG: Are you willing to answer for it, if you hold up important business?

INSPECTOR: Well. . . . Your Honour is not like other officials. Wait here while I announce you. (*Exit.*)

KUANG: Pah! What a coward! Ridiculous!

VOICE (*offstage*): Yes, yes!

(*Enter the* INSPECTOR.)

INSPECTOR: Where is His Honour?

KUANG: I'm here.

INSPECTOR: When I went in to announce you, His Excellency was very annoyed. Only your name saved me from a reprimand. His Excellency asks Your Honour to go away now, and come back tomorrow morning.

KUANG: This is a matter of life and death; how can I wait till the morning? I must trouble you to announce me again.

INSPECTOR: I have my own neck to think of! (*Exit hastily.*)

KUANG: Well! What shall I do now? (*He sees the drum.*) There is nothing for it but to beat the drum. (*He beats the drum twice.*)

LIEUTENANT (*offstage*): Here! (GUARDS *offstage respond.*) The governor wants to know what silly fool has dared to beat the court drum at this hour of the night. If the fellow has a plea, give him forty strokes before his case is heard. If he has no plea, give him eighty strokes, then drive him out.

(*The* GUARDS *shout assent.*)

(*Enter the* LIEUTENANT.)

LIEUTENANT (*deliberately*): Who beat the drum?

KUANG: I did. I have no written plea—what's to be done?

LIEUTENANT: You must be joking, Your Honour! Please wait while I announce you. (*Exit.*)

KUANG: Thank you. (*When the* LIEUTENANT *has gone.*) A fox aping a tiger—disgusting!

VOICE (*offstage*): His Honour is invited to the reception room! His Honour is invited to the reception room!

(*The* LIEUTENANT *comes in again.*)

LIEUTENANT: His Excellency asks you to wait for him in the reception room.

KUANG: Thank you. (*Exeunt.*)

(*The curtain rises on* GOVERNOR CHOU'S *reception room. The* LIEUTENANT *leads in* PREFECT KUANG.)

LIEUTENANT: Please wait a minute.

(*The* LIEUTENANT *goes in and* KUANG *sits down; but although he waits for some time the* GOVERNOR *does not appear, and he grows impatient. The* LIEUTENANT *comes back and* KUANG *stands up, thinking the* GOVERNOR *is about to arrive; but the* LIEUTENANT *goes out again and still there is no sign of* GOVERNOR CHOU.)

LIEUTENANT (*offstage*): Listen! His Excellency orders the guards to come to the hall!

(*A shout of assent offstage.* KUANG *thinks the* GOVERNOR *is coming soon. He sits down and waits for some time, but no one comes. After another pause, the* LIEUTENANT *comes in and goes out again. Still the* GOVERNOR *has not appeared. The watch tower sounds the last quarter before the fourth watch.*)

KUANG (*very restlessly*):

In this suspense,
I can neither sit nor stand;
There is barely time
To save them from the sword.
I little thought the governor would prove
Immovable as Mount Tai.
The patients are dying, but the doctor delays!
I fret at the sound of the watch drum;

Well do they say: Time is more precious than gold;
It is hard to enter the yamen,
Hard to gain access to a high official!

(*Enter four* GUARDS *followed by the* LIEUTENANT. *After another long pause, two* ATTENDANTS *lead in* GOVERNOR CHOU. KUANG *bows to the* GOVERNOR, *who sits down looking thoroughly displeased.*)

KUANG: Your Excellency!

GOVERNOR: Please take a seat.

KUANG: Thank you.

GOVERNOR: We received an imperial decree ordering an execution, and asked Your Honour's assistance. We expected you to preside while the sentence was carried out; why should you come here by night and sound the drum?

KUANG: The prisoners' guilt has not been proved, so I came by night to beg Your Excellency to allow the execution to be postponed, while we find out the truth.

GOVERNOR: Why do you say their guilt has not been proved?

KUANG: Although Su Shu-chuan was travelling with Hsiung Yu-lan and Hsiung was carrying the same amount of money as that stolen from Yu Hu-lu, when I looked into the case I found many dubious points. We are not justified in jumping to the conclusion that they were lovers and that they murdered the old man. Your Excellency —

We cannot condemn them just for walking together,
And the money alone is not sure evidence.
No, this case is extremely dubious,
We must make another, careful investigation.

GOVERNOR: Consider how many courts this suit has been through. After three trials and six cross-examinations, the case is already closed. Your Honour need not concern yourself with it.

KUANG: Ah, no, Your Excellency!

Pass sentence of death so lightly,
Causing innocent people to lose their lives?

GOVERNOR: The magistrate of Wusih and the prefect of Changchow are both responsible officials appointed by the court, and able servants of the state. These shrewd and experienced men cannot have been mistaken in this case. Besides, I passed the final judgement myself: had there been any injustice, I would have set it right. There is no need for Your Honour to intervene.

KUANG: Since Your Excellency passed the final judgement, may I ask whether Hsiung Yu-lan is really a traveller for the merchant Tao Fu-chu? And did you find out where his fifteen strings of cash actually came from? Since Hsiung Yu-lan lived in Huaian and the girl in Wusih, how did they become acquainted? And who can testify that they were lovers? According to what I have discovered by sending a man to Welcome Inn opposite Yuanmiaokuan Temple. . . .

GOVERNOR: Wait a little! Many districts south of the Yangtse come under my jurisdiction. There are even some important affairs of state that I can't attend to in person; do you expect me to investigate the details of a piddling affair like this? I had the files from Changchow to refer to; do you call that trumping up an empty charge?

KUANG: But men's lives are not toys! In my humble opinion, this case should be carefully re-investigated.

True proof is needed;
Genuine evidence is required;
We must base our judgement on facts.

GOVERNOR: Your Honour, there is one point on which I am not clear. I would appreciate an explanation from you.

KUANG: What is that?

GOVERNOR: What is the duty of the officer who supervises an execution?

KUANG: To check the felon, have him executed promptly, and report to his superior.

GOVERNOR: When something is not his business —

KUANG: A man should not interfere.

GOVERNOR: Since I asked you to supervise the execution, you should simply have carried out your task. Why leave your post to interfere in what is not your business?

KUANG: Your Excellency, the law allows us to question felons about to be executed, who cry out that they have been wronged, and recommend that their case be reconsidered. I am simply asking your help to save two innocent lives.

GOVERNOR: An order has already come from the ministry — what can I do?

You are causing needless trouble!
The law is as adamant as a rock:
Who is bold enough to defy it?
I am only a small official,
I dare not act rashly.

KUANG: As servants of the state, we are responsible to the court above and to the people below. I find it hard to condone this disregard for men's lives!

(*The fourth watch sounds from the tower.*)

GOVERNOR: Your Honour!

Listen to the watch!
Time is fleeting;
I expect you to hurry back.

If the execution is late, so much the worse for us all!

KUANG: No, Your Excellency. . . .

GOVERNOR: What?!

KUANG:

"The ruler is not so important as the people."

If the people are wrongly accused,
An official must feel ashamed.
To save two innocent lives
I am willing to lose my post!

GOVERNOR: I dare not take action in such a serious matter. Please say no more about it!

(*He rises to leave, but* PREFECT KUANG *hastily stops him.*)

KUANG: If you are afraid to take the responsibility, Your Excellency, you can shift it to me. I will answer for everything.

I have the warrant with the imperial seal
Given by His Majesty:
In any sudden crisis
I can use my own discretion.

If my colleagues do wrong I can have them arrested and tried; so how can I stand idly by if innocent citizens are wrongly sentenced?

GOVERNOR: Humph!

KUANG:

I beg Your Excellency not to refuse,
But to be merciful!

GOVERNOR: Since you intend to do exactly as you please anyway, why waste so much time talking?

If you have the emperor's warrant
To do as you please,
Why did you trouble to come here?

As for me —

I have always been very discreet,
And never broken the rules.

KUANG: Pray don't take offence, Your Excellency. My one wish is to help the people.

GOVERNOR: For the last time — no!

KUANG: Very well, since Your Excellency is determined to refuse, I will leave my gold seal here as bond, and ask you to grant me a few months' leave to investigate this case in Wusih and Changchow. I shall make you a report on my return. I hope you will agree to this request.

GOVERNOR (*with a sarcastic laugh*): How rare to find such a kind-hearted prefect! Please keep your seal. I give you leave to go.

KUANG: I thank Your Excellency! And may I have an arrow of authority?*

GOVERNOR: What do you need that for?

KUANG: Changchow and Wusih are not under my jurisdiction. My work will be much easier if I have authority from Your Excellency.

GOVERNOR: Bring an arrow here!

---

*An arrow with a flag attached, given as a token of authority.

LIEUTENANT: Yes, Your Excellency! (*He fetches an arrow.*) The official arrow is here.

KUANG: Thank you, Your Excellency! (*He prepares to leave.*)

GOVERNOR: One moment! You have half a month only for this investigation!

KUANG: . . . .

GOVERNOR: If you fail to get to the bottom of this business in half a month, I shall report the matter to the emperor! Ha! Then you must forgive me if I act impolitely! (*He shakes his long cuffs in anger, and stalks out.*)

(*Curtain.*)

SCENE VI

THE RAT IS SUSPECTED

(*The back of the stage is curtained off.*)
(*The highway. Enter* WARDEN HSIA.)

HSIA:

Don't take the job of a local officer;
You'll be on the run day and night;
Whenever murder is done,
I have to rush around till I'm out of breath.

Please come here, neighbours!
(*Enter the* NEIGHBOURS.)

NEIGHBOURS: What do you want, Uncle Hsia?

HSIA: It's Yu Hu-lu's murder case. Prefect Kuang of Soochow will soon be here to make an investigation. So I want you to wait for him and answer his questions.

FIRST NEIGHBOUR: How can the prefect of Soochow look into a Changchow case?

HSIA: Prefect Kuang is bringing the arrow of authority from the governor.

FIRST NEIGHBOUR: But the murderers have been caught. Why should there be another investigation?

NEIGHBOURS: Yes. Why?

HSIA: Prefect Kuang is a good official, and he says a wrong sentence was passed. Please come along with me.
(*They go out, leaving the* RAT *alone on the stage.*)

RAT: Aiya! I thought Hsiung Yu-lan and Su Shu-chuan were already ghosts of the wrongly killed! How does this Prefect Kuang come to be investigating the case again? Can my part in this be known? No, that's impossible. Nobody saw me that night, so nobody knows. There aren't any witnesses, nor any evidence either. I've nothing to be afraid of. I'll go along with the others like an honest citizen, trimming my sails to the wind, and seizing every chance to clear myself. Aiya! That won't do! That won't do! This Prefect Kuang is known as a second Prefect Pao. He's very clever and resourceful—it's no joke being up against him. If I make a slip and he spots it, it'll be too late to escape. The proverb says: Of thirty-six strategies flight is best. Let me go

to the country and lie low for ten days or so. I'll come back when all this has blown over. That's right. Off I go. (*Exit.*)

(*Enter two* CONSTABLES, *the* SERVANT, MAGISTRATE KUO *and* PREFECT KUANG.)

KUANG:

For the people's sake I never spare myself.

KUO:

I dread nothing so much as these officious fellows!

(*Enter* HSIA.)

HSIA: Welcome, Your Honours. The warden kowtows to you!

KUANG: Get up. Where is Yu Hu-lu's house?

HSIA: Just in front there.

KUANG: Lead the way.

HSIA: Yes, Your Honour.

(*They walk to* YU*'s door. The inner curtain rises, showing his house.*)

HSIA: Here is Yu Hu-lu's house.

KUANG: Open the door.

HSIA: Yes, Your Honour. I'll break the seals. (*He removes the paper seals, and opens the door.*)

KUANG (*to* KUO): After you.

KUO: After you, Your Honour.

KUANG: Let's go in together.

(*They walk in.*)

(*The place is thick with dust, and they brush themselves off with their sleeves.*)

KUO: Please carry out your investigation, Your Honour.

KUANG: Let us make a search together. Warden!

HSIA: Yes, Your Honour.

KUANG: Where did you find Yu's body?

HSIA (*pointing to the ground*): Here.

KUANG: Where was the weapon?

HSIA (*pointing*): Here.

KUANG: When was the post-mortem held?

HSIA: Three days later.

KUANG: Where is the weapon now?

HSIA: It was taken away and kept as material evidence.

KUANG (*to* KUO): Did you investigate the case yourself at the time, Your Honour?

KUO: Since the murderers had been caught, there was no need for further investigation.

(KUANG *examines the door to see whether the murderer came from outside or not, and tries the knocker to see how much noise it makes. He closes the door, searches for marks left by the chopper, and examines the hinges. Finding nothing suspicious here, he looks round until his eye is caught by the meat counter. He scrutinizes it carefully, and*

steps forward to shake the fence bordering the street in front of it, to see how firm it is. A cloud of dust springs up, and they all brush their clothes. Next KUANG *examines the wall and the bed, but again finds nothing suspicious. Finally he gazes intently at the bloodstains on the ground.*)

KUO (*feigning surprise*): Ah, bloodstains!

KUANG: Yes, they are bloodstains.

KUO: I suppose they were made by the murdered man.

KUANG: Well, they can hardly have been made by the murderer!

KUO: These are closely related to the criminal. We should study them carefully.

KUANG: Certainly we should.

KUO: Aiya! However hard you look at them, they still don't tell you who the murderer is!

KUANG: What is Your Honour's opinion?

KUO: My opinion? (*He laughs.*)

KUANG: Who did this?

KUO (*laughing*): But Your Honour says they have been wrongly sentenced!

KUANG (*to* HSIA): Which is Su Shu-chuan's room?

HSIA: Inside there.

KUANG: What was she like?

HSIA: A quiet, well-behaved girl.

KUO: When a young girl has a lover, of course she pretends to be quiet and well-behaved, to throw dust in everyone's eyes.

(KUANG *casts a glance at* KUO, *then goes to search the inner room. Exit.*)

KUO (*giving a sarcastic laugh*):

Her guilt is sure, yet he says she is innocent!
There is ample proof, yet he must re-open the case!
What a ridiculous ignoramus he is,
Insisting the murderers are good citizens!

(KUANG *re-enters.*)

KUO: Did you find anything suspicious, Your Honour?

KUANG: Did you?

KUO: Ah, everything looks suspicious!

KUANG: What is suspicious, and why?

KUO: If there were nothing suspicious, why should Your Honour make an investigation?

KUANG: You mean I should have minded my own business?

KUO: Oh, no! Your Honour is a champion of the people.

KUANG: Aren't you?

KUO: I am dull and ignorant. I judged this case in accordance with the evidence; but Your Honour must have some good reason for saying my verdict was wrong!

You are brilliant and experienced,
Once you have investigated the case,
You will certainly find out the truth!

KUANG: I am only afraid I may have come for nothing.

KUO: Your Honour has a theory already. You won't have come for nothing. (*He laughs.*) Please go on with your search.

KUANG: Yes, I will. Ah, here is a coin on the ground! (*He picks it up to look at it.*)

SECOND CONSTABLE: Here is another coin. (*He hands it to* KUANG.)

KUO: What do you expect to learn from these two coins?

KUANG (*ignoring* KUO): Have another good look round.

(*The others search.*)

FIRST CONSTABLE: Your Honour, there's more than half a string of cash behind the bed.

(KUANG *hurries over to look, and reflects.*)

KUANG: How strange to find this half string of cash here!

KUO: Your Honour, Yu Hu-lu was a butcher. He may have dropped the cash by mistake. There's nothing strange in that.

KUANG: Let's have the neighbours in.

HSIA: Here, neighbours!

KUO (*aside*): The neighbours were all witnesses in this case. They all approved of my verdict. Question them if you like—it makes no difference.

(*The* NEIGHBOURS *enter and kneel.*)

NEIGHBOURS: Your Honour!

KUANG: Get up. How was Yu off for money?

CHIN: He had closed shop for quite a time, and was living by borrowing and pawning.

NEIGHBOURS: He didn't know where his next meal was coming from.

KUANG: Ah!

If he had no spare money at home,
How did this cash come to be dropped on the ground?

KUO: Yu was a fool and a drunkard. He must have left this cash here before his business failed, and forgotten it.

KUANG: Hardly!

Three or four coins he might forget,
But not half a string of cash!

(*The* NEIGHBOURS *look at the money, and exchange comments.*)

KUO: Where does Your Honour think this half string of cash came from?

KUANG: That's what's puzzling me too. Where did this come from?

CHIN: Please, Your Honour, I think this half string may have come from those fifteen strings.

FIRST NEIGHBOUR: Why should half a string come off?

SECOND NEIGHBOUR: Maybe the murderer was in such a flurry that he dropped the money.

FIRST NEIGHBOUR: But there wasn't a single coin missing from the fifteen strings the murderer was carrying.

THIRD AND FOURTH NEIGHBOURS: Maybe that man they arrested wasn't the murderer at all!

CHIN: I dare say Hsiung Yu-lan. . . .

KUO: Humph!

(CHIN *dare not go on.*)

KUO: I dare say Hsiung Yu-lan didn't know there was money behind the bed. If he'd known, he'd have taken it too.

KUANG (*to the* FIRST CONSTABLE): Put that money away as evidence.

FIRST CONSTABLE: Yes, Your Honour. (*After picking up the cash, he finds a small box.*) Your Honour! I've found a small wooden box!

KUANG: Let me see it! There's a pair of dice inside—why are they so heavy?

FIRST CONSTABLE: The dice may be weighted with lead.

KUANG: Yes! That's probably the case!

(*The* NEIGHBOURS *exchange comments.*)

KUO: The people here are a vicious lot; gambling is all too common. You'll find dice like this in every house—there's nothing strange about it!

KUANG: Your Honour!

These dice are loaded,
And that is not too common;
They must have belonged to a gambler
And a cheat.

KUO: Since Yu Hu-lu was a drunkard, he must have gambled too. These dice were his—you can be sure of that.

KUANG (*to the* NEIGHBOURS): Tell me, good folk, was Yu Hu-lu a gambler?

NEIGHBOURS: He was a heavy drinker, but he never gambled!

KUO: Then some friend of his must have left them here.

KUANG: Were any of his close friends gamblers?

NEIGHBOURS: We know all his friends. There wasn't a gambler among them!

KUANG: Please leave us for a while. (*The* NEIGHBOURS *go out.*) Warden Hsia! Do any of these neighbours gamble?

KUO: Of course!

HSIA: None of them gamble.

KUANG: Is there anyone else who does?

KUO: He's already said they don't gamble!

HSIA: Yes, there is one who does.

KUANG: What's his name?

HSIA: Lou the Rat.

KUANG: Did he see much of Yu Hu-lu?

KUO: Of course he did! How could he have dropped his dice here otherwise?

HSIA: He took so much of Yu Hu-lu's pork without paying for it that they weren't on speaking terms.

KUO: Your Honour!

You are simply wasting your time
Probing into this!
You can find no end
Of evidence of this kind!

KUANG:

I shall leave no stone unturned
To get to the bottom of this.

If Your Honour has other business, and prefers not to continue this investigation

By all means go back to your office;
I will carry on alone.

(*Curtain.*)

SCENE VII

A SEARCH IS MADE FOR THE RAT

(*The back of the stage is curtained off.*)

(*The foot of Mount Huei, near the temple of the mountain god.*)

(*The* SERVANT, *disguised as a pedlar, enters with* CHIN.)

CHIN: After hunting up and down for more than ten days, I've just heard that the Rat is staying in that thatched hut. (*He points out the place to the* SERVANT.)

SERVANT: What does the Rat look like?

(CHIN *does not answer, but looks ahead.*)

CHIN: Ah, that seems to be the Rat in front! Yes, that's him all right. I mustn't let him see me. I'd better hide myself. (*Exit.*)

(*The* RAT *walks on and comes face to face with the* SERVANT, *who sounds his pedlar's drum. The* RAT *is startled, and the* SERVANT *goes out.*)

RAT: Who's that? . . . Who was it? . . . Ah, a man who does no wrong won't be frightened when people knock at his door by night. Ever since Prefect Kuang — curse him! — came to Wusih, I've been on tenterhooks. I just can't sit still. For the last ten days I've been lying low in the country, and I've had enough of it! The priest in the mountain god's temple in front is my friend. He often goes to town to buy incense and candles. I'll go and ask him what news there is in town, and find out at the same time what my luck is to be.

Hiding in the country
Is a wretched business;
When Prefect Kuang goes away,
I shall go out again. (*Exit.*)

(OLD CHIN *comes back with the* SERVANT.)

CHIN: That's him. I'll go back first. (*Exit.*)

SERVANT: Thank you. (*He sees that the* RAT *has gone into the temple.*) Our prefect has been searching right and left in disguise. Since the time is nearly up, he is very anxious. Now that I've found the Rat, he will be pleased.

(*Enter the* FIRST CONSTABLE *in disguise.*)

FIRST CONSTABLE: How goes it?

SERVANT: The Rat is in that temple. Go back and report it to His Honour at once.

FIRST CONSTABLE: Let me go in and arrest him.

SERVANT: His Honour says though the Rat is highly suspicious, we still can't be sure he's the murderer, so we mustn't do anything rash. I'll keep an eye on him, while you go to the boat to tell His Honour. (*Exit.*)

(*The* CONSTABLE *goes out.*)

(*The inner curtain is drawn back to disclose the temple hall.*)

(*Enter the* RAT *from within.*)

RAT: The priest has gone to town to buy incense, and hasn't come back yet. Let me see what my lot is while waiting for him. Aiya, Emperor of the East, if all is well, give me a sign! (*He stretches out his hand to take one of the bamboo slips which predict the future.*)

(*Enter* PREFECT KUANG *disguised as a fortune-teller.*)

KUANG: Hey, brother!

RAT: You made me start! What is it?

KUANG: Do you want your fortune told?

RAT: I'm drawing a lot here. Have my fortune told? No, no!

KUANG: Those lots are not as good as the fortunes I tell.

RAT: Aren't they?

KUANG: No. If you're in doubt about anything, or want to know what your luck is going to be, you need only ask me, and I'll make it as clear as day. If you want to change bad luck into good, misfortune into good fortune, find someone missing, secure a post, or win money in gambling, all you need do is ask me. I've never let anyone down!

RAT: So I'd better have my fortune told, eh? (*He puts down the tube which holds the lots.*) May I ask what method you use?

KUANG: I will tell you —

I do it by examining words,
And my fame is known far and wide.

RAT: So you tell fortunes from words? How do you do it?

KUANG: Brother, if you've something on your mind, write down any character you like, and by looking at it I can tell you your fate.

RAT: That's no good. That's no good.

KUANG: Why is it no good?

RAT: I can't read or write; doesn't that mean it's no good?

KUANG: Just tell me a character, that will do.

RAT: Ah, just telling you a character will do?

KUANG: That's right.

RAT: Well, sir, my name is Lou the Rat. Will the character "rat" do?

KUANG: Certainly.

RAT: Let me fetch you a bench.

KUANG:

Under cover of telling his fortune,

I mean to arrive at the truth;
I hope that I can gain my end today.

RAT: Please sit down, sir.

KUANG: Now, what do you want to ask about?

RAT (*looks around and whispers*): A lawsuit.

KUANG: Ah! A lawsuit?

(*The* RAT *puts a hand over* KUANG*'s mouth, warning him not to speak so loudly.*)

KUANG (*analysing the character*): The character "rat" has fourteen strokes. It is an even number, in other words a dark number, and the rat is a dark animal. This is something very dark. If it is a lawsuit, it is going to be difficult to clear up.

RAT: I know it's difficult to clear up. But will there be trouble in future?

KUANG: Are you asking for yourself or for somebody else?

RAT: Oh, for somebody else, for somebody else.

KUANG: Judging by the character, I shouldn't have thought it was for somebody else.

(*The* RAT *is taken aback.*)

KUANG (*feigning surprise*): Why, the rat is the source of evil.

RAT: The source of the Huai River?

KUANG: I didn't say of the Huai River. I said the source of evil.

(*The* RAT *begins to be frightened.*)

KUANG: The rat is the first of the twelve cyclical animals of the zodiac; so it is the source. Judging by this character, some trouble started because you robbed a man. Is that so, brother?

RAT: Sir, you roam the streets while I haunt the gambling houses. We're two of one kind, so don't play tricks like that on me. No, don't play tricks like that on me! How did you guess that some money had been stolen?

KUANG: The rat is a clever thief: that's how I knew. Another thing, wasn't the man's name Yu? (*This gives the* RAT *such a turn that he falls off the bench.*) Hey, be careful!

RAT (*getting up*): See here, I told you not to play tricks on me, but there you go again. I don't believe you can guess that fellow's name. How did you guess it?

KUANG: I had something to go on.

RAT: What?

KUANG: Rats like stealing oil, don't they?*

RAT: Yes! That's why people say (*imitating a rat stealing oil*): The rat steals oil, the oil-stealing rat! But never mind, sir, whether it steals oil or salt. Do you think there's going to be trouble for me in future?

---

*The Chinese word for "oil" is pronounced "yu."

KUANG: Of course. This business will soon be known.
RAT: Why do you say that?
KUANG: Well, you gave me the word "rat," and now it's the month of the rat. That means the time has come; so I'm afraid the case will soon be cleared up.
RAT (*to himself*): Aiya! I can't have it cleared up! (*He is in a cold sweat.*)
KUANG: Tell me the truth, brother. Are you asking for somebody else, or for yourself? If you tell me, I can show you a way out.
RAT: Wait a minute, sir. (*He walks to one side and thinks, looking around.*) He's there . . . I'm here. . . . Sir, I am asking for. . . .
KUANG: Now, brother, within the four seas all men are friends. If there's anything on your mind, just tell me. I may be able to help you.
RAT: The truth is I'm asking for myself.
KUANG: Ah, for yourself.
RAT (*stops him, and signs to him not to speak so loudly*): Sir, do you think I can steer clear of trouble?
KUANG: Well, if this is your own fortune you're asking, you needn't stay up a tree.
RAT: What do you mean?
KUANG: If you add the character "tree" to "rat," don't you get "retreat"?

Kuang Chung tells Lou the Rat's fortune

RAT: What's that?

KUANG: "Retreat" means to run away.

RAT: Will I be able to run away, sir?

KUANG: Of course, if you want to. The only trouble is rats are naturally suspicious. If you start suspecting people right and left, you may be too frightened to move a step. Then you won't be able to escape.

RAT (*admiringly*): Your fortune-telling is certainly wonderful, sir. I always have been on the suspicious side. What do you reckon is the best time for me to go?

KUANG: If you want to go, you must start today. Tomorrow will be too late.

RAT: Why is that?

KUANG: The top part of the character "rat" is made of two half "days," which make one whole day. By tomorrow two days will have gone, and that will be too late.

RAT: Aiya! It's already getting on; how shall I go?

KUANG: Why, rats always hide by day and come out at night. The best thing you can do is to go this very night.

RAT: Please, sir, will you have a look to see which direction is safest for me?

KUANG: Let me see. . . . You should go southeast.

RAT: Southeast? Please have a look to see which way is safer for me, by water or by land?

KUANG: Let me see. . . . You should go by water.

RAT: Southeast by water. Wusih, Wangting, Kuanshang, Soochow. . . . (*He gives a start.*)

KUANG: After that Kashing and Hangchow. Hangchow is a good place.

RAT: Ah, if only there were a convenient boat going southeast, and I could just jump aboard and be off!

KUANG: I have a boat ready. We are leaving tonight for Soochow and Hangchow to do some business during the New Year holidays. The only thing is. . . .

RAT: Please take me along, sir, won't you? I promise to pay you well.

KUANG: It's not a question of money. Kindness is worth a thousand pieces of gold. It's just that this boat is rather slow. If you don't mind that, by all means come with us.

RAT: Ah, you're not a fortune-teller!

KUANG: What?

RAT: No, you are the Rat's saviour! My life is in your hands.

KUANG: Don't worry. I guarantee you'll be safe on board.

RAT:

I feel like a fish that escapes from the net
And flies to the open sea!

KUANG:

Your troubles, I hope, will soon end,
And all will go well.

RAT:

I shall fly far, far away!
Where is your boat, sir?

KUANG (*leading the* RAT *out of the door*): Moored by the bank over there.

RAT: I live in that thatched hut on the opposite bank. This is payment for telling me my fortune, and this is my fare. Please accept it. I'm going to fetch some clothes and money. I'll be back very soon.

KUANG: Be as quick as you can. I'll wait for you aboard.

(*The* RAT *goes out. The* FIRST CONSTABLE *and* SERVANT *come on.*)

KUANG (*to the* FIRST CONSTABLE): Shadow that man!

(*Exit the* FIRST CONSTABLE.)

KUANG (*to the* SERVANT): Go back at once to fetch constables, and get the neighbours together to search the Rat's house. If you find anything suspicious, bring it on tonight to Soochow. Mind you do this without fail!

(*The* SERVANT *goes out, followed by* KUANG.)

(*Curtain.*)

SCENE VIII

THE RAT IS BROUGHT TO TRIAL

(*The back of the stage is curtained off.*)
(*Outside the Soochow prefectural court.*)
(*Enter the* SERVANT.)

SERVANT:

I made a search according to my orders,
And have come back early, thanks to a fair wind;
I bring real evidence with me,
And go in now to make my report.

Yesterday when I went to the Rat's house to make a search, I discovered a cache under his bed, with all sorts of keys and gambler's gear to swindle people in it. There was a money bag too, which Old Chin said belonged to Yu Hu-lu. If the Rat has the murdered man's bag, it proves he must be the murderer. But since we're afraid the Rat may deny it, Old Chin has volunteered to come as a witness. (*He calls out.*) Uncle Chin, let's go!

(*Enter* OLD CHIN.)

SERVANT: Come with me, uncle, to wait in the ante-room while I go to the back to report to His Honour.

CHIN: All right.

(*They go out.*)

(*The inner curtain rises on the* PREFECT's *court. Clappers sound, and the* FIRST CONSTABLE *enters.*)

FIRST CONSTABLE: Hey, fellows! That's the third call. Files must be sent through the first gate and felons through the second. His Honour is going to take his seat in court. Hurry up and make ready! (*Exit.*)

(*Enter the* CONSTABLES, *followed by* KUANG.)

KUANG:

We searched right and left,
And found the true culprit at last.
When water subsides the rock appears;
When the fog lifts, clouds vanish too.
By taking risks
And sparing no pains,
I have saved two innocent lives.

Here! Open the court.

(*The* CONSTABLES *assent.*)

KUANG: Bring Su Shu-chuan in.

(*The* CONSTABLES *bring her in.*)

KUANG: Su Shu-chuan, do you recognize this bag?

SU: That was my father's money bag. How did it get here?

KUANG: What proof have you that it was your father's?

SU: Father burned a round hole in it; and I patched it and embroidered a flower over the patch. Please have a look, Your Honour!

KUANG: You may leave the court.

SU: Yes, Your Honour.

(*The* CONSTABLES *lead her away.*)

(*Enter the* THIRD CONSTABLE.)

THIRD CONSTABLE: Your Honour, the governor has sent a man to see you.

KUANG: Ask him to come here.

THIRD CONSTABLE: Yes, Your Honour. (*Exit.*)

(*Enter the* GOVERNOR'S LIEUTENANT.)

LIEUTENANT: I greet Your Honour!

KUANG: May I ask your honourable business?

LIEUTENANT: When Your Honour went to Wusih to investigate a case, His Excellency made it clear that you were not to be away for more than a fortnight. Today the time is up, but he has not heard your report. So His Excellency says that in Yu Hu-lu's case both the murderers and the loot were found, and after three trials the case was closed; but Your Honour, relying on your warrant from the emperor, wilfully took the side of the felons, held up their execution, insulted your superior, and opposed the state's decision. These are serious offences. His Excellency orders you to appear before him at once. If injustice was really done, you may be pardoned; but if you have not found anything, you must hand in your seal and wait for further orders.

KUANG: One moment, please. (*To the* CONSTABLES.) Fetch a seat for him.

(*The* CONSTABLES *place a chair for the* LIEUTENANT.)

KUANG: Now bring in Lou the Rat.

(*The* CONSTABLES *bring in the* RAT.)

FIRST CONSTABLE: Lou the Rat is here, Your Honour.

KUANG: Lou the Rat!

RAT: Your Honour.

KUANG: A fine thing you have done!

RAT: I've done nothing wrong.

KUANG: You murdered Yu Hu-lu, and stole his fifteen strings of cash. Do you dare deny it?

RAT: I am innocent, Your Honour.

KUANG: Innocent, indeed! (*To the* CONSTABLES, *pointing to the dice.*) Show him these. (*To the* RAT.) Are these dice yours?

RAT (*startled*): No, they're not mine.

KUANG: Look up. Do you recognize the fortune-teller from the temple? (*The* RAT *looks up at the* PREFECT, *and turns pale with fear.*) You dog! Hurry up and confess.

RAT: There is no evidence against me, and no witnesses. Your Honour can't wrong an innocent citizen.

KUANG (*to the* CONSTABLES, *pointing to the bag*): Show him that. (*To the* RAT.) Do you recognize this bag?

RAT (*trembling*): Where did this come from?

KUANG: How does it happen that you don't recognize something from your own cache?

RAT: It is my bag.

KUANG: Is there any mark on it to prove that it is yours?

RAT: Mark? I can't remember any.

KUANG: Bring in Old Chin.

(OLD CHIN *comes in and kneels down.*)

CHIN: Your Honour.

KUANG: Get up. (CHIN *rises.*) Now, Old Chin, Lou the Rat says this bag is his. What do you say?

CHIN: He is lying. I know this bag was Yu Hu-lu's. Yu and I were old neighbours, and I often helped him buy pigs. I know this bag very well. Last year, after drinking, Yu burned a hole in it as big as your thumb; and his daughter embroidered a flower over the place. Please have a look, Your Honour.

KUANG (*to the* RAT): Dog! What have you to say now?

RAT: Ah! All right, I can't deny it. I'll confess.

It was very late that night,
And I'd lost all my money at dice;
Yu's pork shop was still open,
So I went in intending to get some meat on credit.
Shu-chuan had disappeared,
And Yu Hu-lu was fast asleep;
Then to get his money I committed murder,
Killing him with the chopper,
And throwing the blame on others.
I swear this is the truth.

KUANG: Had you any accomplice?

RAT: No, I did it alone.

KUANG: Here! Make him sign his confession.

(*The* RAT *signs a confession.*)

KUANG: You dog! You gambled, robbed and committed murder, in defiance of the law. Put the cangue on his neck and take him to the prison for the condemned. Old Chin, you may go.

(*The* RUNNERS *put the cangue on the* RAT *and take him away.* OLD CHIN *also leaves.*)

KUANG (*to the* LIEUTENANT): Although the case went through three trials and was closed, the murderer has only just been caught. Don't you think that rather strange?

(*The* LIEUTENANT *is silent.*)

KUANG: Call Su Shu-chuan and Hsiung Yu-lan.

CONSTABLES: Su Shu-chuan and Hsiung Yu-lan are wanted in court.

(*They bring in* SU *and* HSIUNG.)

KUANG: Hsiung Yu-lan and Su Shu-chuan, the real murderer Lou the Rat has confessed, so your innocence is proved.

(SU *and* HSIUNG *are overjoyed.*)

KUANG: Take off their cangues. (*The* CONSTABLES *remove the cangues from around their necks.*) Get up, Hsiung Yu-lan. Here are the fifteen strings of cash, take it back. (*The* CONSTABLES *offer the money to* HSIUNG, *who, overcome with gratitude, forgets to take it.*) Su Shu-chuan, here are ten taels of silver for you. You can go to your aunt in Kaochiao. (*The girl is also too overcome to take the silver.*) Take the money.

HSIUNG, SU: Merciful Heaven!

Your Honour sheds light like a crystal lamp,
All-seeing as a magic mirror;
Your brightness shines over our heads;
You are as just as the great Prefect Pao!

(*Two* RUNNERS *give them the money.*)

If not for Your Honour's great kindness,
We should have died unjustly,
We should have died unjustly;
We should not be alive today!

KUANG: You may go.

HSIUNG, SU: We thank Your Honour for saving our lives! (*They turn to go.*)

LIEUTENANT: Wait! We cannot let the prisoners go before reporting this to the governor.

KUANG (*laughing*): I am releasing two false murderers, and giving him one genuine one. What objection can he have? (*To* SU *and* HSIUNG.) You may go.

(HSIUNG *and* SU *leave the court.*)

SU: I am sorry, sir, to have involved you in this.

HSIUNG: Don't say that, miss. It was all the fault of that cursed magistrate Kuo. You don't think I blame *you,* do you? Let's go.

SU: Yes, sir!

(*They go out.*)

LIEUTENANT: A prefect like this certainly makes people open their eyes!

KUANG: Some people's eyes need opening.

LIEUTENANT: Your Honour set right a wrong sentence. This reflects great credit on you.

KUANG: Although I wilfully took the side of the felons and held up the execution, at least the case is solved now. And although the fortnight is up, I have not exceeded the time limit. Let us go now. Let us go and report this together. After you!

LIEUTENANT: Yes, yes, yes, Your Honour!

(*Curtain.*)

THE END

Translated by Yang Hsien-yi and Gladys Yang
Illustrations by Yeh Chien-yu

Tales of the Chuang People

The Piece of Chuang Brocade

Long, long ago there lived an old Chuang woman, a Tanpu, in a valley at the bottom of a high mountain. Her husband was dead, and she lived in a hut with her three sons, the first was called Leme—which meant eldest son—the second Letuie—second son—and the third Leje—youngest son.

Her people were famous for weaving brocade, so much so that there is a particular kind known as Chuang brocade. But Tanpu had a special gift. The flowers, plants, birds and animals she wove on her brocade were as lifelike as could be. She could always sell her brocade—it was made into waistcoats, quilt covers and bedspreads. In fact, the whole family of four lived on the labour of her hands.

One day, Tanpu went to town, to sell some brocade and buy rice with the money from it. But in the town she saw an extraordinarily beautiful coloured picture in one of the shops. It was a picture of an ideal compound, with tall buildings, a wonderful garden, vast fruitful fields, an orchard, a vegetable garden and a fish-pond. All the animals you could want were there, fat chickens, ducks, cattle and sheep. Tanpu gazed and gazed at the picture. Somehow it made her feel very happy. She fell so in love with it that finally she bought it. But of course this meant that she couldn't buy so much rice.

All the way back she kept on stopping by the roadside to look at her picture. "Oh," she murmured to herself, "if only I could live in such a compound!"

When she got home she showed the picture to her sons. They also liked it very much.

"Wouldn't it be wonderful, Leme, if we could live in such a compound!" Tanpu said to the eldest son.

"That's an idle dream, Ami."—Leme pooh-poohed the idea.

"If only we could live in such a compound, Letuie," Tanpu said to her second son.

"Only in the next world, Ami." Letuie also pooh-poohed it.

Then Tanpu frowned and said to the third son, "Leje, I swear I shall die of disappointment if I can't live in such a compound." And she sighed a great sigh.

Leje thought it over while he comforted his mother. Then he said: "Ami, you can weave very well and the patterns you weave on your Chuang brocade are as lifelike as can be. Why don't you weave a copy of this picture? Looking at it all the time will be nearly as good as if you were living in that compound."

Tanpu meditated a few seconds and smacked her lips: "You're right! I must weave such a brocade or I'll die of disappointment."

So she bought silk yarn of every colour, set her loom up, and began to weave the picture into a brocade.

She wove steadily day after day, and month after month.

Leme and Letuie were very dissatisfied with their mother. To tell you the truth, they even pulled their mother's hands away from the loom, grumbling, "You weave all day but you never sell anything. You just live on the rice we buy with the money we get from the wood we chop. And we are tired of chopping wood."

But Leje said: "Let Ami weave the beautiful compound into a brocade, otherwise she'll die of disappointment. If you think cutting wood makes you too tired, I will chop all the wood we need."

And from then on the whole family lived on the wood he chopped. He had to work day and night.

Tanpu went on weaving all day and all night. At night she burnt pine branches for light. They smoked so much that her eyes were all red and bloodshot. But still she would not stop. A year passed, and her tears began to drop on the brocade. She wove them into a clear, clear river and a little round fish-pond. Two years later, blood dropped from her eyes on to it. She wove the drops of blood into a flaring red sun and bright coloured flowers.

She wove and wove. By the third year she finished the brocade.

Oh, how beautiful was that piece of Chuang brocade!

There it all was. Grand buildings, with blue-tiled roofs, green walls, red pillars and yellow gates. In front of the buildings was a lovely garden where beautiful flowers blossomed and goldfish swished their tails in a pond. On the left was an orchard where song birds of every kind perched on the fruit trees, laden with red and orange fruits. At the right lay a vegetable garden where green and yellow vegetables grew plenteously. Behind the buildings was a vast grassy enclosure where sheep and cattle grazed, and chickens and ducks pecked at worms. A sheep-fold, a cattle byre and coops for the chickens and ducks could be seen on the meadow. At the foot of the hill, not far from the buildings, stretched broad fields golden with maize and rice. A clear river flowed in front of the compound and a red sun shone in the sky.

"Oh, oh, how beautiful it is!" exclaimed the three sons.

Tanpu stretched herself, and rubbed her bloodshot eyes. Her lips parted in a smile, and then widened into a joyous laugh.

And then, all of a sudden, a great wind blew from the west. And swish! Away went the brocade, out of the door, up to the sky, straight towards the east.

Tanpu chased after it like a flash, waving her hands, and shouting at the top of her voice. But it vanished in a twinkling of an eye.

Poor Tanpu fainted outside the door.

The three brothers helped her into the house and laid her on the bed. She came to herself slowly after they had given her some ginger broth to sup. "Leme, go to the east and find me my brocade. It means more than life to me," she said to the eldest son.

Leme nodded his head, put on his straw sandals, and made for the east. After a month's travel he came to a mountain pass.

There was a stone house at the pass, with a stone horse standing at its right side. Its mouth was open, as if it wanted to eat some red berries which grew beside it. In front of the house sat a white-haired old woman, who spoke to Leme when she saw him. "Where are you going, my son?" she asked.

"I'm searching for a piece of Chuang brocade," answered Leme. "My mother has spent three years weaving it. It was blown to the east by a great gust of wind."

"The brocade was taken away by the fairies of the Eastern Sun Mountain," said the old woman. "They want to use it as a pattern for their weaving, because it was so well woven. But it is very difficult to get there. First you have to knock two of your teeth out and put

them into my stone horse's mouth so that he will be able to move and eat the red berries. When he has eaten ten berries you can mount him. He will take you to the Sun Mountain. On the way you must first pass the Flame Mountain, which burns fiercely. When the horse goes through the fire you must endure the burning heat with your teeth clenched. If you utter one word of complaint you will be burnt to ashes. Then you will come to a big, stormy sea where icy winds and waves will lash you. You must clench your teeth and must not shudder. The slightest shudder, and you will sink to the bottom of the sea. When you have crossed the icy sea you will be able to go to the Sun Mountain and bring back your mother's brocade."

Leme felt his teeth and thought of the burning fire and the lashing, icy waves. He went white as a ghost.

The old woman looked at him and laughed, "You can't bear it, my son. Don't go. I'll give you a small iron box of gold. You can go home and live happily."

She fetched a small iron box of gold out from the stone house, and Leme took it and went away.

As he went back he thought to himself: "I shall be able to live very well with this box of gold. But I shan't take it home. Spending it all on myself will be better than spending it on four people." So he decided not to go home but went instead to the big city.

Tanpu grew thinner and thinner. She waited for two months. But still Leme did not come back. "Letuie, go to the east, and bring me back my Chuang brocade. It is all my life to me," she said to her second son.

Letuie nodded, put on his straw sandals and headed for the east. A month later, he met the old woman sitting by the door of the stone house at the mountain pass. The old woman told him the things she had told his brother. Letuie touched his teeth, and thought of the burning fire and the lashing waves. He, too, went white as a ghost.

The old woman gave him a small iron box of gold. He took it and, like his brother, decided not to go back home but instead went to the big city.

Tanpu waited for another two months on her bed. She got as thin as a piece of dry firewood. Every day she looked out of the door and wept. Her eyes, already bloodshot, finally became blind from crying.

Then one day, Leje said to his mother, "Ami, maybe my brothers have met with some accident on the way and therefore have not come back. Let me go. I'll bring you back the brocade."

"All right, Leje. You go." Tanpu agreed, after thinking it over. "But take good care of yourself on the way. The neighbours will look after me."

Leje put on his straw sandals, threw out his chest and set off in big strides towards the east. It took him only half a month to get to

the mountain pass. There he met the old woman sitting in front of the stone house.

The old woman told him the same things as she had told his two brothers, and said: "My son, your brothers have both gone home with a small box of gold. You may have one too."

"No, I want to get the brocade back," Leje replied. He immediately bent down and picked up a stone and knocked two of his teeth out. He put them into the mouth of the stone horse, and the big stone horse came to life and ate ten red berries. Leje jumped on its back, caught hold of its mane and dug his heels into its flanks. The horse lifted its head and neighed. And klop, klop, it galloped off towards the east.

In three days and three nights he came to the Flame Mountain. Red flames surged around him and the horse. His skin hissed in the fire. Bending low on his horse he endured it with his teeth clenched tight. It took him half a day to go through the Flame Mountain and reach the big sea. Cold waves with pieces of ice clinking in them rolled at him. Leje was cold and bruised with ice. But bending low on his horse and clenching his teeth he endured it all. Half a day later he reached the opposite shore, where the Sun Mountain stood. The kind sun shone warmly on him. How comforting it was!

From a gorgeous mansion on the top of the mountain, there rang out the sound of girlish singing and merry laughter.

Leje dug his heels in again, the stone horse reared up, and in less than no time they reached the mansion. He jumped down from his horse and went in through the door. There in the hall were many beautiful fairies weaving away. And in the middle of the fairies hung Tanpu's brocade for them to copy.

They were all very startled when they saw Leje stride in. He told them what he had come for. "Very well," one of the fairies said, "we'll finish weaving it tonight, and you can have it tomorrow. Will it please you to wait here for a night?"

Leje consented and the fairies brought him many delicious fruits. He was quite exhausted and fell asleep on a chair. When dusk fell, the fairies hung up a pearl, which shone like a lamp, to light the hall. They went on weaving all night by the light of the pearl.

One fairy, dressed all in red, seemed very clever and quick, and finished her piece first. When she came to compare her work with Tanpu's, she found that Tanpu's brocade was much better done with its fiery red sun, crystal clear fish-pond, bright red flowers and lifelike cattle and sheep.

"Wouldn't it be wonderful if I could live in this Chuang brocade," murmured the fairy to herself. And as the other fairies had still not finished their pieces, she picked up some silk thread, and embroidered a picture of herself on Tanpu's brocade, standing by the fish-pond, looking at the red flowers.

It was already late in the night when Leje woke up. The fairies had all gone to their beds to sleep. Under the shining pearl, he saw Tanpu's brocade on the table. "Suppose they won't give me the brocade tomorrow? I must not delay longer. My dear Ami has been sick for such a long, long time. Better if I take the brocade and go now," thought he.

So he took the brocade, folded it up and put it next his heart. Out he went, jumped on his horse, and dug his heels in. And klop, klop, the stone horse galloped off in the moonlight.

Bending over his horse with his teeth clenched, Leje first crossed the sea again and then the Flame Mountain, and soon reached the mountain pass.

There was the old woman, standing in front of the stone house, who said smiling: "Dismount, my son."

Leje dismounted. The old woman took out his teeth from the stone horse's mouth and put them back in Leje's mouth. The stone horse again stood motionless beside the red berry bush.

The old woman then fetched him a pair of deerskin shoes. "Here, my son," she said. "Put these shoes on and go home quickly. Your Ami is dying!"

He put on the shoes and got home in a trice. Tanpu, groaning weakly, lay on the bed like a piece of dry firewood. It really seemed as though she was dying that minute.

"Ami! Ami!" called Leje, rushing over to the bed. He took the brocade out from next his heart and spread it before her. It gleamed so brightly that Tanpu's sight came back to her. She got up from the bed immediately and gazed with smiling eyes at the brocade, the brocade she had taken three years to weave. "Oh my youngest son," she said, "it's too dark in here. Let's take it out in the sunlight."

Mother and son went outside and spread the brocade lovingly on the ground. And whoo-oo-oo-oo, a fragrant breeze sprang up and drew

TSAO CHIEN-FENG: The West Lake

the brocade out and out, bigger and bigger until it covered a wide, wide area.

Their little hut had disappeared in it. Instead what should they see but big, magnificent buildings. Around them lay a garden, an orchard, a vegetable garden, fields, cattle and sheep—just exactly like the pattern on the brocade.

Suddenly Tanpu saw a girl in red standing by the fish-pond, looking at the flowers. Off went Tanpu to her, and found she was the fairy in red, who had been brought here because she had embroidered herself into the brocade.

Tanpu asked her to live with them in the big building.

She also asked her poor neighbours to come and live in her beautiful compound because they had looked after her when she was ill.

Leje married the beautiful fairy in red. They lived very happily together.

One day two beggars came to the gate of the beautiful compound. Who should they be but Leme and Letuie? Yes, they had gone to the big city with the gold they had from the old woman, but they had eaten and drunk it all away. Now they were reduced to beggary.

When they came to the beautiful compound and saw Tanpu, Leje, and his lovely wife singing happily in the garden, they thought of the past, and were terribly ashamed. So much so that they picked up their begging sticks and crept away again.

Translated by Yu Fan-chin

Two Lovers and Two Trees

The stars on high are few yet bright,
In Shuinanchieh's a wondrous sight;
On Goose Neck Ridge two trees you find,
Their roots and branches intertwined.

Beyond Laipin County, in Kwangsi Province, where the Chuang people live, is Shuinanchieh Village. In front of it runs a big river, and behind it are steep mountains; a gully runs down close by the village. The mountains—a narrow range—go up to the county wall. The village calls the ridge the Goose Neck and the highest point, near the gully, is called the Goose Head.

Two tall trees, a red kapok tree and a banyan, seventy to eighty feet tall, their roots and branches closely entangled, grow side by side

on the Goose Neck. In late spring the kapok breaks into red flower and leaves grow thickly on the banyan. They look so beautiful.

The old folk in the village say there is a story about these trees—the story of Jung-lang and Hung-ku.

* * *

Long, long ago, in a little straw hut, there lived a widow and her only son in Shuinanchieh Village. The boy, Jung-lang, had been sent to his uncle's to learn to plait bamboo into baskets, and since his return home had taken this handicraft up as his trade. He slit the bamboo and made baskets, and sold them. But this only just gave the mother and her boy enough money for a meagre diet of gruel.

One day Jung-lang went to the city with his baskets, and after he had sold them bought half a bag of rice. His mother had not eaten white rice for a long time; they had only the cheaper maize gruel, and she was badly pulled down, quite grey in the face. It was towards sunset, and the sunset clouds were hanging low in the sky when Jung-lang, carrying the rice on his back, began making his way home. As he reached Goose Head he caught sight of a big red sachet lying at the side of the road. He snatched it up. In it were silk threads of different colours, and a pile of embroidery patterns. It was a woman's embroidery sachet. Now these are always considered treasures, to be handed down from generation to generation, from mother to daughter or from mother-in-law to daughter-in-law. Who could have dropped it? The unlucky girl who had done so would get a good hiding from her mother or her mother-in-law.

Jung-lang stood at the side of the road, waiting for the owner to come back. To every passer-by he said:

"The leaves, wind-blown, all sway and toss,
A sachet's gone, who mourns the loss?"

But every time he had the answer:

"The leaves, wind-blown, all sway and toss,
It was not mine; I mourn no loss."

He patiently waited and waited, till dusk fell. Then he became worried; his mother was waiting for him to bring back the rice. When the moon came up, all was quiet; not a soul passed. So the rice on his back, the embroidery sachet under his arm, he went home.

When he got there his mother was waiting for him at the door-step, and asked:

"The moon is up so clear and bright,
Why are you back so late tonight?"

Jung-lang replied, smiling:

"I picked up this sachet and waited to see,
If the girl who had lost it would claim it of me."

His mother took the sachet, looked inside, and said:

"The loser bitter tears will shed;
Poor maid, she'll not be comforted."

Jung-lang began to help to get the supper ready, and said:

"I'd fain assuage that bitter sorrow;
Beside the road I'll wait tomorrow."

His mother fetched the firewood and started the cooking fire. It burnt up with a crackle, and shone red on the faces of the mother and son.

Early next morning, Jung-lang got up and went off to Goose Head with his knife and bamboos in his right hand and the embroidery sachet in his left. As he sat there and waited for the owner, he went on making his bamboo baskets. He asked every passer-by:

"The leaves, wind-blown, all sway and toss,
A sachet's gone, who mourns the loss?"

Again the answers were always the same:

"The leaves, wind-blown, all sway and toss,
It was not mine; I mourn no loss."

He was there all day. Finally it began to get dark again, but no one came for the sachet. The moon rose. He turned the sachet over to look at it in the moonlight and suddenly his eyes were arrested by the sight of a beautiful girl's face, embroidered on a small piece of white silk. Her hair was black and shining, her complexion fair, and she had a loving smile. Jung-lang stared at the picture. He went on waiting, and did not go home until midnight.

For the third day, he went again to the same place to keep watch, but still nobody turned out to be the owner of the sachet! However, he did not give up. He passed the time away by looking at the embroidered face and at the same time did his bamboo work. He was enchanted by the picture, so much so that his hand slipped and he cut his finger. The blood dripped right on to the embroidered face and dyed her white cheeks red. He was very sorry about this and wondered how he would ever face the owner.

He tore a strip off his jacket, and tied up his finger; then he packed up the knife, the bamboo baskets, and the sachet and went home with a heavy heart.

The next day, Jung-lang again came to the Goose Head on his errand. When the moon shone on the land, he murmured to himself:

"Mid-autumn moon is round and bright,
I wait in vain the owner's sight.
Four days have passed, yet none I see.
Who will the sachet claim from me?"

He opened the sachet, and pored over the picture. As he did so, a cold breeze swept past and a white flower petal fell on the lock of hair

on the right of the girl's forehead. Jung-lang tried to brush it away with his hand, but to his surprise he found this lock had gone silvery white, and glittered in the moonlight. Jung-lang was very upset because he had damaged the picture again. He stared at it, feeling miserable. What could he do? He had already ruined the piece of silk. He sat sighing.

Suddenly there was a gust of fragrant wind which blew some dust into his eyes. When he opened them again, the embroidered portrait had disappeared from the white silk. He was dumbfounded. "Ah!" he gasped,

"The balmy breeze blows softly on;
The face upon the silk is gone.
When she whose treasure 'tis comes back,
What shall I say to her, alack?"

Oh, he was worried. Then, all of a sudden, he heard a peal of laughter behind him. He turned round and found that a girl was standing beside him on the grass, in the bright moonlight. Her cheeks were pink, and a lock of white hair hung on the right side of her forehead. She smiled at Jung-lang.

Jung-lang at once sprang up to his feet and said:

"The leaves, wind-blown, all sway and toss,
A sachet's gone, who mourns the loss?"

The girl said gently:

"Yes, it is mine: my name's Hung-ku,
So may I take it back from you?"

Jung-lang handed it back to the girl, respectfully, with both hands.

The girl took it, but she still stood there motionless. Jung-lang said:

"All night the wind blows cold and drear,
You should be home with parents dear."

Tears welled up in her eyes, the girl muttered:

"All night the wind blows cold and drear,
Alas! I have no parents dear."

The two faced each other in silence.

Then Jung-lang, blushing to his ears, stammered:

"I have a home and mother kind:
A happy home with us you'd find."

Hung-ku too flushed crimson. She hung her head and whispered:

"We two were made for one another,
Let us go home and see your mother."

Jung-lang was overjoyed. He hurriedly gathered his things together and then the two of them walked home side by side, singing all the way.

When Jung-lang's mother saw her son coming back with a beautiful daughter-in-law, she was beside herself and fairly cried for joy.

From the time that Hung-ku joined Jung-lang and his mother the family was always happy. But they found it difficult to manage, now there were three of them, by Jung-lang's basket-making. They might eat enough at one meal, but they would have to go hungry for the next.

One day when Hung-ku was combing her hair, a sheaf of cotton wool fell out from the lock of white hair. So she asked her husband to make a bamboo spinning wheel and a wooden loom for her, so that she could start spinning and weaving. She made cloth, and embroidered it with dragons and phoenixes, chickens and ducks in coloured silk. She did it beautifully; they seemed almost alive. Jung-lang carried the embroidered cloth to the county town to sell. It was immediately snapped up; many people came and offered high prices for it. So after that Hung-ku would always comb her hair, get the cotton, spin it, weave it and embroider all day, and then Jung-lang would go to the county market and sell it. The little family became better off and lived well and the house always rang with joyful singing.

* * *

Now in those days the Laipin County Magistrate was a very bad man. He robbed people of their money and property, insulted women, and did all manner of evil things. One day, when he was in the street, he saw the beautiful embroidered cloth which Jung-lang had for sale, and immediately told his man to grab it. When they returned to the yamen they unfolded it and were at once enchanted by the embroidery. The horrible magistrate asked his servant who it was who had such gifted hands. And the servant replied:

"Fair as an opening bud is she,
And famed for her embroidery,

She lives not very far away—
In the next village—Shuinanchieh."

The greedy magistrate chuckled:

"So fair? Then she has met her fate!
I'll seize her, being magistrate."

At which the servant suggested:

"Set Dragon Dog upon her track:
He'll bring her here upon his back."

The wicked magistrate had a strange dog, a great heavy thing with two long fleshy horns on its head which it used like paws to snatch things from people. It understood everything the magistrate said, and had already stolen a lot of things for its master. It was called Dragon Dog.

That very evening, the bad magistrate sent Dragon Dog to fetch Hung-ku. Jung-lang, who was upset at his cloth being taken from him without payment, had gone to see a play with his uncle.

When he returned home, Hung-ku was not there. His mother was in despair, not knowing where she had been taken. They searched all around but failed to find her.

At daybreak, Jung-lang walked up to the Goose Head and stood there looking. With tears in his eyes, he stopped every passer-by and said:

"The gander cackles for his vanished mate:
Oh, know you anything of Hung-ku's fate?"

But all the passers-by said:

"Hung-ku is nowhere to be seen:
The gander cackles all in vain."

At last, he caught sight of two of the yamen servants heading for the county town, with a big pig. Jung-lang asked them too whether they had seen Hung-ku.

The servants did not stop, but answered as they went:

"The Dragon Dog your love has seized:
E'en now they make the wedding feast."

When Jung-lang heard that his wife had been carried away by Dragon Dog, he fell fainting to the ground.

A gust of cold wind swept by, and brought Jung-lang back to his senses. He slowly got up and tottered home weeping. He said to his mother, his voice breaking with sobs:

"Ah, mother, scarcely can I tell
My tale for grief and anguish:
The Dragon Dog has seized Hung-ku—
In the yamen doth she languish."

Cried his mother:

"That loathsome hound has borne her off?
The magistrate will have her?

Come, dry your eyes and rack your brains—
We'll find some way to save her."

She took out a package of poison from the cupboard. It was left over from the time when the father was alive and used it for hunting. The mother hid it in some sticky rice, fetched a sharp knife, and handed them to Jung-lang and said to him:

"This poisoned rice shall quickly end
The Dragon Dog's fell life,
And that accursed magistrate
Shall fall before this knife."

Jung-lang took the knife and the poisoned rice, and pulled himself together. He solemnly vowed:

"Hung-ku shall I bring home again,
Nor see her wed another;
Restore a wife to husband's arms,
A daughter to her mother."

Stars were twinkling in the sky as Jung-lang climbed over the wall and entered the yamen from the back court. The wicked magistrate and his soldiers were swilling wine and playing the finger game in the big dining room, while the Dragon Dog stood guard in front of a room. Behind the door Hung-ku could be heard crying.

Jung-lang flung the rice ball towards the Dragon Dog, which, wagging its tail, immediately threw itself upon it and swallowed it. In a trice it sprang ten feet into the air, turned a somersault, and fell down stone dead.

Jung-lang pulled out the knife, cut the door open, swung Hung-ku on his shoulder and ran to the back court. In his haste, he bumped into one of the soldiers, who let out a shout. When the magistrate heard him shout, he at once called upon all his soldiers, scores of them, and ordered them to light their lanterns and torches and chase after Jung-lang.

Carrying Hung-ku on his back, Jung-lang dashed across the garden and through the city gate, and ran towards the Goose Head. The soldiers, their lanterns and torches in hand, pursued at top speed, their deafening shouts fairly shaking the earth. When Jung-lang reached Goose Neck, his legs were aching and could carry him no further. He set Hung-ku gently on the ground and flung himself down panting. Hung-ku had not eaten for a whole day, and was faint with hunger. But they could see the lanterns and torches coming nearer and nearer. Jung-lang groaned. "Alas!" he said:

"The goose and gander's cries redouble:
The happy marriage encounters trouble."

The soldiers were close in sight. Hung-ku, white in the face, cast a look at the wide river and said resolutely:

"Contumely we'll ne'er abide:
Let's plunge into the raging tide."

Jung-lang and Hung-ku, clasped in one another's arms, leapt into the river. Splashes rose high. The current was swift and the loving couple vanished in the whirling water.

The brutal magistrate panted up to the river's brim, gazed at the ripples and heaved a sigh. He called his soldiers together and went back to the yamen sullenly.

* * *

Early next morning the mother heard what had happened and hastened down to the river. All she could see were the rolling waters. Her son and daughter-in-law were no more. She sat down by the river and wept. She wept for seven days and nights, until her eyes became swollen and her voice died in her throat. She began to weep tears of blood, and the tears flowed down into the river. All of a sudden, a thunderstorm broke out, and torrents of rain poured down. The waters rose and the current changed and floated the corpses of the two lovers out on to the Goose Neck. The mother ran to them, and found them still locked in one another's arms, inseparable in death, a loving smile still on their faces.

There, on the Goose Neck the mother mournfully dug a grave and buried them.

Then she sat by the grave, and wept:

"In angry waters, tempest-tossed,
A son and daughter have I lost.
Here I'll bewail their dreadful fate,
And curse that cruel magistrate."

For another seven days and nights the mother stayed by the grave shedding tears. Tears streamed down from her bloodshot eyes into the grave, and her throat got agonizingly sore. Unconsciously she fell asleep. A cool breeze went by, she came to herself and found that two trees had grown together over the grave, a kapok tree and a banyan. Their roots were twisted together and their branches entwined. Red flowers were blossoming on the kapok, and shining green leaves grew on the banyan.

The distressed mother thought to herself:

"These trees that here are new created,
Might be my boy and girl translated."

But the trees could not speak, though she caressed their trunks, and broke into tears again.

"The kapok and the banyan spring,
From out their burial place;
The loving roots all intertwine,

The loving boughs enlace.
And yet the twain no answer make:
Oh hearken, or my heart will break!"

Leaning against the trees, she cried for seven days and nights. Her tears, mixed with blood, flowed down into the river and the water was tinged with red.

The poor mother, half fainting, dozed off at the foot of the two trees.

Suddenly, the water in the river bubbled as if it were boiling. A great goose with a red crown appeared on the river and said to the mother:

"Oh look upon the mighty flood,
Its waters troubled, red as blood.
Bring buckets of this water red,
And let the trees be nourished.
Two hundred buckets full of water,
Will bring to life your son and daughter."

And when the goose had finished speaking, it dived back again into the river.

When the mother heard that she might see her son and daughter-in-law again, she sprang up, hurried home and brought back two buckets and a pole to carry them on. She started to carry water, two bucketfuls at a time, from the river to the trees on the grave.

It was terribly strenuous work for the aged mother. But for the sake of her son and daughter-in-law, she toiled and toiled. Her shoulders were bruised and swollen, and her feet were torn, but she kept on carrying the water day and night.

When she had carried two hundred bucketfuls, she fell down beside the two trees, exhausted.

* * *

A soft and fragrant wind blew by. The mother woke up. When she opened her eyes, to her delight she saw Jung-lang and Hung-ku were by her side. Joyfully they called out to her, "Mother!"

Oh, what ecstasy! The mother jumped up and embraced them. She laughed and cried, in a paroxysm of joy.

Cried Jung-lang:

"By the sun's glow the day is lighted:
Our family is reunited."

"And now rejoices everyone—
Wife and husband, mother, son."

answered Hung-ku.

Little breezes wafted fragrance over them. Lucky magpies chattered on the trees overhead. The mother and her children were gay.

And then, suddenly, a dreadful thought struck the mother. She lifted her head, looked towards the county town and gasped:

"Dark clouds still in the heavens abide;
Over the people rough-shod ride.
The magistrate, the soldiery. . .
Where can we shelter, hapless three?"

They looked at each other in silence. All at once, a big red flower from the kapok fell into the river. It instantly became a big red boat, beautifully carved.

Hung-ku stood up, taking her mother by one hand and Jung-lang by the other. The three of them stepped into the boat, and away it sailed down to the lower reaches. A red boat floated on the red water; the three passengers, rosy with happiness, beamed at one another.

The boat carried them all the way down to Penglai Island—an island in the middle of the river—seven miles downstream. The current was swift; it was very difficult for an ordinary boat to approach it.

But the mother and her son and daughter-in-law lived there happily ever after.

* * *

When the bad magistrate heard that Jung-lang and Hung-ku had come to life again, and had escaped in a red boat, he flew into a rage and thought to himself:

"Now if I fell those trees that wave
On Goose Neck Ridge above their grave,
The pair for good and all 'twill slay:
My will no more shall they gainsay."

So one day, the wicked man, taking along several of his soldiers, went along to the big trees. They chopped hard at the trees with heavy axes. After only a few strokes, the trees split, and crashed down on the magistrate, killing him instantly.

The next minute, a strong gust of wind blew and stood the trees back in their places again. Their flowers and leaves were as beautiful as ever.

The soldiers were terrified, and ran away.

There was another time when a villain came from the county to see the strange trees. No sooner had he touched them when he was knocked down. His head was bruised and poured blood. Since then no bad man has dared to come near the trees or to touch them.

* * *

And there the two trees still stand, in all their beauty, at the Goose Neck in Shuinanchieh Village.

Translated by Chang Su-chu

BUILDING A SOCIALIST LITERATURE

CHOU YANG

— A speech made on February 27, 1956 at the Second Council Session (enlarged) of the Union of Chinese Writers —

The Second Conference of the All-China Federation of Writers and Artists, convened in 1953, called on our writers and artists to develop literary and artistic creation and strive for the attainment of the great goal of socialism. Today, only two years and a few months later, the high tide of the socialist revolution is already here. In another two or three years, our people will accomplish, in the main, the historic tasks of our nationwide socialist revolution.

How can we create literature appropriate to these times of great historic changes? It is often pointed out regretfully that our literary and artistic creation falls behind living reality. Can we close our eyes to this state of affairs and let it drift on? The people are eagerly awaiting excellent and artistic writings which truthfully reflect all aspects of their life; they are looking forward to the steady production of good literature. Can we disappoint them in these just and reasonable hopes?

No! Our literature must advance with the people, in fact it should lead them forward while satisfying their increasing literary needs and demands.

The Central Committee of our Communist Party and Comrade Mao Tse-tung have been waging a series of battles against rightist conservatism in every field. Precisely as a result of this, the enthusiasm of the masses for socialism has been aroused to the greatest heights. On every front the people are making startling accomplishments, performing deeds that seem miracles to the near-sighted eyes of the rightist conservatives. The unprecedented speed and scope of socialist transformation and socialist construction have enabled us to greatly accelerate the development of our national economy under the First Five-Year Plan. This is an event of world-wide significance.

Continual changes are taking place in the life of our country, from its basis to its superstructure. The deepest and most fundamental of these is the change in man, for in the struggle to change society, the people are transforming themselves. They are gradually breaking free

from the shackles of feudal, capitalist, and small-producer habits and old ways of thinking. A new interrelation, founded on socialist principles, has begun to take shape among the people. Socialist thinking, based on the principle of linking the individual and the collective interests, is more and more guiding all of the people's conduct, while capitalist ideology, and the small-producer's habits and his passion for private ownership are already publicly scorned as backward. People now have an entirely new attitude toward labour, public property, friendship, love. In the more advanced of them a new, socialist character can be seen developing; the soul of hundreds of millions is being transformed. It is the mission of our literature to reflect this struggle of the people to change society, to reflect their enthusiasm in building a new life, and to foster the growth of a new socialist character.

The great mass of our youth demand that literature give them communist education and inspire them with lofty ideas and emotions. Many of our present works ideologically and artistically are unable to satisfy this demand. Because the material life of the vast majority of our people is continually improving—with a concomitant growth in their cultural demands, because we have speeded up the reform of the written language and the elimination of illiteracy, our readers will soon increase by the thousand-fold. They will stretch their hands toward our writers and ask for more and better literature.

The question is: Can we satisfy them? Can our literature catch up with living reality and go forward with giant strides?

In literature and art, as in other fields, rightist conservatism has been the most serious impediment to our progress. We have manifested this in many ways. In permitting bourgeois reactionary ideology and counter-revolutionaries to corrupt and sabotage the people's literary work, we have lost the political acuteness and ideological fighting strength needed on the literary front. We have allowed, on the one hand, all sorts of wrong, unhealthy and decadent tendencies to persist in literary work instead of firmly opposing them. On the other hand, we have failed to give active protection and support to the progressive elements and the new-born forces emerging as our literature develops. In tolerating the abnormal situation in which literature lags behind life, we have ignored the increasing demands on literature by the great mass of the people and forgotten the duties which writers and artists owe to the nation.

In the past two years a number of battles on the ideological front — particularly the one which exposed and criticized the Hu Feng counter-revolutionary clique* — struck a mortal blow at reactionary, bourgeois idealism and various forms of activities against the people in the literary field; rightist conservative ideas were also given a strong corrective.

*See *Chinese Literature*, No. 3, 1955, p. 164.

Thus, the road was swept clear for the smooth advance of our socialist literature.

In pace with our times, with the progress of our country and the growth of our writers—both in their thinking and in their technique, our literature has already taken a big step toward socialist realism. Ever since the May the Fourth Movement of 1919, socialist ideals have been stimulating all honest and progressive writers. Many of their creations truthfully portray the various forms of struggle which the Chinese people waged to win national independence and carry out the democratic revolution. Because the whole world has entered the age of socialist revolution, because China's democratic revolution—in which socialist elements were the decisive factors—was led by the Chinese working class and the Chinese Communist Party, because many progressive writers have gradually developed a communist world outlook and grasped the principles of socialist realism—for all these reasons, the works of these writers have shown increasing socialist tendencies.

Now that we have entered the period of socialist revolution, new and infinitely rich material has become available for the creation of literature of socialist realism. Today, our writings describe first-hand how the people are struggling to attain the aims of the socialist revolution. They show the enthusiasm of the working people for building a socialist nation and portray many individuals who are socialist in character. The builders of socialism have become the heroes of our literary creations.

Peasants in our writings are no longer people satisfied with having wrested a small patch of ground from the hands of a landlord. Now they are shown fighting to break away from the limitations of the small-peasant economy, from their own blind attachment to the system of private ownership of land, from the snares that capitalism sets for them; they are shown struggling to reach the broad highway to collectivization.

Today the writer's pen goes beyond depicting women only in their fight for freedom of choice in marriage. Women are seen actively joining in the construction of socialism and in other social activities, the same as men. What is more, they are shown able to solve the most complicated problems of the heart in accordance with socialist principles.

Many new types appear in our works. Their character is no longer tinged with bourgeois individualism but with socialist collectivism. The entire content of our literature reflects, in varying degrees, our country's epochal transition from the democratic revolution to the socialist revolution. Our literature is pervaded with the new, rich air of socialism. Tendencies to formulist, stereotyped writing, and other departures from realism, have markedly been overcome.

The scope of relationship between literature and the people is much broader than before. From the Second Conference of the All-China

Federation of Writers and Artists in September 1953 to the end of 1955, our state literary publishing houses produced over two thousand different titles. Our books today are not printed in editions of thousands or even tens of thousands, but in hundreds of thousands and millions of copies. *Sanliwan Village, Defend Yenan!* and other better novels recently published have been welcomed by the great mass of our readers. Playwriting has also come to life.

One of the most noteworthy and outstanding phenomena in the literary world is the rapid growth of new authors of rich creative ability, writers who are forming the ranks of a new and powerful army of socialist literati. Most of the literature published in our country today comes from the pens of young writers.

This then is the new atmosphere which has existed in the realm of literary creation for the past two or three years.

Literary writing has not "withered" and "decayed" as Hu Feng slanderously alleged. Quite the opposite. Warmed by the brilliant sunshine of Marxism-Leninism, it is growing well in the fertile soil of socialist reality. Only reactionary literature has "withered" and "decayed."

The task of the writer is to create literature worthy of our era, worthy of our nation and our people. This literature should truthfully portray the unprecedented historic changes now taking place in this great nation of ours with its 600 million people. On a magnificent and artistic canvas, the writer should depict our people's long revolutionary struggle of the past and their rich experience in building socialism. His creations should not only be socialist in content; they should also have their own national form. They should embody both the best of our country's cultural heritage over the past two thousand years and more, and all the progressive elements of world culture. We must create literature worthy of the name of great, or at least build a firm foundation for its production. Our writings must serve the workers, peasants, intellectuals and all other working people, in every possible way.

This is the honourable responsibility of the writers of our generation.

II

The past two or three years have not been smooth sailing in our literary world. Here, as in many other fields, tumultuous, complicated, and highly significant changes have taken place. Criticisms were directed against the bourgeois idealist approach of Yu Ping-po in his research on *The Dream of the Red Chamber*.* Related with this, the *Literary Gazette*** was also criticized for knuckling under to bourgeois influence

*See *Chinese Literature*, No. 2, 1955, p. 169.

**A fortnightly, organ of the All-China Federation of Writers and Artists. See *Chinese Literature*, No. 4, 1955, p. 156.

and for its supercilious attitude toward new talent. At the same time we comprehensively criticized reactionary bourgeois idealism (for which Hu Shih was the spokesman) in all academic fields—including political, philosophical, historical and literary studies. Of these struggles, the one to expose the Hu Feng counter-revolutionary clique was the hottest and the most involved. Both its scope and the extent of its influence were unprecedented in our literary history. Not only the literati, but the whole intellectual world was drawn into its debates. It was a reflection of the class struggle our country is waging, as it commences the socialist revolution, as well as the final reckoning for the reactionary literary ideology of Hu Feng—the ideology which had been harming our literature so long. It was a battle between the principle that literature should serve the workers, peasants and soldiers and the line of socialist realism on the one side, and the anti-popular, anti-socialist, anti-realist line on the other. It was a struggle between the aesthetic concepts of Marxist materialism and those of bourgeois idealism. Politically, it was a battle between revolution and counter-revolution.

As the three sets of material published in the *People's Daily* revealed, Hu Feng betrayed the revolution more than 20 years ago and threw himself on the bosom of the Kuomintang reactionary clique. Material which we have most recently discovered shows that during the White Terror of 1927-1928, this turncoat wrote "Opposing the Communists Today and Tomorrow" and many other rabid articles, libelling and insulting the Communist Party, and calling on the people to develop an "iron anti-Communist will," to "strike the Party down." Hu Feng managed to conceal his criminal history for a long time. He fooled us. Worming his way into the ranks of the people and their writers, he carried out his treacherous task of serving the reactionary rulers by sabotaging the revolution from within.

Today the Hu Feng counter-revolutionary clique has been thoroughly exposed and smashed. Many comrades have written articles demolishing Hu Feng's reactionary theories on literature. Here, I shall speak briefly about only one of the points where we differ with Hu Feng fundamentally on literary thought, namely, the question of the relationship between literature and the people.

The literary policy of our Communist Party is predicated on the conviction that the working people are the creators not only of all material wealth but also of all spiritual wealth, that literature must depict the people and be understandable to them, that it should meet their needs and benefit them. These principles were set down by Lenin 50 years ago and were creatively expounded by Comrade Mao Tse-tung in his *Talks at the Yenan Forum on Art and Literature** as partisan literary policy of the highest order.

---

*Delivered at Yenan in 1942.

What Hu Feng advocated was in direct opposition to this.

He saw the people as indolent, blindly destructive forces in history. He particularly hated the Chinese people. They were covered with "wounds of spiritual servitude," he said; the masses were a "sea of wounds." When our Party called on all progressive writers to recognize and portray the greatness of the people's labour and struggles, to become one with the people's thoughts and emotions, Hu Feng demanded that the writers scourge the "wounds" on the body of the people and "raise a bloody welt with each blow of the whip," warning the writers not to let themselves be drowned in the "sea" of the people.

It is no coincidence, therefore, that the writers of the Hu Feng clique, especially their representative Lu Ling, always portrayed the people if not as sodden swine bereft of all human sensibility, then as "elemental savages," full of nerves and jitters, as epileptic freaks. In the writings of the Hu Feng clique, the "heroes" invariably were extreme egoists, disguised in one form or another. These writings were the practical demonstrations of the reactionary literary theories of the Hu Feng clique. The purpose of their distortions unquestionably was to sap the will and reason of the reader, to bring him to a complete spiritual collapse. The sickly sentimentalism and anti-reason of the moribund classes are typical attributes of the hollow-shelled egoism manifested in the writings of the Hu Feng clique.

Toward the traditions of national culture, the attitude of the members of the Hu Feng clique was nihilistic, although they unreservedly welcomed the capitalist culture of the West. This is closely related with their contempt and hatred for the Chinese people, with their view that the Chinese people are devoid of any creative ability.

Like all spokesmen for reactionary bourgeois ideology, Hu Feng always stressed the writer's subjective "sincerity," twisting its meaning until "sincerity" became equivalent to "partisanship" and "partisanship" became "artistic conscience." His purpose was to substitute "sincerity" for working-class stand and communist partisanship. He pretended to be acting from the loftiest motives, as if he and his cronies were the most "sincere" people in the world and all writers who were honestly trying to serve the people were "insincere." The hypocritical and reactionary nature of this brand of "sincerity" was exposed over 20 years ago by Lu Hsun in a sarcastic thrust that drew blood. Lu Hsun said:

"They (the 'literati' with the knife behind their back—C.Y.) think that since anyone able to afford enough education to write articles is at least a petty bourgeois—who ought to hold on to his petty possessions, any tendency in favour of the propertyless is certainly 'hypocritical' and, therefore, only those petty-bourgeois writers who oppose the proletariat are 'sincere.' Of course it is better to be 'sincere' than 'hypocritical,' and so their libels, oppression, imprisonment and murder of left-wing writers make much better literature."

Wasn't this exactly the "sincerity" for which the members of the Hu Feng clique extolled one another? The only difference was that, times and circumstances having changed, they had no choice but to pose as supporters of the proletariat and the revolution in order to attack them. In the mouth of Hu Feng, "sincerity" became thoroughgoing hypocrisy and deceit.

Our writers should be sincere first and foremost to the people, to the cause of socialism and communism. Being faithful to oneself and being faithful to the people should be identical.

Hu Feng exaggerated the "special nature" of artistic cognition, describing the process of literary creation as something extremely mystic. He did this not to help writers understand the difference between artistically reflecting reality and scientifically reflecting reality, or obtain a better grasp of the rules of artistic creation. Rather he was attempting to make a sharp split between artistic and scientific cognition, between thinking in terms of imagery and thinking in terms of logic, to prove that there was no relation whatever between a writer's creations and his world outlook, that creation depended on the special "laws" of inspiration and subjective "sincerity." Thus, on the one hand, under the cloak of the "mystery" of artistic cognition, he was able to spread the poison of idealist ideas, while on the other hand he was able to attack the functions of an advanced world outlook and any current progressive thinking in the creative process. This view of artistic creation is held in common by many aesthetes in the camp of the modern bourgeois idealists. Hu Feng was different from them only in that he manifested an especially intense hatred for the Marxist world outlook.

We are believers in Marxism-Leninism. We believe that to teach the great world outlook of Marxism-Leninism is the illustrious duty of all writers, artists and other workers in the field of intellect. All progressive writers who want to become socialist realists ought to earnestly study Marxism-Leninism. The reason why socialist realism is an entirely new form of realism in the history of mankind is because it is an artistic method intimately related with the world outlook of Marxism-Leninism. This is a fact Hu Feng was unable to eradicate no matter how he tried.

Of course, the relation between world outlook and literary creation is a complicated one. Simplified, vulgarized explanations are only harmful. It should be noted, first of all, that while the basis of all realistic art is the actualities of life, a writer's world outlook—his attitude toward the realities which he describes—stems from his subjective cognition. But we cannot place objective reality and subjective cognition on a par. What we ask of all artistic works is not the subjective preaching of the author but the realities of life in artistic form. The function of an advanced world outlook is to help the author have a correct and deep

understanding of life, to inspire him to create artistic works beneficial to the people.

Secondly, it should also be noted that the world outlook of many great writers in the past often contained contradictions. While as realistic writers—whose thinking was as advanced as any in their day—they necessarily described the realities of life, yet the prejudices in their world outlook—usually the result of the historical and class limitations of the times—often prevented them from reaching a correct understanding and explanation of actuality. Their writings, therefore, besides reflecting reality, also contain false images manifesting the erroneous ideas of the authors. Only the world outlook of Marxism-Leninism can help writers to accurately understand and interpret reality.

Thirdly, with the forces of modern socialism growing stronger by the day, it has become possible for talented writers who are true to reality to obtain a communist world outlook through their own creative efforts and practical activities in life. Those writers not armed with Marxist-Leninist ideology undoubtedly have considerable difficulty in grasping the urgent and complex social problems of today. But those who have consciously sought and acquired a communist world outlook find it extremely helpful to an accurate understanding and reflection of reality.

Fourthly, writers with a command of Marxism-Leninism must integrate it with both their life and their art. A writer's ability to recognize and portray life is determined not only by whether his world outlook is correct, but also by the level of his world outlook, the level of his knowledge, the extent of his experience in life, his talent and the quality of his artistic technique. It is of the utmost importance for a writer to maintain the closest contacts with the life and struggles of the great mass of the people. Only thus can he acquire a feeling for the new and the fresh and develop broad vision. Life is infinitely rich, new, different every day. It can correct people's wrong and antiquated ideas, their naive, impractical illusions.

The foregoing are some of our basic views on a writer's world outlook.

Many writers are very thrilled on first encountering the new life of the people. But they are also rather bewildered. They must strive to understand and appraise the new significant features of life, and truthfully portray them in a way that is acceptable and understandable to the people. Writers are becoming increasingly aware of the importance and necessity of studying Marxism-Leninism, if they are to fulfil this creative task.

It is entirely right for us to firmly maintain that an advanced world outlook serves a constructive function in literary creation. The concept of literature serving the working class and the working people is the most fundamental manifestation of our world outlook. It is precisely

for this reason that Hu Feng, Hsueh Wei* and the like, directed their hatred against us for so many years. We have also been opposed to an oversimplified understanding of the relation between world outlook and creative writing. However, this is not what the Hu Feng gang opposed. What they hated was the Marxist-Leninist world outlook itself. They flatly denied that a writer needs an advanced world outlook. In effect, they were demanding that he eternally embrace the world outlook of bourgeois idealism and egoism, and continuously preach it to the people. They claimed Marxism-Leninism was "icy," something which the people could not accept. As a matter of fact they were terrified that the people would accept it. They knew that once the people had grasped this ideology they would control their own destiny and smash the old world on which Hu Feng and his stripe relied for their existence.

The union of the Chinese people's struggle against imperialism and feudalism with the scientific socialist thinking which led to the new-democratic revolution, gave rise to the progressive revolutionary literature that started with the May the Fourth Movement. The vitality and strength of this literature lay in its organic tie with the people's liberation movement and socialist ideology. Hu Feng did his best to break this tie. His purpose was to make our literature wither and die and thereby bring himself a step closer to his goal—that of obstructing and opposing our democratic and socialist revolutions.

It has become very clear that what made Hu Feng's literary ideology particularly reactionary was not only that his theories were based on the reactionary, subjective and idealist world outlook of the bourgeoisie, but that, from start to finish, he cleverly used these flashy "theories" to cloak his counter-revolutionary activities against the people. This fact is inseparable from his entire counter-revolutionary history. Beginning as a "devotee" of communism thirty years ago, he sold out when the going got rough. Then, when the revolutionary tide surged forward again, he once more disguised himself as a supporter of the revolution in order to sabotage it.

In connection with the struggle against the Hu Feng counter-revolutionary clique, we also opposed the activities of certain sectarian literary groups. The sectarians, instead of placing the interests of the nation, the people, and the whole literary cause first, were concerned primarily with their individual interests and those of their little coterie. They wanted to establish themselves as a kind of "special power" in the world of letters, refusing to let the Party and the people supervise their work, excluding and refusing to co-operate with many Communist writers and upright non-Communist writers. They propagated the corrupt world outlook of bourgeois individualism among young literati. "Have a book published and the world is yours," they cried. "Pride is a virtue," etc.

*A member of the Hu Feng counter-revolutionary clique.

Chen Chi-hsia* was one of the spokesmen for this line. We firmly opposed such thinking and activities.

What important results have we achieved in the above struggles, and what is our job from now on?

We achieved the following results:

1) Bourgeois idealism was thoroughly, comprehensively and trenchantly refuted on the literary front. The unscientific and reactionary nature of Hu Shih's pragmatic methods which had held sway over our research in classical literature for so long was exposed. The influence of Hu Feng's false "realism" among the young literati was swept clean. Tendencies toward knuckling under to bourgeois literary ideas were overcome. The ideological position of Marxism on the literary front was further strengthened.

2) A counter-revolutionary clique which had been lying in ambush in the world of literature for a long time—the Hu Feng clique—was wiped out, and an end was put to the activities of the sectarian literary groups. The unity among literary workers is now stronger than at any time in the past.

3) One of the most important and valuable results of the ideological struggle has been the appearance on the literary theory front of new warriors, brimming with vitality and armed with Marxist aesthetic viewpoints. Li Hsi-fan and Lan Ling are two bold young cannoneers who fired the first volley against bourgeois idealism in classical literary research. Today, in Marxist literary criticism, new ranks are being formed.

Our task from now on is: Continue to wage a relentless struggle against all manifestations of reactionary bourgeois thinking in literature; scientifically appraise the rich heritage of our literature through the ages, analyse and sum up the living experience of the modern literary movement; and, on this foundation, build our Marxist literary theory and criticism.

One of our constant tasks is to battle against bourgeois ideology. Ever since we started to refute the bourgeois idealism, as represented by Hu Shih and Hu Feng, our literary criticism has shown some lively trends. But on the whole our work in literary theory is still relatively weak. There is hardly a single good volume of Chinese literary history —especially modern literary history—written from the Marxist point of view, although teachers in the institutes of higher learning have begun to make some efforts in this direction. Nor have we scientifically appraised and expanded upon our rich literary heritage, including the heritage of theory and criticism. No systematic research has been conducted into and conclusions drawn about the rich creative experience of

*Former associate editor of the *Literary Gazette.*

our modern writers. Very little inquiry has been made into Marxist aesthetics. These backward conditions must be changed.

In the field of literary theory and criticism we must oppose the tendency to oversimplify and vulgarize Marxism. Some critics are prone to rely upon a few simple formulas and dogmas in analysing the complicated phenomena of literature and art. They measure a work by the simple test of its author's subjective intention rather than by its objective significance. They judge a book simply by what the positive and negative characters say and do, instead of examining them in the light of their historical background, instead of probing into the love or hate the author feels for the characters he has created. Some critics demand that all characters completely measure up to current "ideal" standards, when actually these standards are only something the critic has invented out of thin air. Others insist that a character's every word and move correspond exactly to real life, thus limiting the writer's freedom of imagination. Obviously, such criticism is of no help to literary creation; it only encourages a writer to create stereotyped characters and plots.

The situation is not much better in classical literary research. Some students in this field judge whether a work is progressive or reactionary simply by the class origin of the author; or they arbitrarily stick labels of "realistic," "patriotic" or "popular" on the writer and his work, completely neglecting to analyse them concretely from a historical, ideological and artistic point of view. This kind of research, of course, cannot accurately appraise the worth of our literary heritage. All these tendencies to vulgarize and oversimplify are harmful to the development of our literature. We must work hard to overcome them.

III

Now let us talk about the situation in creative writing.

As we have said above, literary creation not only has not "withered" and "decayed" as Hu Feng slanderously alleged but, on the contrary, it is thriving.

There are many difficulties. While fighting against all bourgeois idealism and anti-popular thinking and tendencies which harm the development of literature and art, we also must struggle against a very injurious and fairly widespread fault in our literary creation—an inclination to create stereotyped plots and characters. The main reason for this failing is that the younger writers lack experience in literary creation, while the older, more experienced writers still are not yet sufficiently familiar with the new life of the people. Moreover, there are many themes that are entirely new and have never been written about before, and it is not easy for the writers to handle them. Another reason

is that some authors have an incorrect understanding of the special features of creative writing. Because they write within the narrow framework of self-imposed formulas, many writers in describing our rich, colourful, varied life convert it into something monotonous, drab and tasteless. Their writings lack fresh, vivid characters, rousing scenes, the moving power which all artistic works ought to have. A formulist approach limits the development of the writer's individuality, his style and his ability. Our writers have done much to overcome this fault, and some results can already be seen. But a number of writers have taken the path of least resistance and are substituting chasing after the trivial and superficial in life for the creation of typical characters in a typical environment. Thus, they fall into another error—that of naturalism.

Formulism and naturalism—these are the major obstacles to improving our creative writing today. I will go into this question more fully further on.

In the name of opposing stereotyped writing, the Hu Feng clique attempted to strangle our young socialist literature. Critics like Chen Chi-hsia sought to slash down new writers and new works. Of course we had to defend our literature—the people's own literature—from the attacks of these axe-wielders. As we can see today, opposition to crude methods of criticism at the Second Conference of the All-China Federation of Writers and Artists was entirely necessary, entirely correct.

Literary writing in the past two or three years, in spite of its faults and shortcomings, has made noteworthy progress in giving a broader and deeper insight into life.

Rural life and struggles are still the themes about which most of our authors write. The socialist high tide now surging through the countryside is a mass movement which is fundamentally changing all aspects of rural life. Comrade Mao Tse-tung's report on "The Question of Agricultural Co-operation"* has been of enormous encouragement to our hundreds of millions of peasants. In recent years, besides continuing to write eloquently about land reform, our authors have begun to give us quite a few new pictures of the socialist transformation in the villages. To a certain extent, these works reflect the enthusiasm of the great mass of the peasants for socialism, reflect the interrelation as well as the conflicts and contradictions among their various strata, reflect the heated battle in the countryside over the choice of roads—to socialism or to capitalism.

An excellent work of this type is Chao Shu-li's novel, *Sanliwan Village*. With his particularly rich knowledge of the peasants, his warmth and humour, the author is able to accurately describe the battle in the countryside between the backward forces and the advanced so-

*Delivered at a meeting of secretaries of provincial, municipal and autonomous region committees of the Communist Party of China on July 31, 1955.

cialist forces. Showing the various conflicts and contradictions among the peasants at work, at home, and in love, Chao Shu-li has captured the flavour of our new rural life. His portraits of "Muddle-head" and "Always Right"—typical old middle peasants—are very successful, and he also shows us some of the new people growing up in the villages. The insignificant figures we met in his earlier novel *The Rhymes of Li Yu-tsai*—all nicknamed "Little," have now grown much bigger indeed with the change in the times. Today, they are the champions of socialist reform and construction in the countryside. The author has embodied his ardent ideals in his new hero, Wang Yu-sheng—honest, keen and striving hard to improve his farming technique, and in the two young couples in love, who represent the union of rural intellectuals with the ordinary village folk, although people have rightly pointed out that the description of their romance is "not romantic enough." At the same time the author faithfully portrays how the peasants, after having formed their co-op, thirst for culture and technique. And isn't Old Liang, the artist in the story who has painted three pictures of Sanliwan Village, the very image of the author himself? Chao Shu-li knows the peasants well, and he has a deep understanding of their weaknesses as small producers. He criticizes their backwardness, but he often does it with a warm and affectionate smile.

When the peasants' revolutionary spirit is welded to the socialist ideas of the working class, a world-shaking force is generated. This force not only can overthrow the system of landlord ownership which has existed for thousands of years, but can also cause the peasants to discard the system of individual ownership of the land they have acquired and choose the road to collectivism. The author, however, seems to have seen less of this aspect of the peasants' strength; in any event, he does not do it full justice. Moreover, the advanced peasants he describes are more or less coloured by his own wishful thinking, and their true forcefulness is not fully brought out. For this reason the contradictions among the peasants and in their hearts do not appear very serious or acute, and they are solved fairly easily. Many details of the plot are not thoroughly developed, and the story ends rather abruptly. All this affects the freshness and sharpness of the theme, makes for a loose and incomplete structure, and prevents the novel from being more of an ideological and artistic success.

This failure to describe contradictions with sufficient acuteness and vigour, to fully portray the great upheavals of the times and thoroughly stir the hearts of the readers, is a weakness found in the works of many other writers as well.

Ouyang Shan's *A Future as Beautiful as Blossoms* and Wang Hsi-chien's *A Song to Welcome Spring* also take agricultural co-operation as their subject, and both were well received by the readers. They tell of the sharp class struggle against rich peasants, counter-revolutionaries and

imposters who have wormed their way into the Party. Although fairly successful in portraying advanced peasants, they are a bit too pat in their solutions of the conflicts and contradictions.

Spring Sowing, Autumn Harvest and *Village Sketches* by Kang Cho and Chin Chao-yang respectively, both old hands at describing peasant life, are collections of short stories. They reflect the early stages of the socialist reform in the countryside and describe the maturing of the younger generation and their fine, bright character. The common failing of the stories in both collections is that they do not present the main conflicts and contradictions in the countryside. Kang Cho's style is fresh and simple. His descriptions of rural life come very close to the truth, although they are somewhat cluttered at times. Chin Chao-yang writes beautifully, though he often prettifies life, deliberately giving it a kind of pastorale air.

The plays *Spring Wind over the Nomin River* by An Po and *Flowers Blossom in the Warmth of Spring* by Hu Tan-fei describe the relation and contradiction between the poor and the middle peasants in the co-operative movement, and the complicated battle to win over the middle peasants while striking back at the rich peasants and counter-revolutionaries.

Quite a few new and talented young authors who write of country life have come forward in recent years. Li Chun, in his short story *Not That Road,* was the first to portray the peasants faced with alternatives of socialism or capitalism. This story has attracted considerable attention among the general reading public and in the literary world. He followed it up with *The Ice Thaws and the Snow Melts,* a novelette which takes as its theme the contradiction between the interests of a small group of peasants and those of the community as a whole—the problems of unity between new and old, big and small co-ops.

Other promising new writers include Chi Hsueh-pei (*Storm over a Little White Flag*—a collection of short stories), Liu Shu-teh (*Bridge*—a novelette), Liu Shao-tang (*Oars Creak in the Canal*—a novelette), Fang Chih (*Beside the Spring*—a short story) and Liu Chen (*Elder Sister Spring*—a short story).

Several of our writers have taken their themes from the great revolutionary wars of the Chinese people. Tu Peng-cheng's novel *Defend Yenan!* and Chen Chi-tung's play *The Long March* deal with two events of major significance in the history of our revolutionary wars. Both truthfully and vividly portray the high revolutionary heroism and optimistic spirit of the people's forces. Although the leading characters in them are tried by the severest adversities, these books do not contain even a hint of sentimentalism, nor do they show any of that cheap optimism which sees smooth sailing ahead no matter what the weather. The hero of *Defend Yenan!*—Chou Ta-yung, a company commander—is utterly fearless. The story also describes the lovable character of several

other people's fighters, and has a try at portraying the supreme commander on the northwestern front at that time.

The Long March is more than a simple record of the 25,000 *li* Long March. The author pays great attention to character delineation. He describes a battalion political instructor's friendship through thick and thin with his comrades-in-arms, his fine sense of principle, and steadfast loyalty to the revolutionary cause.

The events portrayed in these works are moving enough in themselves. All the author has to do is to choose those incidents which are the most stirring, the characters who participated in them, their words and deeds, and weave them together aesthetically so as to evoke a response from the reader. But instead, our writers often cannot resist coming forward themselves or speaking through the mouths of their characters, and pronouncing abstract polemics on such things as revolutionary spirit, fidelity, heroism and optimism. This practice detracts from a work's effectiveness and ability to move people.

One of the best of our new films is *Tung Tsun-jui* (scenario by Ting Hung and others, directed by Kuo Wei). Although not as broad in scope as *Defend Yenan!* and *The Long March*, the true story it relates is equally moving. Thanks to the collective efforts of the writer, director and actors, the film paints, in clear lines and colours, a picture of the growth of an ordinary soldier from a simple, childish, country youngster to an outstanding Communist fighter, and delineates his remarkable character.

Riverside at Dawn, a collection of short stories by Sun Chun-ching, tells of the many valiant exploits of the people in a revolutionary base in Shantung Province during their armed struggle against the Kuomintang reactionaries and foreign invaders. The author takes us from our peaceful life back to the cruel times of not so long ago when the whole land was in flames. With the utmost ardour, he draws for us a true and glorious picture of the ordinary people who preferred death to surrender. The "unruly Wei River" and the fragrant apple orchard were dyed red with martyrs' blood. Who can read these stories without being moved and inspired by the great spirit of our people's heroes!

Liu Chih-hsia's *Railway Guerillas* is another popular favourite. He has caught the full romantic flavour of this tale of a guerilla detachment of coal-miners and railway workers growing in strength in the rear of Japanese invaders.

The first part of *Memories of Early Stormy Days* by Sun Li vividly portrays the outbreak of the war against Japan, showing how the sons and daughters of the central Hopei plains swarmed to join the resistance. But just as the reader is looking forward to seeing, in a second and third part, how the people boldly and firmly fought and built up guerilla bases, the author leads us away from the vortex of the struggle to

linger in an atmosphere that is filled with emotional trivialities. This saps the vitality of the book's second part.

Following up his *Living Hell* and other stories, Chen Teng-ke has written a novel about wartime—*Sons and Daughters on the Banks of the Huai.* In his novelette *The Regimental Commander,* Hsieh Hsueh-chou, drawing on his own experience, describes the thoughts and actions of a commander of the people's army before and after a battle.

In *Into Battle,* Liu Pai-yu, with the same deep feeling that he has always shown for the people's fighters, tells of his reunion with his old comrades-in-arms on the fighting fronts of Korea. This was a completely modern war, different from those fought in the past. The people's fighters—the officers and the rank and file—showed the same staunch spirit, the same optimism and keenness under all circumstances. The author sings their praises and warmly describes this special quality which he has always seen in them. Though he succeeds in bringing out this common feature, he does not clearly delineate their individual differences in personality.

Other works about the Korean war worthy of mention include Hu Ke's play *The Front Moves South,* Huang Ti's play *The Transport Soldiers of Steel,* Lao Sheh's novelette *A Nameless Height Gets a Name,* and the novels *Eastern Front* by Han Feng, and *East of the Motherland* by Ma Chia.

The handling of industrial themes and the life and struggle of the workers is still one of the weak spots in our writing. Our writers must certainly make greater efforts in this regard. Both Chou Li-po's *Molten Iron* and Lei Chia's *Spring on the Yalu* describe the bitter struggles of the Party and the working class to restore industry in the days immediately after liberation. But Chou Li-po fails to link his enthusiasm for the working class with a penetrating portrayal of the complex struggles in the factories and the relations among the various types of workers and the changes in their thinking. Nor does he concentrate the full force of his pen on describing the people he likes. As a result, the picture of life is rather superficial, and characterization is oversimplified.

Lei Chia is more familiar with factory life and has considerable experience there, but most readers get the impression that he leans too heavily on detailed description of trifles.

Hsia Yen's play *The Test* takes as its theme the sharp struggle on the industrial front between the advanced forces and those of bureaucracy and conservatism. The author draws his negative characters boldly, but his heroes seem a bit frivolous and they win their victory with too much ease.

Wei Wei's short story *Old Chimney* criticizes the stubborn ideas and selfish concepts and habits that are typical of small producers and carried over by some workers of the older generation. In the one-act play *Liu Lien-ying* by Tsui Teh-chih and the short story *Not Up to Standard* by

Nan Ting we find the fine new communist character of the youngest generation of Chinese workers clearly and truthfully etched. *Liu Lien-ying* and *The Women's Representative*, a play by Sun Yu about a forward-looking peasant woman, are two of the most popular one-act plays on our stage today. The heroine of *The Women's Representative* has become known to millions of theatre-goers.

Hitherto very little has been written about the intellectuals and the changes that have taken place in their outlook and their progress since the liberation, but this theme too is now attracting the attention of our writers. Tsao Yu's play *Bright Sky* is a faithful reflection of such changes among some types of highly-trained specialists. It goes some way to making good the gap.

Of the works reflecting the life of our national minorities, there has been an increase not only in poems, but also in plays and fiction. Their folk tales are constantly being brought to light and recorded. Particular mention must be made of the long poems *Ashma* and *The Garment of a Hundred Birds' Feathers*—two important folk creations that have been carefully recorded. Among the national minority writers who have come to public attention, we must mention N. Sayntsogt, poet, and Malchinhu, young author of the collection of short stories called *Happy Songs of Spring*, the Uighur poet Teepjan-Eliev, and the Uighur playwright Tsiya Samidi, author of the play *Bloodstains*.

An important advance has been made recently in children's literature. We have Chang Tien-yi's *How Lo Wen-ying Became a Young Pioneer* and his other stories and poems so welcomed by our children. If we expand the former definition of children's literature somewhat, we must include such charming pieces as Ma Feng's *Han Mei-mei*, Han Tse's *Mother's Stories*, and Liu Chen's *Me and Little Yung*. All give our youngsters an education in the spirit of communism.

Creation of poetry has livened up considerably. Quite a few fine lyrical and narrative poems and verses of political satire have already appeared. Hu Feng said that we crushed lyric poetry until it was breathless. Yes, the kind of "lyric poetry" that Hu Feng and Lu Li* wrote, frenziedly propagating egoism, setting the individual in conflict with social currents, posing the "genius" in opposition to "the rabble," and promoting other anti-social ideas—that kind of poetry we neither need nor want. What we do want are the poems of the people. We want a lyric poetry that is not wholly and exclusively a medium for individualist sentiments, that expresses individual sentiments which accord with the spirit of the age, with the spirit of the people and the working class. Poets are the trumpeters of their era. There is no Great Wall between the spirit of our lyrics and that of our narrative poems. Both of them are for the people. One waxes lyrical about the loves of the

*A member of the Hu Feng clique.

people; the other narrates the people's deeds. This is a special feature of our lyric poetry.

In recent years, our older and more experienced poets—Ai Ching and Tien Chien, Feng Chih and Yuan Shui-po, Tsang Ke-chia and Yen Chen, Li Chi and Yuan Chang-ching—all have written quite a lot. Most of our poets have kept close to the effervescent life of the country and the people. From far-away Yumen, Li Chi has given us a lively picture of the oil workers and the prospecting teams working in the Gobi Desert. Especially worthy of our attention are the numerous talented young poets who have appeared. They sing of a vast variety of subjects—from the Korean battlefields to the sea coasts of South China, from the grape arbours of Turfan in Sinkiang to the highways on the Sikang-Tibetan Plateau; from our Anshan steelworkers, our coal-miners, linemen, road-builders, our men and women on the co-operative farms to the soldiers guarding our frontiers. There is a genuine feeling and imaginative colour in their praises of the people, the motherland, the friendship among our many nationalities and the enthusiasm with which they are building a new life together.

Wen Chieh's *Love Song from Turfan* and other poems about the new life of the people in Sinkiang have been well received by our readers because of the novelty of their subject-matter as well as their artistic power. Shao Yen-hsiang's poetry (he has written a collection of poems called *Going to Distant Places*) has an earthy, free flavour. He tries hard to convey the picture of China's working people.

In addition, we also have young poets Chang Yung-mei (*Poems Written by the Seaside, New Spring*—collections), Wei Yang (*Motherland, I've Come Back*—a collection), and Ku Kung (*At the Foot of the Himalayas*—a collection). Their poems all describe the people's armymen who are defending our frontiers and taking part in building up our country, but each poet has his own characteristic lyric style.

New China's working masses are entering an era of unprecedented enthusiasm. Our youth is demanding from our poets voices that are stimulating and militant. But poems of the calibre needed are still all too few. We hope our poets will strengthen their ties with the people, and recite the poems they are most satisfied with among the masses. They should have a mutual exchange of feelings with the masses, and derive from them inspiration and strength. At the same time, poets should learn from our national heritage. This is one of the keys to making our new poetry truly popular. If our poets constantly bear in mind the likes of the masses and learn the mastery of language and rhythm found in our classical and folk poetry, then our new poems will be on the lips of all and become the people's own.

The people need satires as well as lyric poetry. Political satires in verse have been written, lampooning the foreign imperialists and warmongers, and the concealed counter-revolutionaries in our midst.

Satirical comedies exposing and criticizing various manifestations of backwardness in our social life have also begun to be staged and our audiences are delighted with them.

The foregoing is just an outline of the development of our creative writing in the past few years. I have mentioned only those works which I have read myself and about which there has been more than the usual share of public discussion. Of course the list is not complete, nor are all my ideas about these works necessarily right. I want to make it clear that these are only my personal opinions and are open to discussion.

We can now state with confidence that our literary creation is becoming abundant and flourishing. Our writers are manifesting a mounting keenness for creation. Many experienced authors are enthusiastically taking part in the life around them while diligently engaging in creative writing. What is more, they are reflecting the new life in their literary efforts.

Lao Sheh has been one of our most industrious writers during the past few years, in fact he has been a model of hard work in our literary ranks. Our readers hope that, by deepening his understanding of the new life and writing on subjects with which he is particularly familiar, he will bring about a still more felicitous union between his high political enthusiasm and his writing technique and ability as a humourist.

Pa Chin has been writing many sketches of the exploits and ardour of the heroes of the war against American aggression in Korea. Other comparatively experienced writers, like Tsao Yu, Chang Tien-yi, Hsia Yen, Sha Ting and Ai Wu, after a fairly long silence, are again beginning to make themselves heard as writers.

Worthy of special rejoicing is the burgeoning of new writing talent, bringing to our literary creation a new spirit and vitality.

Not only is the new life of the people now depicted in our literature, but some relatively fresh characters, possessing their own individuality, have been created as well. Our literary works today deal with more themes than ever before, and a much greater variety of styles and forms are being employed. The relationship between literature and the great mass of the people has, therefore, been further broadened.

Still we cannot say that we are satisfied with the present state of our literary development.

Creative writing, no matter how you look at it, is a long way from meeting the requirements of the people. Our choice of subject-matter is still too narrow. Many aspects of social life have not yet even been touched upon. Most of our youth, for instance, complain that too little has been written about students. Workers in the field of economics rightly ask why there has not been any portrayal of our state-owned commerce and the socialist reform of handicrafts and of private industry and commerce. An important theme like the defence of world peace,

except for a few songs and poems, has not been treated with at all. Motion pictures have the largest mass audience of all the various art forms, but we suffer from a lack of good scenarios. Making good this lack is one of the most difficult tasks of our writers today. Most important of all, both ideologically and artistically, our present works fail to meet the standards demanded by the great mass of the readers. It is here that the seriousness of the problem lies.

To raise the ideological and artistic level of our creative literature requires hard work from us in many respects. So far as the author is concerned, he must, first of all, better educate himself, strive to overcome formulistic, naturalistic writing and all other tendencies toward a departure from realism.

Conquering formulism is no easy matter. The decisive factor is the maintenance of a correct relation between the writer and life. This includes not only deep penetration into life, but also the author's ability to understand life and portray it, his powers of observation, his enthusiasm, his artistic technique. The chief characteristic of formulistic writing is that it oversimplifies the richness and variety in life and in personalities. The contact of many of our authors with the life of the people is too narrow, and their understanding of it is not very deep. This is one of the fundamental reasons for stereotyped writing.

Yet aren't our writers always "experiencing" life? Yes, that is one of our good points. Most of our writers are not divorced from the life of the people. Generally speaking, they are quite familiar with it. The trouble is that some writers "experience life" in a very limited and partial manner. They often restrict their observation to their chosen milieu and subjects, instead of carefully noting the people and things around them at all times, as every successful author has always done. Some writers, even when they are observing the prototypes for their characters, set them within a subjective framework. They first decide that A will be the "hero" and B the "villain," and that this "hero" and this "villain" should have certain characteristics. Then they proceed to seek in A and B those traits which they would like to find. These writers therefore oversimplify and get a one-sided picture of people, and do not see them as complete, living persons. By the time A and B appear as characters in the author's book, they resemble human beings still less.

Authors of this kind cannot obtain a true and complete understanding of life. To get at the truth, they should observe life in its many-sidedness and study it deeply. In this regard, a writer's serious study of Marxism-Leninism and the policies of the government and the Communist Party is of decisive significance. Only when we grasp the weapon of Marxism-Leninism can we discern and recognize the essence of various complicated phenomena with relative acuteness and accuracy. Naturally, a correct approach to Marxism-Leninism requires that we use it creatively in practice, not just memorize and recite it as a doctrine.

Writers should know and respect government and Party policy. Policy helps a writer visualize the major contradictions and perceive the direction in which the people are going and the road they are taking. Literature which departs from policy abandons its stand of serving the current political struggles.

It is also necessary that writers broaden their knowledge. They should have not only a rich knowledge of literature and history, but also some understanding of the natural sciences. This is indispensable to all writers who want to understand and portray life.

For an accurate and deep understanding of life it is essential for the writer to take an active part in the struggle to change it; he must maintain a flesh and blood relationship with the people waging the struggle, join in their fight, go forward together with them, and never avoid their struggle or only look at it from the side-lines as a spectator.

Today we all know how important it is for literary works to depict the contradictions and conflicts in life and how harmful the "no conflict" theory is. But why is it that many writers are often afraid to portray the contradictions and conflicts in life, or are not very good at it? Either they turn away from contradictions and prettify reality and see everything through rose-coloured glasses; or they write of the contradictions and struggle between the new and the old as if they were some sort of petty quarrels or expression of personal eccentricities of particular individuals; or, although mentioning important contradictions, they fail to develop them and offer a forceful solution, but solve them much too simply and in a weak, flat manner.

What is the reason for this? It is mainly because the writer has not taken the attitude of an active participant in the people's struggles, but stands outside the contradictions between the old and the new; because he has not joined the advanced elements among the people in actively supporting the new and opposing the old. As a result, the heroes in his works are always wishy-washy. He cannot make them people with initiative, militant, full of vitality. Nor is he able to expose and excoriate the evils of society effectively. Another reason for this situation is that some writers lack political and artistic courage: they do not dare to portray contradictions and conflicts even if they are aware of them. Or they may not be able to artistically extract the essence of a situation; they cannot refine and condense the conflicts and contradictions in life and convert them into the conflicts and contradictions portrayed in their own writings.

The contradictions in life are many and varied. There is the contradiction between the people and their oppressors and exploiters—an antagonistic kind of contradiction. There are also the contradictions among the people themselves, such as the one between the advanced and the backward forces, or between the progressive and backward ideas of an individual. This is what we call "internal contradiction," or "in-

ternal struggle." Writers must develop the ability to observe, analyse and synthesize all kinds of contradictions, grasp their basic qualities, and portray them concisely and sharply.

Nowadays our writers are paying relatively more attention to the personality and thoughts of the characters in their works. But why are really well-drawn characters so few? One of the main reasons is that the writer tends to draw the personality of a character as something unchanging, in isolation from struggle and action; or he fixes on certain physical features to represent various traits of character of the individual; or he goes in for revealing those details of "private life" which actually have very little to do with characterization. It is only in the course of action, conflict, struggle, in close integration of work and social and private life, that the personality of a character can be fully brought out.

Another reason for the formulistic tendency in our literary writing is the fact that some writers do not correctly understand that art reflects reality by means of special forms. Artistic reflection of reality and scientific reflection of reality have something in common; in addition each has its own particular qualities. What they have in common is that both reflect life and reality. The difference between them is that science is a reflection by means of concepts, while art is a reflection by means of images. The task of science is to discover the laws of life and reality—and laws are always abstract, derived by sifting through a great many concrete phenomena of life and setting them aside. Science helps people understand the world by means of concepts, and appeals mainly to their reason.

Literature, however, manifests life itself. Although it also seeks to discover the laws of life, its immediate task is not to abstract life, but to depict its phenomena—which, generally speaking, are much richer than abstract laws. In the process of making abstractions, science cannot help but set many concrete things aside. Literature does just the opposite. It enables people to understand the world precisely by depicting individual, concrete, tangible objects, and evokes pleasure in its readers for the beautiful in life and revulsion against what is ugly. Literature always depicts the general through the particular, essence through concrete phenomena. This is the principle of typicalness in art.

Authors who write in a stereotyped way violate this principle of artistic creation. Their starting point for observing and portraying life is not concrete reality but abstract concepts and documents of political policy. Instead of depicting life in keeping with its varied, complex nature, they write according to a set "formula." The picture they present of life is therefore oversimplified and one-sided. Life is actually an integrated whole, but the formula-followers artificially dismember it. When these authors write of a worker who invents something, they make the whole life of the worker and the factory revolve around the inven-

tion, as if all other activity had stopped. Nor does the worker ever think of anything except his invention, and he seems to have lost all other interest in life and become emotionally numb.

Thus the true nature of life and people disappears without a trace. All details are monotonously alike. Characters become either "right" and "progressive," or "wrong" and "backward." And so, while the events described in the story have their setting in time and place and the characters have both given names and surnames, there is nothing individual or special about any of them. Unity of the "particular" and the "general" becomes impossible. As Engels put it: "Individuality is drowned in a sea of generalizations."

The oversimplification of characters in many works stems from the oversimplification of the plot. Our writers frequently fail to notice or are no good at selecting the fascinating details which serve as the threads from which characterization is woven. It is right for an author to discard all superfluous detail, all unnecessary characters and events, in order to sharply bring out his main theme. But this certainly does not mean that he should oversimplify his plot. A theme that is rich in thought cannot be separated from a story that is intelligently constructed.

In their efforts to overcome formulism, some writers have slipped into the slough of naturalism. I cannot now say which writer or writers have become representatives of the tendency toward naturalism, but I can say that in some works of certain authors this tendency is definitely manifested. To photographically record life, to merely itemize phenomena, to fail to be artistically selective in description, to take a detached and indifferent attitude toward the fate of the characters described, to depict their thoughts and emotions as low and vulgar—are these not manifestations of naturalism? Here I would like to recommend an article by Comrade Chang Chun-hsiang, the film director, which appeared in the *Literary Gazette,* No. 24, 1955, entitled "What Makes Our Moving Pictures Too Long?" Quite correctly and with good reason, he points out three excesses in our motion pictures: an excess of scenes, an excess of characters, and an excess of dialogue. And aren't these faults attributable to formulistic and naturalistic tendencies? Are they not equally prevalent in other forms of artistic creation? Formulism oversimplifies life's rich variety; naturalism gives lengthy descriptions of life's trivia. The two appear antithetical, but in fact they are complementary to each other. Far from being an antidote to formulism, naturalism takes creative writing down an even more dangerous path for, in a certain sense, it distorts life still further. Whether formulistic or naturalistic, both kinds of writing violate the fundamental principle of creative writing — "describing typical characters in a typical environment"; both depict life subjectively.

As we know, naturalism shows itself in many ways. One of its major characteristics is that it takes a purely biological view of people

and society. In many naturalistic works, people are not social beings, but biological or clinical specimens. They are depicted as animals apart from society. Their life and actions are treated as biological phenomena. Naturalistic writers are opposed to art describing the lofty and beautiful in life. They focus their attention on the petty and the vulgar. Their method is to record facts mechanically, photographically — which is part of the same thing, with no regard for the general and the typical. They are enthralled with descriptions of trifling, superficial, accidental phenomena. As a result, reality is inevitably distorted, and the reader is drawn toward developing a taste for the coarse and the inconsequential.

Naturalism on the surface appears to be "faithful" to reality, but in fact it is limited to reflecting merely the superficial in life. It cannot penetrate to the essence of life. What it supposes to be realism is actually a vulgarization of it.

Some of our authors, anxious to avoid formulistic mistakes, end up taking the road to naturalism, because their sense of discrimination is weak. It is true that they have not developed a system of naturalist ideas which they advocate in creative writing, and that most of their mistakes are made unconsciously. But if we fail to point out these mistakes in time and let these writers continue in their erroneous ways, they will face a very dangerous future.

Our literature educates people in the spirit of communism, but by aesthetic means. In other words, the author should use his talent and skill to arouse the aesthetic feelings of his readers and develop their artistic tastes, evoking strong love or hate for the characters portrayed in his works. Obviously, formulistic or naturalistic creations lack this artistic power to sway emotions.

Our writers, particularly our young writers, must learn and master writing technique. To take a light view of technique is harmful. Technique is something writers develop by continually observing and depicting life; but it is also the product of experience accumulated through the centuries by our predecessors. It is a heritage, a method which has been bequeathed to us. We cannot move a step without it. Only the writer's talent and technique can transform the truths of life into artistic truths, the beauties of life into beauties of art, and blend into one teachings in communist morality and aesthetic education. Technique itself, as a manifestation of human labour and ingenuity, evokes aesthetic pleasure. In this regard, we should learn from all of the world's great writers, particularly from our own great writers of the past. There is a serious tendency among our writers today to deprecate our national heritage. Far too few of them are studying China's traditional novels and poetry. This situation must be changed.

First of all, we should learn from Lu Hsun. The works of Lu Hsun opened an entire new literary era. He left what to us are the dearest, most precious and most valuable things in our literary heritage. Kuo

Mo-jo's *The Nymph* began a new era in poetry. Writers Mao Tun, Lao Sheh, Pa Chin, Tsao Yu and Chao Shu-li are all contemporary masters in the art of language.

In order to overcome formulistic, naturalistic writing, and all other tendencies against socialist realism, in order to enable our literature to raise its present level, it is necessary that we writers improve our ability to understand and portray life, clarify our world outlook, broaden our knowledge, improve our artistic technique and, most important of all, devote all of our artistic efforts to serving the people and the cause of socialist construction with ever greater enthusiasm.

Only by maintaining the closest bonds with the people, especially in the course of their struggles, partaking in their happiness and misfortunes, breathing the same air, can our writers share the people's emotions. A despicable bourgeois craving for fame makes an author proud, and the ugly shadow of his egoism appears in everything he writes. The only true force which can motivate an author to create good works is a sincere desire to serve the people without reservation and an ardour for the great causes of socialism and communism. May these sparks of enthusiasm dance forever in the hearts of our writers!

After this conference is concluded I believe that many, many writers will go to factories, mines, construction sites and farms, to our country's borders, to our national defence fronts, to every battle front where socialist construction and socialist transformation are in the heat of progress. Our conference should become a rally arousing writers to go to the life of the people. The great mass of our young literati and many people, holding various posts, who love literature and possess some literary polish, have been stirred by their personal experiences and desire to write. Our conference should become a rally for drawing the widest possible number of new talented writers into our literary ranks.

THE KEY PROBLEMS IN ART AND LITERATURE*

MAO TUN

For nearly two months now, Chinese artists and writers have been discussing the policy summed up in the words "let flowers of all kinds blossom and diverse schools of thought contend." There is great enthusiasm among them about it. They believe that this is an extremely important directive that will help to bring about a new blossoming of art and literature — of creative work as well as of art theory and criticism.

The question of quality is the main problem we face in art and literature today. In the first half of the year, many of our theatres were not as well attended as they should have been. Why was this? Simply because there was lack of good new productions of modern plays. What is at the root of this question of quality? Audiences and readers almost invariably complain that our plays are lifeless, or tell the same old story. They are lifeless because their authors approach their subjects saddled with a set of preconceived ideas. They are monotonous because their authors write to a set pattern and deal with a very limited group of themes. There are many reasons for these faults. But generally speaking, they can be summed up as our failure to carry out the policy of "letting flowers of all kinds blossom" and lack of diverse schools of thought vying with one another.

The policy "let flowers of all kinds blossom, weed through the old to let the new emerge" was first put into practice in the field of opera reform, and we have in fact achieved some success along these lines in the past few years. But the recent performance of the revised *Kunchu* opera *Fifteen Strings of Cash* came, like a bolt from the blue, to rouse us from self-complacency. Let us be quite frank about this: too many people working on this question of opera reform grossly underestimated the value of this time-honoured style of opera. We must also admit that, in general, far too little has been done in searching and sorting out the rich legacy of our classical repertoire.

As far as is known at present, there are about 200 styles of opera in this country, and the classical repertoire includes several thousand

*Speech made at the Third Session of the First National People's Congress on June 19th, 1956.

pieces at the very least. With such a rich heritage at our disposal, it must be admitted that there is plenty of room for our artists to display their talents. Why, then, have we still got people begging for meals, so to speak, with golden bowls in their hands? I think that it is because their minds are cluttered with taboos and commandments. And the reason why such taboos and commandments have been allowed to dull their minds is simply that they never try to look at things from various angles, never try to make a thorough-going analysis of things, don't know how to sift gold from sand. For instance, in some places, operas in which clowns play the leading roles have been labelled "insults to the working people," and kept from production pending "further study," "careful consideration," or under some such pretext.

Our music and the visual arts suffer from defects common to all the other branches of art, but I must especially mention the **utterly unsatisfactory nature of our work in studying and developing our national heritage in these arts.** Our traditional painters and musicians have worked hard. Thanks to their efforts, our national heritage in these two fields has been enriched. But some of the very people who are supposed to give them guidance, encouragement and help in developing their talents seem to have done a very poor job indeed. Worse than that. They themselves have no clear-cut idea as to the sort of guidance they should give because they have not delved deep into our national heritage themselves and have no comprehensive knowledge of these arts. Moreover, because they are subjective in their way of thinking, they are arbitrary and heavy-handed in their approach to things. As a result, though they sincerely want to carry on our finest traditions, they have in fact abandoned those very traditions. This is what happened, for instance, when such people took up the question of creative method in traditional Chinese painting and the question of teaching traditional painting.

We say that, in accordance with the principle of "letting flowers of all kinds blossom," popular songs should be encouraged, symphonic music should be composed and Western-style music and oil painting should be mastered; but this does not mean that we should ignore the importance of assimilating and developing our own traditional music and fine arts. As far as traditional Chinese painting goes, whether of landscapes, human figures, or flowers and birds, whether it is a product of fine and delicate draughtsmanship or free-style drawing, so long as it is a "flower" we must let it blossom and help it to blossom. We should have a great variety of styles and genres, the more the better.

We hold that, in accordance with the principle of "letting diverse schools of thought contend," **we must make room for various schools to exist in the world of art and literature,** and give them a chance to stand the test of free discussion and mutual competition, and so prove their fitness to survive. We are convinced that because it can most faithfully

reflect reality, socialist realism is the method of artistic creation that best shows the laws of social development. That is why it is the most advanced creative method in art. But while we encourage and give publicity to the creative method of socialist realism, at the same time, we feel strongly that each writer should be entirely free to choose his own creative method, the one that suits him best. It is only by turning out more and better works, not by artificial boosting, that socialist realist art and literature will prove their worth. There are controversial problems in literary theory and creation which have not been satisfactorily solved to this day. There are also many open questions relating to the appraisal of certain periods of classical literature or of various schools or writers. We must leave such questions to free discussion; we must not seek a false unanimity of views or rush to hasty conclusions.

In the recent past, there was a rather widespread tendency in literary criticism to oversimplify things, to indulge in rudeness or *ex cathedra* pronouncements based on vulgar sociological views that made no attempt at concrete analysis of the content of the work criticized. This tendency has not entirely disappeared even now. Such critics, as often as not, cover up their shallowness and rudeness with voluminous quotations from the Marxist classics. They try to bolster up their unfair and illogical arguments by tacking a label on a writer or his work. This kind of criticism lays down innumerable do's and don't's for writers. This only does harm to literature. Its main result is to hamper the free and vital growth of the creative spirit among writers, and especially among young writers, dulling their ardour in the search for new literary styles and forms.

A limited subject-matter and monotony of treatment are the common defects of artistic and literary works today. On the face of it, it seems that this may be attributed to the fact that most of our artists and writers have tried to deal with the most important social events of the day. But actually, this is not so. A great many important social events have not yet found reflection in art and literature. Our readers are bored not because too many important events have been reflected in literature but because there is little variety in the themes that have been treated and there is a sameness in the way these themes are presented. The public demands that our art should reflect important social events, that, in fact, we should write more about such events, describing their various aspects and reflecting their complex character. We are of the opinion that the main task of our writers is to reflect important social events, now and in the future. But this does not mean that we preclude other themes. Provided they are not socially pernicious, provided they do not tend to endanger the people's cause, there is no reason why all the other aspects of the realities of life should not serve as themes for creative art.

In our daily life, we need pretty cotton prints and fine handicraft products as well as steel plants and sluice gates. As to our recreations, the people would certainly not be satisfied if all they could get were lyrical

poems, waltz music, and paintings of birds and flowers. But, on the other hand, if they can find no art except that which purports to reflect important social events and it is all stereotyped both in form and content, it would not be surprising if they voiced their discontent and, indeed, they have already done so. Never since the remotest past has the art and literature created by the people been either monotonous or dull; it is always kaleidoscopic in variety of form and richness of content. It is our responsibility to carry on this fine tradition of ours; we have certainly no right to destroy it.

The goal of our art and literature is to serve the people, especially the workers, peasants and soldiers. There should be no doubt about that. But what shall we serve them with? The policy of "letting flowers of all kinds blossom" answers the question in principle. What is the best way to serve them? The answer is "let diverse schools of thought contend." We must understand the truth of the saying: "The melodies of two composers may not be the same, but what does it matter if they are equally pleasant to the ear? The paths people take may not be the same, but what does it matter if in the end they all arrive at their common destination!" We must realize that in artistic theory and criticism, the principle of "letting diverse schools of thought contend" will not cause ideological confusion but, on the contrary, will correct that one-sidedness in theoretical work that results when only one school of thought has its say. This policy will in fact help do away with subjectivism and arbitrariness and in the end it will lead to fundamental agreement on many ideological issues.

The policy of "letting diverse schools of thought contend," in the study and theoretical work of art and literature, will certainly play an active part in enabling "flowers of all kinds to blossom." We can hope that as a consequence of this there will, in the near future, be a great blossoming of the many kinds of flowers we have in our garden of art, and that we will also find many new kinds of flowers come out as a result of better "grafting." Then, we shall indeed have a sea of lovely blooms, vying with one another in charm and beauty.

If we are to properly carry out this policy of "letting flowers of all kinds blossom and diverse schools of thought contend," then, we must at the same time discover and foster by every means the great reserves of literary and artistic talent we have among the masses. **We must make great efforts to promote artistic and literary activities among amateurs.**

Data to hand from nineteen provinces and municipalities and three industrial trade unions, including the big railway workers' union, show there are more than 21,700 amateur art and literary groups with a membership of over 300,000. Following the recent upsurge in agricultural co-operation, nearly all the 100,000 amateur dramatic groups, choirs, etc. we had in the countryside have amalgamated into co-op farm clubs which have since made rapid progress.

Take Szechuan Province for instance. In 1955 the whole province had only 355 co-op farm clubs; now, in 1956, in Kwanghan County alone, 300 such clubs are being formed. This vigorous amateur art and literary activity among the masses now sets us the urgent problem of how to give it proper guidance. We still lack the personnel needed to guide art and literary work in general, and in regard to co-op farm clubs in particular, the number of personnel lags far behind the need.

Despite this lack of effective guidance, the masses show an astounding talent in art and literature. The First National Folk Music and Dance Festival held in 1953, the National Amateur Music and Dance Festival, the First Exhibition of Workers' Fine Arts held in 1955 and the National Workers' and Employees' Ballad Festival held last April, gave us a chance of seeing many memorable items (some of them created entirely by workers themselves) and many gifted amateur actors and singers came into the limelight. Such talent coming from the ranks of the amateurs has infused fresh blood into our professional theatre and other arts.

The same is true in the world of letters. It has welcomed many newcomers. The younger generation is growing up fast. The *Selected Works of Young Writers* compiled recently with over a million words includes the works of 188 young writers. This represents only one-fifth of the young writers who are making regular contributions to the press. They are the rising force in the literary world, and 70 per cent of them are amateur writers from factories, villages, the armed services, schools and government offices. It is true that their personal style is still in the making, and that their writing has not yet shown enough signs of maturity, but they have at least shown that they have talent and a promising future lies ahead of them. **This big contingent of amateur writers also stands in urgent need of guidance.** The second enlarged meeting of the council of the Union of Chinese Writers decided on a number of measures that must be taken to improve our work in this field.

As I said earlier, although amateur literary and artistic activities haven't a very long history behind them, they have already demonstrated what an enormous potential of artistic and literary talent exists among the people. In carrying out the policy of "letting flowers of all kinds blossom and diverse schools of thought contend" in the world of art and literature, our professional artists and writers clearly have a serious responsibility to make each his own contribution. But, at the same time, it would be unforgivable to neglect this tremendous pool of latent talent and fail to give proper education and training to these young people.

I must point out in this connection that there are actually people who not only fail to give proper attention to the spare-time literary and artistic activities of the masses, but go so far as to claim that these interfere with ordinary work, and put all sorts of restrictions on these activities.

There are also people who unduly emphasize the demand that such activities should be closely linked with propaganda concerning the

major topics of the day. As an inevitable result, such artistic activities are cramped and become monotonous both in form and content. Naturally this is not what the people want; they want an art and literature that is varied in subject-matter and form. Such restrictions and demands impair the healthy growth of spare-time artistic and literary activities, and impede the advance of our new artistic forces.

The policy of "letting flowers of all kinds blossom and diverse schools of thought contend" encourages our art and literary workers in their creative work; it will help them to think independently and work with unbounded imagination for the creation of schools of art and literature that are truly Chinese in style. It is our duty to adopt all measures necessary to implement this policy. It is no less important that we should create an atmosphere in which every artist will hate to imitate accepted conventions or to produce a half-baked rehash of accepted ideas. We want an atmosphere in which everyone is ambitious to be original in thought as well as in style, while learning from the best in our cultural heritage. To do this we rely on encouragement from public opinion and the support of society. This is why it is so absolutely necessary to publicize the spirit of "letting flowers of all kinds blossom and diverse schools of thought contend" among the broad masses and to guard vigilantly against anything, whether in word or deed, that runs counter to this spirit.

CHRONICLE

Let Flowers of All Kinds Blossom, Diverse Schools of Thought Contend!

The Chinese Communist Party and the People's Government recently put before Chinese artists, writers and scientists the policy of "letting flowers of all kinds blossom, diverse schools of thought contend." The purpose of this policy is to create a more favourable climate for our literature and art to flourish and help put our badly needed branches of science on a par with what is best in the world inside twelve years, so that they will be in a better position to serve the socialist cause.

This inspiring call has won warm, nation-wide support. In many parts of our vast land, writers, artists, professors and scholars in the fields of natural and social sciences, are taking part in meetings sponsored by the Scientific Planning Commission specially set up by the State Council; local committees of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference; democratic parties; the Union of Chinese Writers; newspaper offices; the Ministry of Higher Education and universities and colleges, etc. They discuss the spirit and substance of this policy and ways of applying it to their work.

All are of the opinion that it is both necessary and timely at present to underline the policy of "letting flowers of all kinds blossom, diverse schools of thought contend" for the sake of our cultural development. Socialist transformation has won a decisive victory in our country, the political outlook of Chinese intellectuals has gone through a fundamental change, and the overwhelming majority of them are bent on doing their bit to help build a socialist society in China. Such being the case, it is now possible to turn to full account all that is good and useful in the fields of art, literature and the sciences for the great cause of socialism.

Here perhaps it is necessary to go back to 1951 when the first part of the present policy summed up in the words "let flowers of all kinds blossom side by side, weed through the old to let the new emerge" was applied to opera reforms. Magnificent results have followed a faithful application of this policy, giving a new face to our stage. The point now is to apply this successful policy to all branches of art and literature.

In the recent discussions held all over the country, writers and artists reviewed their work in the light of this policy. All agreed that in spite of achievements during the past few years much of our literature tends to be rather limited and monotonous in the choice of subject-matter and has little variety in style. This weakness is partly due to artists and writers having a one-sided and dogmatic understanding of the policy put forth many years ago by the Chinese Communist Party that art and literature should serve the workers, peasants and soldiers, and of the socialist realist method in creative writing.

In a recent speech entitled "Let Flowers of All Kinds Blossom, Diverse Schools of Thought Contend," Lu Ting-yi, Director of the Propaganda Department of the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party, remarked:

"With regard to works of art and literature, the Party has only one point to make, that is, that they should 'serve the workers, peasants and soldiers,' or in terms of today, the working people as a whole, intellectuals included. Socialist realism, in our view, is the most fruitful creative method, but it is not the only one. Provided he sets out to meet the

needs of the workers, peasants and soldiers, the writer can choose whatever method he thinks will best enable him to write well, and he can vie with others. As to subject-matter, the Party has never set limits to this. It is not right to lay down such dicta as: write only about workers, peasants and soldiers; write only about the new society; or write only about new types of people."

Apart from exposing such weakness as mentioned above, the discussions held in various places by writers and artists have also thrown up mistakes and defects in the guidance of literary work and in the study of our literary heritage. It was pointed out that dogmatism, vulgar sociological views, and oversimplification of things in literary criticism had much to do with these shortcomings.

Artists and writers hold that to "let flowers of all kinds blossom" in the fields of art and literature, it is necessary to put right erroneous tendencies in literary criticism and encourage independent thinking, diverse schools of thought and a variety of styles to develop in artistic creations and academic research. They pledge their support to the policy of "letting diverse schools of thought contend," because free debate over conflicting ideas will eventually lead them to the truth. It will in the process enable them to acquire a better grasp of Marxist-Leninist theory, which is, after all, based on objective truth, and so become more adept in applying it to their writings and research.

With the introduction of this policy a fresh, invigorating wind is blowing through the literary world in China. Never before have writers and artists shown such keenness in their work.

Liu Pai-yu, a writer himself who is first secretary of the Secretariat of the Union of Chinese Writers, recently visited the branch organizations of the writers' union in Chungking, Kunming and other places. He has since given a glowing account of the irrepressible urge of the authors in these places to write and their readiness to thrash out their views on art and literature. All that is needed, he said, is to give more active guidance, vigorously encourage new works, improve the editorial side of literary journals and find more room for all "flowers" to blossom and diverse "schools of thought" to contend. Then, Liu Pai-yu predicted, we can confidently look forward to a remarkable development in our art and literature.

A Successful Example of Opera Reform

The *Kunchu* opera *Fifteen Strings of Cash*, printed in this issue, is the revised version of a classical opera which has now been more brilliantly staged than ever before. This is a successful example of how to carry on China's best traditions in art and literature and develop them critically. Recently performed by the Chekiang Kunchu Opera Company in Peking, Shanghai and elsewhere, this drama has won much applause and evoked great interest both in the theatre world and among the general public.

Fifteen Strings of Cash first appeared as a story-teller's tale during the Sung Dynasty.* At the end of the Ming Dynasty it was printed in a collection of short stories. Early in the Ching Dynasty the dramatist Chu Su-chen wrote a *Kunchu* opera with this title, making use of certain coincidences involving fifteen strings of cash in the story. This was the original of our revised opera.

Though Chu Su-chen's opera was inspired by the Sung tale, he borrowed a few incidents only from it. In the Sung tale, some people were executed for a crime of which they were innocent, the moral being that one should beware of

*See *Chinese Literature*, No. 1, 1955, page 71.

talking carelessly in jest. But Chu chose as his hero Kuang Chung, a well-known Ming Dynasty figure, and made him the good prefect who eventually righted the wrongs of the unjustly sentenced. Thus the main theme of the opera was clear: a criticism of irresponsible, subjective judges who placed too little value on human life.

In the time of Chu Su-chen, operas were performed during feasts or to entertain guests in the houses of the wealthy and powerful; and the more fantastic the plot, the better such audiences liked them. That was why even a talented playwright like Chu Su-chen could not dispense with far-fetched coincidences.

Chu Su-chen's opera developed along two lines: one part of the plot centred round Hsiung Yu-lan and Su Shu-chuan, the young man and girl who are accused in the revised version, and the other round Hsiung's brother and another girl. Both pairs of young people were involved in trouble through no fault of their own, and in both cases the circumstantial evidence on which they were indicted was fifteen strings of cash. Furthermore, the trouble-maker in Hsiung Yu-lan's case was a gambler called Lou the Rat, while in his brother's case it was a real rat. Both brothers were sentenced to death by the county magistrate Kuo Yu-chih and cleared by the prefect Kuang Chung. In fact, the series of coincidences was carried so far as to make Kuo Yu-chih the examiner who passed the Hsiung brothers in a later examination. These coincidences, one on top of the other, could not but weaken the opera, making it less convincing and realistic.

In his characterization, though the playwright paid much attention to Kuang Chung, he allowed the idea of fate to creep into his theme when he attributed the prefect's discovery of the fact that the two prisoners were innocent to a dream he had before the execution. This weakened the portrayal of Kuang Chung's courage, intelligence and down to earth common sense. At the same time, since there were two cases to be dealt with and each was investigated and cleared at some length, the opera was dragged out into twenty-nine scenes and became extremely involved and loose before it was half finished. The playwright lost himself in a detailed presentation of one incident after another, but omitted to give a clear picture of the characters of the three officials he created.

However, these shortcomings could not prevent what is best in this opera from dominating it and setting the tone of the whole. Thus a strong realism and a positive message can be detected amidst the medley of fantastic incidents, mainly in the just deeds of Kuang Chung, the hero of the opera, and his sterling qualities. A list of popular opera scenes printed in 1878 shows that only a few scenes of *Fifteen Strings of Cash* were generally played — those in which Kuang Chung figures prominently. There was good reason for this. These scenes, improved by generations of actors, always met with a good reception. Thus we can see that the people as a whole, as well as the artists, made up their minds long ago as to what was pure gold in this opera and what was dross.

It was on this basis that the Chekiang Kunchu Opera Company, aided by the Cultural Bureau of the Chekiang Provincial Government and the Chekiang Federation of Artists and Writers, revised *Fifteen Strings of Cash*. Members of the company drew upon their long years of stage experience, and co-operated with dramatists. They made a detailed analysis of the good points and shortcomings of Chu Su-chen's opera, and studied these carefully from many angles, taking care to preserve and develop the best features of the original while bringing out the theme more sharply and presenting the characters more vividly by bold, creative editing and re-writing. The revised version has done away with some of the less dramatic parts and far-fetched coincidences in the original opera. By cutting out what was superfluous, the main theme has been brought out more distinctly. Furthermore, at certain crucial points, revisions have been made to strengthen the portrayal of various types, but never at the expense of the unity of the opera as a whole.

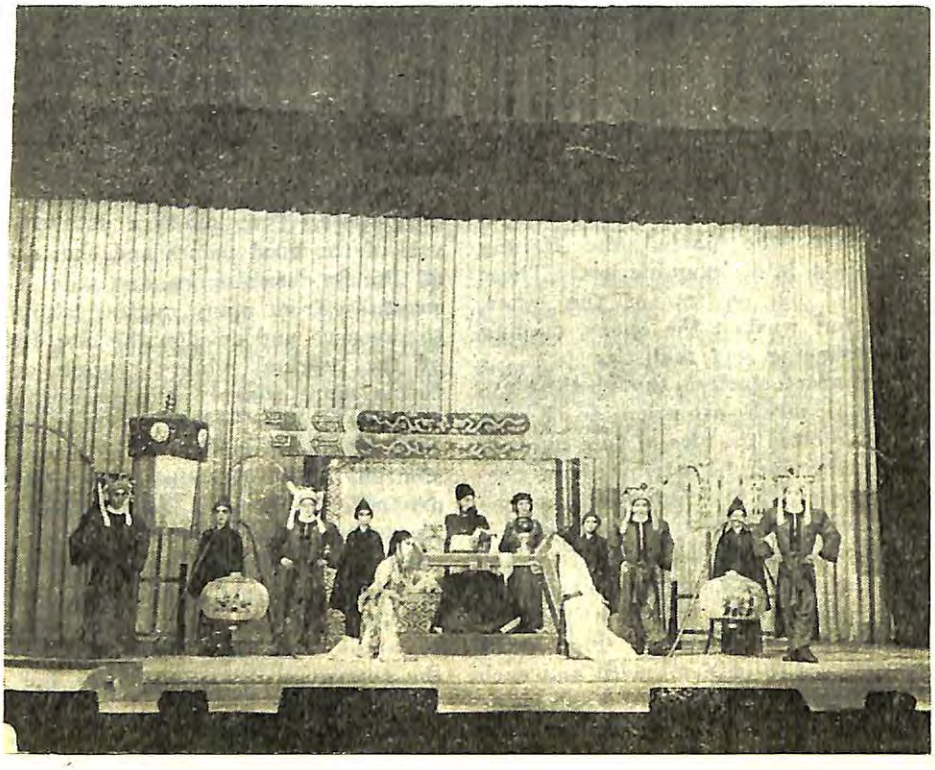
In the original opera, Kuang Chung was fairly well drawn. He had the interests of the people at heart, showed plenty of fight, and was extremely intelligent. But the revised version has gone a step further in portraying him. This is most evident in the scene "An Execution Is Ordered." In the original opera, since Kuang Chung had a dream beforehand, he was able to make up his mind as soon as the prisoners cried out that they had been wronged. He decided at once to go to Governor Chou and demand justice for them. There was nothing very dramatic in this scene. The revised version, however, reveals the prefect's innermost thoughts and feelings in a most arresting and impressive way.

As supervisor of the execution, Kuang Chung's responsibility is merely to identify the criminals, put a vermilion mark against their names, and see to it that they are beheaded before the fifth watch. By the time he discovers that the case is open to doubt it is nearly the third watch. His heart is torn by conflicting emotions. He realizes that the prisoners have been sentenced in three courts, by the county magistrate, the prefect and the governor. Besides, since a death-warrant has been received from the capital, it will be difficult to re-open the case and time is getting short. If he interferes with something which is none of his business he may lose his post or incur even worse consequences. But when he picks up his brush to mark their names with vermilion ink, he is held back by his sense of justice and the desire to right the wrongs of the prisoners in front of him. He hesitates and sings:

This brush weighs a thousand pounds:
It can sign away two lives!

Since I know injustice has been done,
I should have the sentence reviewed;
If I kill the innocent,
How can I call myself a good official?

An execution is ordered



Finally he makes up his mind to shoulder all responsibility and take steps to save two innocent lives. Restricted as he is by the whole system of feudal officialdom, it certainly takes great courage to make such a decision.

In the next scene he goes to Governor Chou to ask for a reprieve in order to reinvestigate the case. Chou is an old bureaucrat who has walked carefully all his life, and never over-stepped the established rules. He has long since lost any sense of right and wrong, and wants only to muddle through. Eager to get the execution over, he refuses Kuang Chung's request. His contempt for human life enrages the prefect, who hands over his official seal as a bond, insisting that the case must be re-opened. At this point, Kuang Chung has forgotten his personal interests completely. The original treatment of this scene "The Prefect Calls on the Governor" was rather crude; but the great improvements introduced in the revised version have made it most dramatic.

In his opera, the playwright showed dissatisfaction with the county magistrate Kuo Yu-chih, who cared nothing for the people. Nevertheless he portrayed him as a well-meaning man, who was merely slightly stubborn. Apparently he forgave the magistrate, for he even let Kuo act as the examiner who passed the Hsiung brothers, to atone for the wrongs he did them. Since that was the playwright's attitude, it follows that his exposé could not be very deep. The revised version is successful in depicting a wicked magistrate anxious to build up a reputation for himself, who considers himself a good man although in fact he treats the people brutally. The scene "An Unjust Sentence Is Passed" gives an excellent portrayal of this "clever and experienced magistrate," this favourite of Governor Chou, with his vaunted powers of detection and deduction.

The original opera did not allow the conflict between Kuang Chung and Kuo Yu-chih to develop. In the scene "The Rat Is Suspected" of the revised version, however, Kuo is present at Kuang Chung's investigation. Since the two men look at the case with different eyes, the sharp contrast and conflict between them brings out the conscientious and responsible attitude of Kuang Chung, with his genuine concern for the fate of his fellow-men, as well as the arrogant and subjective ways of Kuo Yu-chih, who does not care what happens to the people. This excellent scene brings to life these two vivid but very different characters.

The contrast between Kuo Yu-chih and the prefect adds something to the depiction of the contemptible governor too, thus enabling Kuang Chung to stand out even more sharply. In this way, the positive significance of the theme is further heightened.

Fifteen Strings of Cash was written in feudal times. It clearly exposed the crimes of that barbarous, decadent society and extolled Kuang Chung for fighting for the rights of good citizens even at considerable risk to himself. The realist significance of this historical opera lies in the fact that its artistic imagery opens men's eyes and helps them to overcome the failings and pernicious ideas which Kuo Yu-chih possessed and which they inherited from the old society, and encourages them to adopt an attitude like Kuang Chung's to their work, life and fellow-men.

In the process of revision, some of the passages sung which were couched in classical language and consisted of set phrases and metaphors have been rewritten to make them simpler and easier to understand, without sacrificing the characteristic elegance of *Kunchu* opera. Some of the dialogue in classical style has also been brought closer to everyday speech. Furthermore, in their music, singing and elocution, the artists have made efforts to break through hard and fast conventions in order to meet the requirements of the story and its performance on the stage.

Kunchu is one of the oldest of China's many operatic forms, and has enjoyed long popularity. It had at one time a great influence on the dramatic art in our country. Later, however, it was monopolized by the literati and official class and gradually drifted away from the people as a whole. Its vitality ebbed until it was on the verge of extinction. It was

not until the successful performance of the revised *Fifteen Strings of Cash* revealed the unsuspected charms of *Kunchu* opera that this classic form of drama gained a new lease of life.

The revision and performance of *Fifteen Strings of Cash* has done much for the *Kunchu* opera as a form of art, and has rendered a similar service to the two hundred other types of Chinese opera. It has already been filmed by the Shanghai Film Company, and a revised edition of the libretto is being published by the People's Literature Publishing House. Drama groups throughout the country, in response to the call of the Ministry of Culture, are learning from the experience of *Kunchu* opera in the work of revision, and various local operas are adapting *Fifteen Strings of Cash*. It has already been adapted as *Pingchu* opera, Shaohsing opera, Szechuan opera and Shantung opera.

Before the liberation, the Chekiang Kunchu Opera Company, now state-owned, was a small theatrical group very little respected. But by revising and staging *Fifteen Strings of Cash* the artists of this company set an excellent example of how to "weed through the old and let the new emerge" on China's operatic stage. For nearly twenty years in the old society, when *Kunchu* opera had practically disappeared from the theatre, the artists of this company struggled along in spite of hunger and cold to preserve their traditional art. After the liberation, with government help, they made such efforts to reform *Kunchu* opera that they won a degree of popular recognition. Today they have begun to realize their lifelong dream, and in so doing have played a worthy part in making "flowers of all kinds blossom side by side."

Commemoration of Lu Hsun

China's cultural world is making preparations to commemorate Lu Hsun, the great writer, thinker and revolutionary, whose twentieth death anniversary falls on October 19 this year.

The writers' union will bring out a volume of essays on Lu Hsun and a collection of personal reminiscences about him by scholars and critics like Feng Hsueh-feng, Lin Mo-han and Tang Tao, the novelists Mao Tun, Pa Chin and others.

The younger generation of Chinese readers may know little about the circumstances under which Lu Hsun, one of the founders of China's new literature, was forced to write. His miscellaneous essays castigating the old society are particularly difficult to understand, since the author often had to resort to oblique statements and symbolic speech in order to avoid the annihilation threat that the Kuomintang held over all progressive writers. To help present-day readers understand Lu Hsun, the People's Literary Publishing House is providing ample notes for their new edition of Lu Hsun's complete works, of which the first two volumes have now been completed.

Four editions of Lu Hsun's complete works

The Peking Film Studio is preparing a colour film of Hsia Yen's scenario adapted from Lu Hsun's short story "The New Year's Sacrifice" that voices the silent protest of a simple peasant woman against all the injustice she had suffered. This will be the first time Lu Hsun's works appear on the screen.

The Shanghai Film Studio will show a documentary on Lu Hsun's life. The Fine Arts Publishing House in Peking has brought out a picture-story about Lu Hsun—who throughout his life was a staunch supporter of all the arts, particularly the new, revolutionary school of wood-engraving—with photographs and

A scene from the film "The New Year's Sacrifice"

important manuscripts illustrating each period of his life.

Lu Hsun is also being commemorated in engravings by Ku Yuan and Li Hua; in oil paintings by Wu Tso-jen and Ai Chung-hsin; in water colours by Chiang Chao-ho and Hsu Yen-sun. Most of these works are now on view at Lu Hsun's home in Shaohsing in Chekiang Province, the newly-built Lu Hsun Museum in Peking or in his former home near Hongkew Park in Shanghai. Repairs have been done on Lu Hsun's lodgings in these three places, with everything arranged as it was in his lifetime, although many things have been added in his memory.

Lu Hsun passed his boyhood in his native town of Shaohsing. His early experiences there served him as a constant source of inspiration. In 1912 he came to Peking to study, write and translate from foreign languages, and played a leading role in the revolutionary cultural movement against imperialism and feudalism. He did a lot of work in the fourteen years here, during which he delved deeply into China's classical literature, while he was editing important literary periodicals.

It was in Shanghai as a political refugee that Lu Hsun spent the last ten years of his life (1927-1936). It was a decade in which Lu Hsun fully matured

into a Marxist, a decade of great difficulties and struggles for the Chinese revolution as well as Lu Hsun personally. There he kept on writing his dagger-sharp miscellaneous essays until he breathed his last.

The Lu Hsun Museum, situated close to his former home in Peking, was established by the People's Government to afford visitors an idea of Lu Hsun's life. It consists of three rooms, in each of which his books and pictures are displayed, as well as writings published after his death to commemorate him.

When Lu Hsun died in 1936, he was buried in the International Cemetery in Shanghai. Recently a mausoleum was built for him in Hongkew Park there, flanked by the plants and trees that he loved best. Lu Hsun's statue stands in front.

When Lu Hsun's death anniversary is observed in October, workers, peasants, intellectuals and all those engaged in China's socialist construction will flock to the places hallowed to his memory, to pay their respects to this great man of revolutionary thought.

Modern Drama Festival

Last March, the first national festival of modern drama was held in Peking and gave ample proof of the big strides made in this medium since liberation. In 1949, there had been only a few people connected with the stage, but early this year the number had risen to 6,000. Half of them were the actors and actresses of thirty-six professional, state-sponsored troupes and of 103 private ones functioning with government help. The figure would be even larger if we took into account the 100,000 amateur dramatic groups in factories and villages.

Chinese modern drama came into being only some fifty years ago. Based on everyday speech instead of stilted literary language, it became increasingly popular as an effective means of expressing the richness of modern life. This effectiveness was fully borne out at the festival which began on March 1 and lasted thirty-six days, during which 56 plays were staged in the different theatres of the capital.

In pre-liberation times, very few people cared to write plays for children. At the festival, two such plays attracted big audiences among the young: *The Magic Aster*, a fairy tale by the young playwright Jen Teh-yao, and *Friendship*, by the Children's Dramatic Troupe of the China Welfare Institute.

One of the best plays Peking saw during the festival was *The Long March* by Chen Chi-tung, a Chinese Red Army veteran who personally took part in this historic event. Some of the characters on the stage were unforgettable personifications of Red Army men. Other plays about China's military history included *Through the Darkness Before Dawn*, an episode in the Anti-Japanese War; *Steeled in Battle*, which dealt with the War of Liberation; and *Safeguarding Peace*, a description of the Chinese People's Volunteers during the war in Korea.

A number of plays dealt with changes in the countryside. One of the most successful ones was *Not That Road*, adapted by the young writer Li Chun from his now famous short story of the same title about a self-seeking peasant and those who are ready for the co-operative mode of farming. *Huang Hua Mountain* is an episode in the same struggle — between the poor peasants who want co-operation and the rich peasants who are against it. *Two Hearts* also tells about the fight to get rid of old ways of thinking.

Nowadays, the stage describes industrial workers in plays like *He's Also Our Enemy*. Here we see the conflict between advanced workers and conservative management, resolved with the aid of the Communist Party secretary of the factory branch. *A Forty-Year-Old Dream Comes True* tells about the building of the Chengtu-Chungking Railway.

Spring Comes Underground deals with miners and the changes that have come into their life and work.

An attraction at the festival was plays about the national minorities. For the first time, Peking saw modern plays produced in the languages of the national minorities: *We Are Sentinels* in Mongolian, *A Happy Event* in Uighur. *Just Like Brothers* describes the new relationships developed after liberation between the Han and the Hui people on the Kansu-Chinghai border where bad blood used to exist between them, owing to Kuomintang instigation. *On the Kombur Steppes*, produced by the Kansu Dramatic Troupe, was another excellent play that dealt with changes in the relations between nationalities, here the Han and Tibetan people.

During the festival, two plays by the well-known dramatist Tsao Yu were staged: *Thunder and Rain*, written in 1935, and *Bright Sky*, a recent work giving a very moving description of intellectuals coming to a new understanding about the new China. Another play by a famous author was Lao Sheh's new satire *The Impostor*.

Home-coming and *Family Affair* are interesting one-act plays depicting the new moral stamina of the people. The former shows a woman, deserted by a worthless husband, living on and working with superb courage; the latter gives us an insight into the manner in which domestic squabbles are dealt with in present-day China.

Behind the scenes too there was intense activity. The daily festival bulletin carried discussions on all aspects of the theatre — playwriting, directing, production, stage designs, and incidental music. *Just Like Brothers*, for example, aroused lively discussions because some held it was impossible for a military district commander not to be familiar with the local situation. Others thought it quite possible and the play therefore valid. Different opinions were also voiced on the performances by the various actors and proved valuable for playwrights as well as actors. Critical audiences are very important for the progress of our modern drama. In plays about village life, almost every peasant had a pipe between his lips and kept on smoking incessantly. The audience, bored by this mechanical device, asked pointedly: Why should different peasants, under different circumstances and in different moods, act so much alike?

Some fifty dramatists came from the Soviet Union, Poland, Czechoslovakia, the German Democratic Republic, Hungary, Rumania, Bulgaria, Albania, Yugoslavia, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Mongolia and the Democratic Republic of Viet-Nam to take part in the festival. Their exchange of experience with Chinese actors and playwrights proved a great help.

The first national festival of modern drama was an important event that left all concerned with deep impressions. It proved that China's modern drama, despite many twists and turns since its birth, is progressing along realist lines and that our playwrights and actors are hard at work to meet the new demands of a new period.

Shanghai Writers Meet

For thirty years Shanghai has been a centre of revolutionary literary activities and of literary publication as well. The successes attained in socialist construction, coupled with the socialist transformation of private industry and commerce, gave Shanghai's writers a tremendous stimulus so that literary creation was at a height as never before. Under these new conditions, the second congress of the Union of Chinese Writers' Shanghai branch met to summarize the work in the past and to make plans for the future. Two hundred and seventy-eight members took part in the congress.

Pa Chin, the chairman of the Shanghai branch, in his report entitled "Forward Under the Banner of Building Socialism!" spoke of the stirring new life that

offered rich themes for writers in East China: "You who come to this meeting from various parts are able to describe what is happening on the vast and rich lands along the Yellow River, on the south and north banks of the Yangtse and along the Min. You can tell us about the many collective farms dotting the country which mean strength and happiness for all. Describe to us the Futseling and Meishan Reservoirs straddling the Huai River like giants which for so long had been a menace to the people. Let us see through your eyes how the new Yingtan-Amoy Railway will wind along the mountain peaks, connecting them with the sea. In Shanghai, I personally have seen workers turning out 6,000 kilowatt steam turbine generators and hundreds of thousands of double-share ploughs. At the same time, I have also seen what the socialist transformation of private industry and commerce and of handicrafts can do to raise the people's initiative and their enthusiasm for increased production. Nor can we ever forget the patriotism and heroic revolutionary spirit the People's Liberation Army and the people of the area display on the coastal islands in defence of our country. . . ."

The congress summarized the work that has been done in the fields of literary criticism and theory in their close connections with literary creation. In particular, it summarized the victory gained during the past two years in the struggle against the reactionary thinking of Hu Shih* and Hu Feng.** In the crucible of struggle, writers have grown in strength and stature. In the wake of this victory came discussions of the principle put forth by the Communist Party and the People's Government, "Let flowers of all kinds blossom and diverse schools of thought contend." Chinese history records that two thousand years ago there was free discussion among diverse schools of thought in academic research. This gives us a noble tradition, yet at present we cannot boast of having done much along this line. Many writers criticized the *Literary Monthly*, magazine of the Shanghai branch of the writers' union, for its failure in organizing free discussion and theoretical criticism, in fostering young new writers. The branch was also taken to task because it did not encourage literary theory and criticism sufficiently. The writers voiced their repudiation of the mechanically sociological approach current in critical writing and stressed that great attention should be paid to research in and study of classical literature.

Another problem discussed was that of greater quantity of books to be written. The consensus of opinion at the congress was that all efforts should be concentrated on creating the necessary conditions for writing under the motto "Let flowers of all kinds blossom." The congress praised the achievements made in literary creation in Shanghai and East China. In the past two or three years, many books have been written that are an adequate reflection of real life. For instance, Sun Chun-ching's *Riverside at Dawn*, Chih Hsia's *Railway Guerillas*, Wang Hsi-chien's *A Song to Welcome Spring*, Chen Teng-ko's *Sons and Daughters on the Banks of the Huai*. A fact that calls for special attention is that quite a few workers from the industrial front have joined the literary ranks, as writers and as poets, describing with deep feeling the rich new life in the sunlight of socialism.

There are some 270 young writers since the liberation of Shanghai who contribute regularly to newspapers and magazines. The writers' congress realized the responsibility it had of helping these young people and put this question on the agenda for discussion. The writers' union branch took itself to task for its past coolness to the growing army of young authors. It was decided to set up a committee to work among young writers, and that three hundred young people would be admitted within the next two years to the various writers' groups. Besides, a fortnightly magazine, *Sprouts*,

---

* See *Chinese Literature*, No. 2, 1955, "Controversy over 'The Dream of the Red Chamber.'"

** See *Chinese Literature*, No. 3, 1955, "Important Victory on the Cultural Front."

was to be published especially for the writings of young authors, which has since made its appearance. Starting this year, the writers' union branch will edit annually selections from the works of young writers.

Although creative writing has been gaining wider and wider scope, everyone present at the congress realized that the life around us and topics had been looked at from too narrow a viewpoint, with the result that literary creation lagged far behind reality. Also, there was a lack of variety in form: comedies and satirical poems, for instance, were woefully rare. One of the main reasons for this lack was that writers did not delve deeply enough into the day-to-day struggle. It was recognized that one of the main activities for the Shanghai branch of the writers' union was to give its members more opportunities to participate in the many new activities around them, and a special fund was set up to help those in financial difficulties.

A number of the writers pointed out that the congress really served as a mobilization meeting. Indeed, right after it closed, many of them went to factories, farms and construction sites to take part in the actual struggle under a more far-reaching programme of literary production. Many veterans who had not been writing for many years because of other duties or academic research, now want to get back to literary creation. The chancellor of the Shanghai Theatrical Institute, Hsiung Fu-hsi, who has been inactive as a playwright for thirteen years, is planning two plays this year and has actually almost finished one of them. This is only an example of the stimulus this writers' congress gave.

Foreign Films in China

Good foreign films have always been popular among audiences in the people's China. In the past months, some fifty films have been shown—from the Soviet Union, Czechoslovakia, the German Democratic Republic, the German Federal Republic, Hungary, India, Italy, Japan, Korea, Poland and Rumania. All of them were "dubbed" into Chinese by the best actors and actresses. These films not only enriched the Chinese people's cultural life; Chinese film workers also had the occasion to study and learn from their technique.

Recently, a Japanese Film Week brought five feature films to the major cities of China which aroused much interest and discussion. Well over two million tickets were sold. The main theme of these films was hatred of war and a keen love of life. *Women in the Flames of War* described how the Japanese troops drove women and children on Saipan Island at bayonet point into the sea during their retreat from the Island in 1944. *Twenty-four Eyes* tells very movingly of a woman, a primary-school teacher, and twelve of her pupils, and what happened to them in nearly twenty years' time, from 1928 to 1946. *Street Without Sunshine*, adapted from Sunao Tokunaga's novel of the same title, deals with a strike in a Tokyo printing press in 1926, giving a marvellous description of working-class courage. Three short features — *The Flower Girl*, *The Unexpected Bride* and *For Love* — put together under the latter title, portray the Japanese people's life as it really is, with all characters drawn true to life. *Here Are the Well-springs*, a full-length musical, champions the idea that art has its source among the people; it also demonstrates the high artistic level reached by Japanese musicians.

Before the Japanese Film Week, the Indian film *Ravi* had been shown in many places. Adapted for the screen by M. Abdullah from the well-known novel, *Two Leaves and a Bud* by Dr. Mulk Raj Anand, winner of an International Peace Prize, and directed by K. A. Abbas, it deals with the toil and poverty of the Indian workers on tea plantations, their feelings of mutual help and solidarity, their courage in resisting oppression, their scorn for the colonialists. The music with its characteristically Indian melodies, and the songs and dances brilliantly executed,

lent the film strong colour for its description of the ways in which the Indian people live. Nor was this the only Indian film to enchant Chinese film-goers. Ten other films from India were shown in 1955. Seven were documentaries, while three were feature films: *Two Bighas of Land, Vagabond,* and *Hurricane.*

The film *Rome, Eleven O'clock,* produced by Italy's talented young director Giuseppe de Santis, was another foreign importation that left a deep impression on Chinese audiences. The picture is about an accident — hundreds of women applying for one vacancy crowd up the staircase and cause the collapse of the building. Through the details of daily life, the film makes a powerful exposé of a society riddled with contradictions, and skilfully brings out the different characters in sharp relief. Other films, like *The Bicycle Thief, Open City* and *The Miracle of Milan,* also captured Chinese audiences with their simplicity of artistic expression and richness in content.

Soviet films have always been major attractions in China. Pictures for children like *Alyosha Develops His Character, Two Friends, The Team on Our Street* and *Lights on the River* are delightful in their liveliness and liked by children as well as their parents. Other Soviet films that were great hits in China included the colour feature film *The Big Family,* based on Kochetov's novel *The Zhurbins*; the satire *We Met Somewhere*; the stage documentary of Gorky's *The Lower Depths*; the musical *The Composer Glinka* and the ballet *Romeo and Juliet.* The latter, with Ulanova dancing to Prokofiev's music and the beautiful colour tones of outdoor scenes, delighted China's film world by its artistry as much as it did the layman.

Films from the People's Democracies are equally popular among Chinese film-goers. Films shown in recent months include: from Hungary — *Try and Win,* in colour, *Fourteen Lives Saved, A Woman Starts Life, Keep Your Chin Up* and *Dr. Semmelweiss.* The screenplay about this heroic obstetrician who reduced the mortality of young mothers from puerperal fever is by Sandor Dallos and directed by Frigyes Ban, both of them winners of Kossuth Prizes. From Czechoslovakia — *The Show Is On,* in colour, which won a prize at the Eighth International Film Festival in Karlovy Vary; *All Will Be Over Tonight*; *Frona*; and *My Friend Fabian.* From Poland — *The Younger Generation*; *Adventure in Marienstadt*; *Youth of Chopin.* From Bulgaria — *Song of Man* and *Heroes of September,* which latter won the Struggle for Freedom Prize at the Eighth International Film Festival. From the German Democratic Republic — *Ernst Thälmann, Part I,* a feature film in colour that was awarded the Peace Prize at the Eighth Film Festival; *Stronger Than the Night*; *Beethoven*; and the children's film *Disturbers of the Peace.* From Rumania — *The Sun Rises.* From Albania — *The Warrior Skanderbeg,* which was produced in cooperation with the Soviet Union. From Korea — *Guerilla Girls.* Long queues in front of the cinemas indicated where these films were being shown.

Recently, a film from the German Federal Republic, *Heart of the World,* was also shown in Peking. A historical film based on the life of Bertha von Suttner, winner of the Nobel Peace Prize in 1905, it impressed Chinese audiences very favourably.

In order to make foreign films available without much delay, some cinemas in Peking have been showing them in their original language since April this year. Among these films are the Soviet productions of *Twelfth Night* and *Othello*; the British film *Hamlet*; the French films *Address Unknown* and *Fanfan La Tulipe*; and the Italian film *No Peace Under the Olive Trees.*

To dub foreign films into Chinese is an important part of the work of China's film industry. At present, the British film of Dickens' novel *The Pickwick Papers* and the American film about a New Mexico strike *Salt of the Earth* are thus being translated for Chinese audiences. This dubbing not only promotes cultural exchanges between China and foreign countries, it also enables the Chinese people to understand what is happening in the world in their own language.

The response of Chinese film-goers to foreign films shows how intensely they are interested in the life of people in other countries, especially in their struggles for peace and a better life.

The Rumanian "Ciocirlia" Ensemble in China

Recently, the Rumanian "Ciocirlia" (Skylark) Folk Song and Dance Ensemble toured China for two months. With over a hundred members, the ensemble is composed of a well-known dance group, an orchestra and a band playing traditional instruments.

The clear notes and trills of the skylark evoke the happiness of spring. It is after the famous melody "The Skylark," beloved by the Rumanian people, that the ensemble is named. Played by Ioan Oprya on the *nai*, a flute made of many small bamboo tubes which is peculiar to Rumania, this melody also enchanted Chinese audiences. Other interesting instruments played by the ensemble are a flute made of twigs and reeds, and the

Nai solo Sketch by Li Ke-yu

eight-stringed *kobsa*. These ancient instruments now continue old traditions worthily, since they serve to express in new melodies the new life the Rumanian people are leading.

Every item on the ensemble's programme struck a joyous note. A good example is the dance "Wedding in the Somesha Valley," (choreography by Florian Raba, music by Viorel Dobosh) adapted from a Rumanian folk dance that depicts old wedding customs. The master of ceremonies leads out three girls with veiled faces. The groom has to pick his bride from among the three. It can't be this one, nor does the second one look like her. He chooses the third. As he triumphantly snatches away the veil, he finds an old woman hidden underneath! The comic sequence with its many quick changes in the beautiful dance steps was warmly applauded by the appreciative audience.

"Paintings from the National Gallery," also arranged by Florian Raba, is another outstanding example of applying folk art creatively. The curtains are drawn. The audience sees in a picture gallery oil-paintings which describe old village life. As dusk is falling, the people in the paintings step out of their frames and begin to dance. The steward, representative of the landlord-exploiters, is also present, bent on destroying their fun. But they mock at him and chase him away. Then they go on with their dance until dawn, at which time they step back into the paintings very unwillingly. The choreography of this dance is based on George Enescu's Rhapsody No. 1 and five paintings in the Rumanian National Gallery.

Other folk dances obtain their special flavour from the costumes, music and motions which are typical of certain localities in Rumania. The scarf dance is very popular in the southern part of the

A scene from "Wedding in the Somesha Valley" Sketch by Li Ke-yu

country. Sixteen girls dance and whirl like skylarks in embroidered, white gauze frocks, the scarves in their hands flying like clouds.

The folk songs also charmed the audience with their distinctively Rumanian flavour. "At the Mirror" and "Little Star" portray a young girl's feelings. Vesa Buzhor, the baritone, made people roar with laughter when he sang: "Everyone has sadness, some more and some less, but I have more than a train can carry."

The Rumanian dancers also performed a Ukrainian dance and the Chinese "Red Silk Dance." Besides, the soprano Andzhela Moldovan sang a well-known Chinese love song in Chinese.

The success of the ensemble in raising folk art through study and research to the high level it attained afforded Chinese audiences a breath of Rumanian life. Ancient art sparkled in a new light as we witnessed the joy of the Rumanian people in their life today, a light that brought deeper understanding to far-away friends like the Chinese people.

Li Yuan-ching, the vice-director of the Institute for National Music Research, which comes under the Central Conservatory, wrote after he had seen a performance: "Let us thank the Ciocirlia Folk Song and Dance Ensemble for communicating to us such a feeling of beauty. Their success in assimilating and developing folk art has set a fine example for us."

ARTISTS IN THIS NUMBER

Huang Tse-hsi, born in 1918 in Minhou County, Fukien Province, is a painter well acquainted with village life. He started painting in the traditional style when he was fifteen. At twenty-four, he visited Viet-Nam. His skill shows also in stage-designs and scenery. The sceneries he had done for the two Shaohsing operas *Liang Shan-po and Chu Ying-tai* and *The West Chamber* won him a prize at the East China Theatre Festival in 1954. He is at present working with the Shanghai Institute of Shaohsing Opera. "Joining the Co-op," reproduced here, is one of his recent works now on view at the second national exhibition of paintings in the traditional style.

Hsiang Sheng-mu (1597-1658), born in Hsiushui County in Chekiang Province, was the grandson of Hsiang Yuan-pien, the greatest art collector in the Ming Dynasty. He began painting as a small boy. A master of landscapes, flowers and portraits, he conveyed profound thought and feeling through his works. In this he differed greatly from the formalistic school of painting that prevailed in his time.

The Manchu invasion occurred when he was about fifty years old. As a patriot, the artist suffered the agony of being enslaved by a foreign nation. "The Wind-Swept Tree," reproduced in this issue, was done during this period. The huge, bare tree which stands unshaken in the midst of a storm is the symbol of his great sense of loyalty to his own people.

Ho Fang-hua, born in 1918, is a native of Ketse County in Shantung Province. A distinguished painter of birds and flowers, he is now an associate professor at the Southwest Fine Arts School in Chungking. "Two Chickens," here reproduced, is on display at the second national exhibition of paintings in the traditional style.

Tsao Chien-feng, born in 1932, comes from Liyang County in Kiangsu Province. He is now an assistant at the East China Branch of the Central Institute of Fine Arts at Hangchow. "The West Lake" is one of his recent works.

INDEX

Nos. 1-4, 1956

NOVELS

SHORT STORIES, SKETCHES

STORIES FOR CHILDREN

POEMS

PLAYS

LU HSUN'S WORKS

CLASSICS

FOLK LITERATURE

ARTICLES

CHRONICLE

PLATES