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For Susan Hampton
With best wishes
Peter Tang 1987

Spring

Ten Years Deducted

Shen Rong

Word wafted like a spring breeze through the whole office building. "They say a directive will be coming down, deducting ten years from everybody's age!"

"Wishful thinking," said a sceptic.

"Believe it or not," was the indignant retort. "The Chinese Age Research Association after two years' investigation and three months' discussion has drafted a proposal for the higher-ups. It's going to be ratified and issued any day now."

The sceptic remained dubious.

"Really? If so, that's the best news I ever heard!"

His informant explained:

"The age researchers agreed that the ten years of the 'cultural revolution' wasted ten years of everyone's precious time. This ten years debit should be cancelled out. . . ."

That made sense. The sceptic was convinced.

"Deduct ten years and instead of sixty-one I'll be fifty-one — splendid!"

"And I'll be forty-eight, not fifty-eight — fine!"

"This is wonderful news!"

"Brilliant, great!"

The gentle spring breeze swelled up into a whirlwind engulfing everyone.

"Have you heard? Ten years deducted!"

"Ten years off, no doubt about it."

"Minus ten years!"

All dashed around to spread the news.

An hour before it was time to leave the whole building was deserted.

Ji Wenyao, now sixty-four, as soon as he got home, yelled towards the kitchen:

"Minghua, come here quick!"

"What's up?" At her husband's call Fang Minghua hurried out holding some spinach she was cleaning.

Ji was standing in the middle of the room, arms akimbo, his face lit up. Hearing his wife come in he turned his head, his eyes flashing, and said incisively:

"This room needs smartening up. Tomorrow go and order a set of Romanian furniture."

She stepped forward in surprise and asked quietly:

"Are you crazy, Old Ji? We've only those few thousand in the bank. If you squander them. . . ."

"Bah, you don't understand." Face flushed, neck dilated, he cried, "Now we must start a new life!"

Their son and daughter as if by tacit consent hurried in from their different rooms, not knowing what to make of their father's announcement. Was the old man off his rocker?

"Get out, this is none of your business." Old Ji shooed away the inquisitive young people.

He then closed the door and, quite out of character, leapt forward to throw his arms round his wife's plump shoulders. This display of affection, the first in dozens of years, alarmed her even more than his order to buy Romanian furniture. She wondered: What's wrong with him? He's been so down in the dumps about reaching retirement age, he's never demonstrative like this in the daytime, and even in bed he just sighs to himself as if I weren't there beside him. What's got into him today? A man in his sixties carrying on like those romantic characters in TV plays — she blushed for him. But Old Ji didn't notice, his eyes were blazing. Half hugging, half carrying her, he lugged his impassive wife to the wicker chair and sat her down, then whispered jubilantly into her ear:

"I'll tell you some top-secret news. A directive's coming down, we're all to have ten years deducted from our age."

"Ten — years — deducted?" Minghua let fall the spinach, her big eyes nearly popping out of her head. "Well I never! Is it true?"

"It's true. The directive will be arriving any minute."

"Oh my! Well I never!" She sprang to her feet to throw her arms round her husband's scrawny shoulders and peck at his high forehead. Then, shocked by her own behaviour, she felt as if carried back thirty years in time. Old Ji looked blank for a moment then

took her hands and the two of them turned three circles in the middle of the room.

"Oh my, I'm dizzy." Not till Minghua pulled free and patted her stout chest did they stop whirling merrily round.

"Well, dear? Don't you think we ought to buy a set of Romanian furniture?" Ji looked confidently at his rejuvenated wife.

"We ought." Her big eyes were shining.

"Oughtn't we to make a fresh start?"

"We ought, we ought." Her voice was unsteady and there were tears in her eyes.

Old Ji plumped down on the armchair and closed his eyes while rosy dreams of the future flooded his mind. Abruptly opening his eyes he said resolutely:

"Of course our private lives are a minor matter, the main thing is we now have ten more years to work. This time I'm determined to make a go of it. Our bureau is so slack I must take a firm grip on things. On the back-up work too; the head of our general office is not a suitable choice at all. The airs our drivers give themselves, they need to be straightened out too. . . ."

He flourished his arms, his slit eyes agleam with excitement.

"The question of the leading group will have to be reconsidered. I was forced to appoint the best of a bad lot. That Zhang Mingming is a bookworm with no experience of leadership. Ten years, give me ten years and I'll get together a good leading group, a young one with really new blood, chosen from today's college students. Graduates of twenty-three or twenty-four, I'll groom them myself for ten years and then: . . ."

Minghua took little interest in the overhauling of the leading group, looking forward to the wonderful life ahead.

"I think I'll get another armchair too."

"Get a suite instead, more modern."

"And our bed, we'll get a soft one in its place." She reddened.

"Quite right. After sleeping hard all our lives we should get a soft bed to move with the times."

"The money. . . ."

"What does money matter." Ji Wenyao took a long-term view, filled with pride and enthusiasm. "The main thing is getting another ten years, ah, that's something no money could buy."

As they were talking excitedly, hitting it off so well, their daughter opened the door a crack to ask:

"Mum, what shall we have for supper?"

"Oh, cook whatever you want." Minghua had forgotten completely about the meal.

"No!" Old Ji raised one hand and announced, "We'll go out and eat roast duck, I'm standing treat. You and your brother go first to get a table, your mother and I will follow."

"Oh!" His daughter gaped at seeing her parents in such high spirits. Without asking the reason she went to call her brother.

Brother and sister hurried off to the roast duck restaurant, speculating on the way there. He said perhaps an exception had been made in the old man's case and he was being kept on. She thought that maybe he had been promoted or got a bonus. Of course neither of them could guess that the deduction of ten years was worth infinitely more than any promotion.

At home the old couple were still deep in conversation.

"Minghua, you should smarten yourself up too. Ten years off makes you just forty-eight."

"Me? Forty-eight?" she murmured as if dreaming. The vitality of her long-lost youth was animating her plump flabby figure, to her bewilderment.

"Tomorrow buy yourself a cream-coloured coat for spring and autumn." Old Ji looked critically at her tight grey uniform and said decisively, almost protestingly, "Why shouldn't we be in fashion? Just wait. After supper I'll buy myself an Italian-style jacket like Zhang Mingming's. He's forty-nine this year; if he can wear one, why shouldn't I?"

"Right!" Minghua smoothed her scruffy, lustreless grey hair. "I'll dye my hair too and treat myself to a visit to a first-rate beauty-parlour. Ha, the young folk call me a stick-in-the-mud, but put back the clock ten years and I'll show them how to live. . . ."

Old Ji sprang to his feet and chimed in:

"That's it, we must know how to live. We'll travel. Go to Lushan, Huangshan, Jiuzhaigou. Even if we can't swim we'll go to have a look at the ocean. The fifties, that's the prime of life. Really, in the past we had no idea how to live!"

Not pausing to comment Minghua went on thinking aloud:

"If ten years are deducted and I'm just forty-nine, I can work another six years. I must go back and do a good job too."

"You. . . ." Old Ji sounded dubious.

"Six years, six years, I can work for another six years," she exulted.

"You'd better not," Ji said. "Your health isn't up to it."

"My health's fine." In her eagerness to get back to work she really felt quite fit.

"If you take up your old job who'll do all the housework?"

"We'll get a maid."

"But that lot of women from Anhui* are too irresponsible. You can't trust one of them to take over here."

Minghua began to waver.

"Besides, since you've already retired you don't want to make more trouble for the leadership, right? If all the old retired cadres asked to go back, well, that would mess things up." Ji shuddered at the thought.

"No, I've still six years in which I can work," she insisted. "If you won't take me back in the bureau, I can transfer somewhere else. As Party secretary or deputy secretary in some firm — how about that?"

"Well . . . those firms are a very mixed lot."

"All the more reason to strengthen their leadership. We old people are the ones to do ideological and political work."

"All right."

Ji nodded, pleasing her as much as if the head of the Organization Department had agreed. She chortled:

"That's fine then! Those researchers are really understanding. Ten years off, a fresh start — that's beyond my wildest dreams."

"Well, I dreamed of it." Quite carried away Ji cried out vehemently, "The 'cultural revolution' robbed me of ten of my best years. Ten years, think what I could have done in that time. Ten wasted years, leaving me white-haired and decrepit. Who's to make good that loss? Why did I have to take such bitter medicine? Give me back my youth! Give me ten years back! Now this research association is giving me back that decade of my youth. Good for them, this should have been done long ago."

Not wanting her husband to recall painful memories, Minghua smiled and changed the subject.

"All right, let's go and eat roast duck."

Zhang Mingming, forty-nine that year, couldn't analyze his reaction. It seemed a mixture of pleasure and distress, of sweetness and bitterness.

Ten years off certainly pleased him. Working on scientific research he knew the value of time. Especially for him, a middle-

* In recent years many young women from Anhui have come to work as housemaids in big cities like Beijing.

aged intellectual approaching fifty, the recovery of ten years was a heaven-sent opportunity. Look at researchers overseas. A scientist in his twenties could win an international reputation by presenting a thesis at an international conference, then go on to head his field while in his thirties, his name known throughout the world — there were many such cases. Then look at him: a brilliant, most promising student in college with just as good a grounding as anyone else. But unluckily he had been born at the wrong time, and sent to do physical labour in the countryside. When he got down again to his interrupted studies the technical material was strange to him, his brain didn't function well and his hands trembled. Now with this extra ten years he could make a fresh start. If he went all out and research conditions improved, with less time wasted bickering over trifles, why, he could put twenty years' work into ten years and distinguish himself by scaling the heights of science.

He was pleased, just as pleased as everyone else, if not more so.

But a colleague slapped his back and asked:

"Old Zhang, what are you so bucked about?"

"What do you mean?" Why shouldn't he be bucked?

"Deducting ten years makes Ji Wenyao fifty-four. So he won't retire, you won't take over the bureau."

Quite true. That being the case Ji won't retire. He doesn't want to. He'll stick on as bureau head. And what about me? Of course I won't be promoted, I'll remain an engineer doing scientific research in the lab and library.... Yet two days ago the ministry sent for me to tell me that Old Ji would be retiring and they'd decided to put me in charge.... Does that still hold good?

He really didn't want an official post. The highest he had ever held was that of group head, and convening a group meeting was the height of his political experience. He had never expected an official title, least of all the imposing one of bureau head. He had always been a "bookworm". In the "cultural revolution" he had come under fire as "a reactionary revisionist set on becoming an expert". Since the overthrow of the "gang of four" he had spent all his time in his lab, not talking to a soul.

But somehow or other when it came to choosing a third-echelon leading group he had been chosen. In each public opinion poll his name headed the list, just as he had always come top in examinations. When he was summoned to the ministry it sounded as if the whole business had been settled. In that case he couldn't understand where or how he had shown any leading ability, to be favoured by the authorities and trusted by the rank and file. Thinking it

over he felt most ashamed. He had never had any administrative ability, let alone any leadership qualities.

His wife Xue Minru, moderately good-looking and intelligent, was an admirable wife and mother. She took a keen interest in her husband's affairs and knew the disputes in his bureau very well. Her comment had been:

"It's because you're not leadership material that you've been chosen for a leading post."

Zhang Mingming was puzzled by this statement. What does that mean, he wondered. Then he thought: maybe there's some truth in it. Because I've no ability to lead or definite views of my own, and I've not jockeyed for position, no one need worry about me. Perhaps that's why I've been given this opening.

Of course there was also an "opposition party". It was said that at one Party meeting in the bureau his problem had been disputed all afternoon. What the dispute was about he wasn't clear. Nor what his problem was either. After that, though, he felt that he had become a "controversial figure". And this "controversy" wouldn't be resolved nor would his "problem" be cleared up till the day he became bureau head.

Gradually as these public opinion polls and arguments went on, Zhang Mingming became accustomed to his role as someone due to be promoted and a "controversial figure". Sometimes he even imagined that he might really make a good bureau head, though he had never held such a position.

"Better take the job," said Minru. "It's not as if you'd grabbed at it. When you're bureau chief at least you won't have to squeeze on to the bus to go to work."

But now he wouldn't get the job. Was he sorry? A little, not altogether. What it boiled down to was: his feelings were mixed.

He went home at a loss.

"Back? Good, the meal's just ready." Minru went into the kitchen to fetch one meat dish, one vegetable dish and a bowl of egg and pickles soup. The meat dish wasn't greasy and the green vegetables looked very tempting.

His wife was an excellent housekeeper, considerate, clever and deft. During the three hard years when their neighbours contracted hepatitis or dropsy, she kept their family fit by cooking coarse grain so that it tasted good, boiling bones to make soup and using melon rind in place of vegetables. Now farm products were plentiful but fish and meat had risen so much in price that everybody claimed they couldn't afford them. However, Minru knew how to cook tasty inexpensive

meals. When Zhang saw the supper she had served he lost no time in washing his hands, sitting down at the table and picking up his chopsticks.

"What succulent celery," he remarked. "Is it expensive? The papers say celery keeps your blood pressure down."

Minru simply smiled.

"These pickles are good too, they give the soup a fine flavour."

Still she just smiled and said nothing.

"Bamboo shoots with pork. . . ." He went on praising this simple meal as if he were a gourmet.

She laughed and cut him short to ask:

"What's got into you today? Has anything happened?"

"No, nothing." He made a show of surprise. "I was just admiring your cooking."

"You never do normally, so why today?" She was still smiling.

Feeling driven into a corner he retorted:

"It's because I don't normally that I'm saying this now."

"No, you're hiding something from me." She could see through him.

With a sigh he put down his chopsticks.

"I'm not hiding anything, but I don't know what to make of it myself or how to tell you."

Minru smiled complacently. Her husband might be an expert researcher, a top man in his own field, but when it came to psychoanalysis he was no match for her.

"Never mind, just tell me." She sounded like a teacher patiently encouraging a child.

"Today word came that a directive's coming down to deduct ten years from everybody's age."

"Impossible."

"It's true."

"Really?"

"Really and truly."

She thought this over and looked at him with big limpid eyes, then chuckled.

"So you won't be bureau head."

"That's right."

"Does that upset you?"

"No. I can't explain it, but I feel put out."

He took up his chopsticks again to fiddle with the rice in his bowl as he went on:

"To start with I'm not leadership material and I didn't want this

job. But they've made such a mess of things these last few years, it seems I ought to take over. Still, this sudden change makes me feel a bit. . . ." He was at a loss for words.

Minru said incisively:

"If you don't get the job so much the better. You think it's a cushy post?"

Zhang looked up at his wife, surprised by her decisive tone of voice. A few days ago when he'd told her about this impending promotion, she had shown genuine elation. She'd said, "Look at you — you didn't grab at the job and now these laurels have been put on your head." Now the laurels were lost she wasn't upset or angry, as if there had never been any talk of promotion.

"As bureau head, head of the bureau, you'd have been expected to solve every problem big or small — could you have stood it?" she asked. "Allocation of housing, promotions, bonuses, private squabbles, financial affairs, finding jobs or kindergartens for people's children. How could you manage all that?"

True, no one could manage it all.

"Stick to your speciality. An extra ten years will make all the difference to what you can achieve. . . ."

Yes, it would certainly make all the difference.

Zhang felt easier in his mind, with a sense of light-hearted well-being.

He went to bed expecting to sleep soundly. But he woke in the middle of the night with a feeling of faint regret and deprivation.

Thirty-nine-year-old Zheng Zhenhai shot out of the bureau and cycled swiftly home. There he took off his old grey jacket and tossed it on to a chair, conscious of inexhaustible energy. This deduction of ten years seemed to call for prompt action to solve many major problems.

"Hey!"

No one answered his call. His ten-year-old son was fooling about as usual in the alley, and where was his wife who usually responded? Out visiting? Hell! What sort of home was this?

His home-made armchair was so misproportioned that his spine didn't reach the back, while the low arms and high seat made sitting there positively tiring. All because she had to keep up with the neighbours and since they couldn't afford an armchair had insisted on his making a set himself. What a philistine! It was sickening the way every family had armchairs like this, as standard as a cadre's uniform. So philistine!

Whatever had made him choose her? Such a vulgar family with no interests in life except food, clothing, pay and perks. Family education was all-important. She was the spitting image of her mother: the same crude way of talking, and fat as a barrel since the birth of the boy, with no good looks, no figure, no character. Whatever had made him choose someone like her?

Hell! It came of being in too much of a hurry. A bachelor nearing thirty couldn't be choosy. Now with ten years off he was only twenty-nine! He must think over this problem seriously. Yesterday she'd squawked and flounced about because he'd bought a carton of good cigarettes, threatening to divorce him — they couldn't go on like this. Divorce? Go ahead! Twenty-nine was just the right age to find a wife, a slender college graduate of twenty-two or twenty-three with a refined, modern outlook. College students should marry other college students. She was half-baked, just from a technical school. He could kick himself for making such a mistake.

He must re-organize his life, not muddle along like this. Where the hell had she gone?

In fact, after office she'd bolted out of the bureau to head for a shop selling women's clothes.

The thought of ten years off had thrown Yuejuan into raptures and fired her imagination. A woman one year short of forty, she was suddenly restored to a girl of twenty-nine. For her this heaven-sent stroke of luck was a boon not all the money in the world could buy.

Twenty-nine — to be so young was glorious! She glanced down at her faded, drab, unprepossessing uniform with a stab of pained resentment. Hurrying into the shop she pounded up to the section displaying the latest fashions, her eyes scanning the dazzling costumes hanging there till a scarlet dress with a white gauze border struck her. She asked to try it on. The salesgirl looked her up and down, her impassive face cold and stony, her cold look implying contempt.

"Well? Aren't I fit to wear this?" Yuejuan fumed inwardly, as she often had in recent years when shopping for clothes, because whenever something took her fancy Zhenghai always ticked her off: "That makes you look like mutton dressed like lamb." What was wrong with that? Did she have to dress like an old woman? Generally she went home in a rage without buying anything, to squabble with him all night. How unlucky she was, landed for life with such a stick-in-the-mud.

Why stop to argue with the salesgirl? I'll pay for what I buy, you hand it over and mind your own bloody business! What did the silly

fool know? Had she heard about the directive? This is just the dress for someone of twenty-nine. The Chinese are too conservative. In other countries, the older ladies are the more they prink themselves up. Eighty-year-olds wear green and red. What does it matter to you what I choose to wear? However you glare at me, I'm taking this.

Having paid up, Yuejuan went into the fitting room. In the long mirror the scarlet dress which hugged her plump figure so tightly seemed a rather outsize mass of fiery red, but really hot stuff, really smart. Well, she'd have to start slimming. Ten years could be deducted from her age by a directive from the higher-ups, but to deduct ten pounds from her weight she'd have to sweat blood. She'd long since stopped eating animal fat and ate only the minimum of starchy food, even cutting down on fruit. However was she to slim?

She huffed and puffed her way home, threw open the door and burst in like a ball of fire. Zheng leapt up in horror from his armchair to ask:

"What's come over you?"

"What do you mean?"

"Where on earth did you get that dress?"

"I bought it. So what?" She raised the hem of the dress and circled round like a model with a coquettish smile.

He at once poured cold water on her.

"Don't imagine that gaudy colours are beautiful — it depends on who's wearing them."

"Why shouldn't I wear them?"

"A dress like that is out of place on you; you're past the age for it. Just think of your age."

"I have thought; that's why I bought it. Twenty-nine! Just the right age to dress up."

"Twenty-nine?" Zheng was taken aback.

"That's right, twenty-nine. Minus ten years makes me twenty nine, less one month. I insist on wearing reds and greens — so there!" She was gesticulating like an affectedly coy pop singer careering about the stage.

Confound the woman, at her age, so broad in the beam, what a sight she was carrying on like this because of ten years off! Zheng shut his eyes, then opened them abruptly to glare at her.

"The higher-ups are issuing this directive so as to give full play to cadres' youthful vitality and speed up modernization, not so that you'll dress up!"

"How does dressing up affect modernization?" She sprang to her feet. "Does the directive forbid us to dress up? Eh?"

"I mean you can't dress up without taking into account your appearance and figure. . . ."

"What's wrong with my figure?" Touched on a sore spot she struck back. "I'll tell you a home truth. You think me fat; I think you scrawny, scrawny as a pullet, with deep lines like tramways on your forehead, and you can't walk three steps without wheezing. Bah! I wanted an intellectual for a husband. But with you, what better treatment have we had? You're nothing but an intellectual in name. No decent clothes, no decent place to live in. Well? Now I'm twenty-nine, still young, I can find a pedlar anywhere in the street who's better off than you, whether he sells peanuts or sugar-coated haws."

"Go ahead then and find one."

"It's easy. We'll divorce today, and tomorrow I'll register my new marriage."

"Let's divorce then."

With that the fat was in the fire. Normally Yuejuan kept talking of "divorce" while to Zheng the term was taboo. Now the devil was using it too. Of all the gall! This wouldn't do.

It was all the fault of those damn researchers. She butted her husband with her head and raged:

"Deducting ten years has sent you round the bend. Who are *you* to want a divorce? No way!"

"You think by deducting ten years you can have your way in everything — you're crazy!"

"Little Lin, there's a dance tomorrow at the Workers' Cultural Palace. Here's a ticket for you." Big Sister Li of the trade union beckoned to Lin Sufen.

Ignoring her, Sufen quickened her step and hurried out of the bureau.

Take off ten years and she was only nineteen. No one could call her an old maid any more. The trade union needn't worry about a slip of a girl. She didn't need help from the matchmakers' office either. Didn't need attend dances organized to bring young people together. All that was done with!

Unmarried at twenty-nine she found it hard to bear the pitying, derisive, vigilant or suspicious glances that everyone cast at her. She was pitied for being single, all alone; scoffed at for missing the bus by being too choosy; guarded against as hyper-sensitive and easily hurt; suspected of being hysterical and warped. One noon when she went to the boiler room to poach herself two eggs in a bowl of instant noodles, she heard someone behind her comment:

"Knows how to cosset herself."

"Neurotic."

She swallowed back tears. If a girl of twenty-nine poached herself two eggs instead of having lunch in the canteen, did that make her neurotic? What theory of psychology was that?

Even her best friends kept urging her to find a man to share her life. As if to be single at twenty-nine were a crime, making her a target of public criticism, a natural object of gossip. The endless idle talk had destroyed her peace of mind. Was there nothing more important in the world, no more urgent business than finding yourself a husband? How wretched, hateful, maddening and ridiculous!

Now she had been liberated. I'm a girl of nineteen, so all of you shut up! She looked up at the clear blue sky flecked with small white clouds like handkerchiefs to gag those officious gossips. Wonderful! Throwing out her chest, glancing neither to right nor left, she hurried with a light step to the bicycle shed, found her "Pigeon" bicycle and flew off like a pigeon herself through the main gate.

It was the rush hour. The crowded streets were lined with state stores, collectively run or private shops. Pop music sounded on all sides. "I love you. . . ." "You don't love me. . . ." "I can't live without you. . . ." "You've no place in your heart for me. . . ." To hell with that rubbish!

Love was no longer old stock to be sold off fast. At nineteen she had plenty of time, plenty of chances. She must give top priority now to studying and improving herself. Real knowledge and ability could benefit society and create happiness for the people, thereby earning her respect, enriching her life and making it more significant. Then love would naturally seek her out and of course she wouldn't refuse it. But it should be a quiet, deep, half-hidden love.

She must get into college. Nineteen was just the age to go to college. There was no time to be wasted. If she did well in a television college or night school she could get a diploma. Still those weren't regular universities, not up to Beijing or Qinghua. Her life had been ruined by the interruption to her education. Strictly speaking she had reached only primary school standard, because in her fourth year in primary school the "cultural revolution" had started; but after skipping about in the alley for several years she counted as having finished her primary education. In middle school she felt as dizzy as if in a plane, unable to grasp nine-tenths of what

they were taught, yet somehow or other she managed to graduate. Sent down to the country to steel herself by labour, she had forgotten the little she'd learned. When the "revolution" ended she went back to the city to wait for a job, but none materialized. She contrived to get into the service team under the bureau, though that was a collective, not state-run. Reckoning up like this, it seemed there was only one way for her to spend the rest of her life — find a husband, start a family, wash nappies, buy oil, salt, soya sauce, vinegar and grain, change the gas cylinder and squabble.

Was that all there was to life? It wasn't enough for Sufen. One should achieve something, leave something behind. But with her primary school level, unable to grow rice or to mine coal, she was neither worker nor peasant, an "intellectual" with no education, a wretched ghost cut off from humankind.

She'd started from ABC. Spent practically all her spare time attending classes, and most of her pay on school fees and textbooks. Chinese, maths, English, drawing — she studied them all. But this method of catching up was too slow, too much of a strain. She wanted a crash course. Her age was against her. If she couldn't get quicker results, even if she ended up fully proficient it would be too late for her to win recognition.

She concentrated on English, hoping to make a breakthrough. Studied different textbooks, radio materials, TV classes and crash courses all at the same time. After a month she discovered that this breach was already besieged by countless others. All elderly bachelors or unmarried girls like her, trying to find a short cut to success. And this wasn't a short cut either. Because even if you gained a good grasp of English what use would it be in China which is still backward as far as culture is concerned? Translate English into Chinese? Chinese into English? There were plenty of good translators among the graduates from foreign languages colleges. Who was going to look for new talents among young people waiting for employment?

She transferred to the "Correspondence College for Writers". Why not write stories or poems to disclose all the frustrations, uncertainties and aspirations of our generation? Let the reading public and youth of the twenty-first century know that for one brief phase in China the younger generation was unfairly treated and stupefied by history. Through no fault of their own they had lost all that should have been theirs by right and burdened with a heavy load they hadn't deserved. They would have to live out their lives weighed down by this crushing burden.

To talk of writing was easy. But how many works written by her age group made any appeal? When you picked up your pen you didn't know where to start. She'd torn off so many sheets from her pad that her family were desperately afraid that she was possessed. Apparently not everyone could be a writer.

Then what about studying accountancy? Accountants were in great demand. . . .

She couldn't make up her mind. She vacillated, frustrated and unsure of herself, not knowing what she wanted or ought to do. Someone advised her, "Don't be senseless. At your age, just muddle along." Someone else said, "Once you're married you'll feel settled."

But that was the last thing she wanted.

Now this stupendous change: flowers were blooming, birds singing, the world had suddenly become infinitely beautiful. Subtract ten years and I'm just nineteen. To hell with all hesitation, frustration and wretchedness. Life hasn't abandoned me, the world belongs to me again. I must treasure every single moment and waste no time. Must set my life goals, not turn off the right track again. I mean to study, go to college and get myself a real education. This is my first objective.

Yes, starting today, as of now, I'll press towards this goal.

Cycling along and smiling all over her face, she headed for the textbook department of the Xinhua Bookstore.

The next morning the whole bureau seethed with excitement. Upstairs and down, inside and out, all was bustle, talk and laughter. Cardiac cases climbed up to the fifth floor without wheezing, changing colour or heart palpitations, as if nothing were wrong with them. Men of over sixty who normally talked slowly and indistinctly now raised their voices and spoke so incisively that they could be heard from one end of the corridor to the other. The doors of all the offices stood wide open and people wandered about as if at a fair to share their excitement, elation, dreams and illimitable plans.

Suddenly someone suggested:

"Let's parade through the town to celebrate this new liberation!"

At once everyone went into action. Some wrote slogans on banners, some made little green and red flags. The head of the recreation committee fetched out from the storeroom a drum the size of a round table and the red silk used for folk dances. In no time they all assembled in front of the bureau. Written in yellow characters on the red banners was the slogan, "Celebrate the return of youth".

The small flags voiced their inmost feelings: "Support the brilliant decision of the Age Research Association", "Our new youth is devoted to modernization", "Long live youth!"

The big drum beat a rousing tattoo. Ji Wenyao felt his blood was boiling. Standing at the top of the steps he meant to say a few inspiring words before leading this grand parade, when suddenly he saw dozens of retired cadres rush in. Charging up to him they demanded:

"Why weren't we notified of this deduction of ten years?"

"You . . . you've already retired," he said.

"No! That won't do!" the old men chorused.

Ji raised both hands and called from the top of the steps:

"Quiet, comrades. Please. . . ."

They paid no attention, the roar of their voices rising to the sky.

"Ten years deducted applies to everyone. It's not fair to leave us out."

"We must carry out the directive, not just do as we please." Ji's voice had risen an octave.

"Where's the directive? Why hasn't it been relayed?"

"Show us the directive!"

"Why don't you let us see it?"

Ji turned to the head of the general office.

"Where's the directive?"

The man answered bluntly:

"I don't know."

They were in this impasse when shouts went up from some newly recruited workers in their late teens:

"Ten years taken off — nothing doing!"

"Have we grown up for eighteen years and landed a job, just to be sent back to primary school — no way!"

The children of the bureau's kindergarten trooped up to Ji too like a flock of ducklings. Clinging to his legs and grabbing his hands they prattled:

"Ten years off, where can we go?"

"Mummy had to be cut open when I was born."

In desperation Ji called again to the head of the general office:

"The directive — hurry up and fetch the directive."

Seeing the man at a loss he thundered:

"Go and get it, quick, from the section for confidential documents."

The man rushed off to hunt through all the directives there, but failed to find it.

Well-meaning suggestions were made:

"Could it have been put in the archives?"

"Could it have been lent out?"

"Dammit! Suppose it's been thrown away!"

In all this confusion Ji kept a cool head. He ordered:

"Everybody's to make a search. Look carefully, all of you, in every corner."

"Shall we call off the parade?" asked the head of the general office.

"Why should we? First find that directive!"

Translated by Gladys Yang

About the Author

Shen Rong, a native of Sichuan, was born in 1935 and is now a member of the Chinese Writers' Association. She published her first novel, Perpetual Youth, *in 1975. One of her best-known works is* At Middle Age. *For further information about this writer, see* Chinese Literature, *No. 10, 1980. "Ten Years Deducted" is translated from* People's Literature, *No. 2, 1986.*

Shen Rong

To Save Them Trouble

In the West, a person's age, particularly a woman's, is a secret, and to ask a woman her age is considered impolite.

But in present-day China age is a popular subject, so meticulously recorded on birth certificate, identity card and residence booklet that it is absolutely impossible to keep secret. Now that the importance of appointing younger people as leaders at all levels is being stressed, age is widely discussed at Party and organizational meetings, in polls and in idle sitting-room talk. A difference of one or two years, even six months or a hundred days decides the fate of an official, whether he soars to the clouds or is dismissed to civilian life, rises meteorically or goes home to rock his grandson.

It was only natural for me, therefore, amid such enthusiasm about age, to write "Ten Years Deducted"

To deduct anything from one's age is just as impossible as to retrieve time gone by. Zhu Ziqing has a famous paragraph on the passing of time in his essay "Haste": "Departed swallows always return. The withered willow puts out green leaves again, just as fallen peach blossoms will come again another year. But tell me, smarty, why does time never return?... It slips from the basin when we wash our hands, from our rice bowls when we eat, and from our staring eyes when we meditate." What an incentive to melancholy!

Sixty-eight years ago Mr Li Dazhao exhorted the world otherwise in his article "The Present": "The present is the most precious thing in the world for me, all the more so since it is the easiest to lose. The minute you talk about it, it passes like lightning into the past. A shame, is it not, to let it go so idiotically?" Anyone who hears this can feel its weight.

I have exploited fiction, then, to deduct ten years from everybody's age, to save them sighs, to save them worries and to save them trouble.

June 16, 1986

Translated by Yu Fanqin

Fishing

Gao Xiaosheng

South China during the rainy season.

The rain was falling in torrents, like a thousand million needles tying heaven and earth tightly together with their threads.

The earth was covered with a watery blanket.

The open fields, so pitch black you couldn't see your hand in front of your face, the space ahead barely wide enough for you to squeeze your body through it.

It was a never-ending symphony of music — drumbeats of raindrops thudding into the mud below, cymbals of raindrops splashing on the surface of the water, snares of raindrops sliding off the broad leaves of trees, and a crescendo of noise as the water flowed across the fields and through the breaches, emptying into the river.

The river continued to back up, sending the water surging southward along a straight, narrow tributary, replete with swirling eddies, until it emptied into the forty or fifty foot wide canal, where it crashed headlong into the southern embankment, then curled backwards to merge with the roiling water of the canal as it flowed eastward.

On the bank of this juncture where the tributary merged with the canal came the pitter-patter of water falling on something hard as well as the dull thud of rain falling on a soft surface. For there was a man in a grass rain cape and conical straw hat standing at the very spot. At first glance he appeared as a strange shapeless creature standing there facing the river, neither moving nor making a sound, his gaze riveted on something.

Before long he bent over and picked up a bamboo pole, forcefully jerking up the other end of the pole. It was a net; the man was fishing.

The net broke the surface of the water — it was empty. The man loosened his grip and let it sink back into the water.

"Shit," he grumbled angrily. "I'm sure up against the devil today!" After drying his hand on the hem of his tunic, he reached inside his shirt and took out a cigarette, which he flipped into his mouth. Then he lit it with a flick of his cigarette lighter, the glow illuminating a long, thin face, creased with the effort of taking the first puff, which drew his shining black eyes, his bulging nose, and his puckered lips all together in the middle — it was not a pretty sight.

Like an echo, a flash from the opposite bank formed into a small dot of light. There was a man over there, too, and the urge to smoke had been contagious.

There was no telling how many people had been drawn to the canal on this rainy night, each staking out his favourite spot to catch fish. Fish were always more plentiful at times like this, and not just because they were carried in by the water from the river; for while they normally stayed in the deep water out in the middle of the canal, they were drawn during flood times to the sun-dried banks where the mud and foliage had grown moist and fragrant. There they fed, spawned, frolicked . . . and, ultimately, fell captive. They were fated to be carved up with knives, fried in oil, then deposited in human bellies.

A flurry of flapping, splashing sounds from the opposite bank signalled the netting of another fish. The sounds soon died out, indicating that by now the fish was out of the water and up on the bank. A beam of light from a flashlight split the darkness, then went out. It didn't take much imagination to envision the fish strung up by its gills before being put back into the water, which would now become its prison — a truly fresh fish would fetch a higher price at market the next day.

"What kind is it?" the man asked, unable to bear the suspense.

"Silver carp," came the answer from the south bank.

"How big?" God, how he wanted to go over and take a look for himself! Too bad there wasn't a bridge anywhere nearby.

"About half a kilogram."

"Bullshit!" the man cursed. "You can tell by the sound it's bigger than that!"

Instead of answering, the man on the south bank just laughed gloatingly.

The laughter struck the man on the north bank like a knife. He grumbled to himself, "The day this old fisherman loses to you is the day the sun rises in the west!"

There was silence for a while. But the fisherman on the south bank found it impossible to keep his excitement in check. "King of Thieves!" he shouted. "Oh, King of Thieves!"

Hey, why's he using that god-awful name?

The man on the north bank didn't answer.

But the man on the south bank wouldn't give up; he called the other man by his real name, "Caibao, oh, Caibao! Liu — Cai — Bao —!"

"What the hell do you want?" Liu Caibao answered angrily.

"How's it going with you tonight?" There was no mistaking the tone of ridicule in his voice. "I haven't heard your net make any sounds yet."

The man was returning a compliment by using the same derisive comment the King of Thieves — Liu Caibao — had thrown at him the last two nights. What nerve! Liu Caibao never dreamed that any fisherman alive would have the guts to shit on *his* head! But he kept his anger in check, snorting disdainfully as he answered with biting sarcasm, "So, a little whiff of fish has made you cocky, has it! Well, you haven't consumed as many kernels of rice in your life as this old fisherman's caught fish!"

"Heh-heh, heh-heh." The other man didn't have to answer — the taunting laugh said it all.

Liu Caibao had nothing more to say. He was really puzzled by the way things were going. This was the third night in a row he had fished from this spot, and his net had virtually never been empty on the previous two. But tonight, in the two or three hours since dinner, he hadn't caught a damned thing except for an eel and a turtle — one known for being a slippery character, the other a rotten piece of goods. Every fisherman knew what this meant: he would catch no fish tonight. Just his bad luck! But then Liu Caibao never had put much stock in talk of signs and superstitions, and he was certainly no run-of-the-mill fisherman — in fact, he was top dog.

Perfectly suited to this line of work, he had always been able to catch far more fish than any of the other fishermen, relying solely upon his mastery of the skills of his trade. That's why the idea of fate had never much concerned him. Who could possibly have any control over *his* fate? Was he expected to believe that he had become top dog through the benevolence of some river god? No, of course not! Even assuming that these superstitions had any validity, where did the river god figure in the hierarchy of deities? Right down there with the lowly local earth god, that's where. He, on the other hand — top dog — was a heavenly constellation, and what river god could

exert any control over that? Besides, he had actually risen above the level of top dog — he was king, although the second half of the title — 'thieves" — made it a rather disagreeable, uncompromising term. But when someone's mastery of a skill has elevated him to the position of top dog, how can he be expected to make his fortune without the cunning of a thief? Wouldn't that show a lack of ambition? Any king who's not a "thief" is a person who has passed up his chance to make a profit — in short, a fool.

What was it that made snaring a slippery eel and a stinking turtle so unlucky? What's wrong with being slippery? Back when his wife was a young maiden, didn't he suspect that she had married him because her first choice had been just a bit too honest? Who says that anyone is obliged to grow a handle to let himself be carried around by someone else, instead of being like a smooth, perfectly round, ungraspable marble? As for the stink of a turtle, it was only when he farted that you could smell it. And who, may I ask, farts perfume? Or who never farts at all? The only difference between people is that some acknowledge their farts, which makes them fartheads — real stinkers — while others vehemently deny that they've passed gas, even if they've shit their pants and made everyone around them sick — instead they proclaim to all who will listen how clean they are.

And what's wrong with being a thief? If you get caught at it, the most anyone ever does is make a fuss over it — "My, my, how could a good person like that turn into a thief?" they say. But take someone like me, who's turned thievery into a way of life without ever getting caught — I've become "king", and where's the stench in that? When an upright official drinks a single cup of someone else's wine he's accused of going bad, but when a corrupt official climbs to riches on the backs of the common people, everyone praises his abilities. As long as your money belt is full you will be envied. The worst that can happen is that people will curse you behind your back with, "Shit, it's ill-gotten wealth," and that's all. Everything must be seen for what it is: whether it's a good official or a good thief, what's important is calling your own tune.

Liu Caibao was determined not to be cheated out of what was rightfully his just because of an eel or a turtle. He'd keep at it until he managed to turn things around.

But nothing could alter the fact that the last thing to land in his net had been that damned turtle. There had to be a reason for his poor showing — other than superstition — but Liu Caibao didn't know what it was. He thought and he thought, eventually concluding that

when the turtle was caught it had laid a potent fart in the net, contaminating the area so much that passing fish gave it a wide berth.

Liu Caibao clicked his tongue in exasperation. The situation was becoming serious, and he was finding himself in a real fix. Not that his head couldn't come to his rescue — in fact, he had already considered moving to a different spot, but since the fart had been laid in the net, wherever he took the net, the fart stayed with him. So what good would it do to move? Feeling more than merely resentful, he cursed all the turtles in the canal for their lack of unity. Why had only one of them farted? What about the others? If they could all have farted at the same time, stinking up the whole canal, then the passing fish wouldn't have had any choice, and a fart-laden net would have been as good a place to head toward as any.

He thought and he thought, but the best he could come up with was to wait patiently until the stink in the net had washed away before trying to make a comeback. But after a long time had passed without any change, Liu Caibao began to grow restless. There was a limit to every man's patience, and his had just been reached. "Shit! I wonder if I really have run up against the devil tonight?"

"Splash, splash. . . ." Another fish had been caught in the net on the opposite bank. The flashlight split the darkness again. Then the fish was back in the water, strung up by its gills.

Although Liu Caibao was only forty-three years old, he already had twenty-four years of fishing experience behind him. He was confident that the spot he had chosen to drop his net was far better than one on the southern bank. His catches over the previous two nights proved that. So why was tonight so different? Why was the opposite shore getting all the action? Could a single turtle's fart determine the course of events? Not likely! Liu Caibao knew for a fact that no matter how bad a fart smelled, there were some types of fishes that "followed the stink trail". The Chinese herring was known to feed on human excrement, so it seems unlikely one would turn up its nose at a distant fart. Then why in the world were they taking their business over to the south bank instead?

As far as Liu Caibao was concerned, the greatest pleasure in the world was catching a fish no one else could land. And nothing made him angrier than seeing someone else catch a fish that had eluded him. Having gotten used to the pleasurable feeling, he found the current state of affairs intolerable. And the later it got, the more irritable he grew. Finally he could stand it no longer. Unwilling to wait passively for a fish to let itself be caught, he pulled in his net, moved a few

feet closer to the mouth of the spillway, and dropped his net in where the water was moving faster.

Before the net had even touched bottom, the pole began to jerk violently, and he knew at once that he had a big one this time. Good lord, was it ever! He flew into action — the net was in his hands almost at the precise second the fish hit. But still he wasn't quick enough, for the startled fish leaped out of the net with a loud splash, landing several feet upriver.

Liu Caibao froze on the spot, holding the net in his hands and wishing he could have closed it in time, when sounds of violent splashing came from the south bank — his fish had wound up in the net over there, there was no doubt about that.

Liu Caibao angrily let go of the net in his hands, which fell back into the water, and glared at the south bank. This time the flashlight split the darkness for a longer time, and as the fish was lowered into the water, he could see by the faint light that it was nearly half the size of the man.

"The fish ought to be mine," he grumbled hatefully through clenched teeth, as though the other man had stolen it right out of his hands.

As he pulled the net out of the water again he noticed that it had been turned inside out and was now twisted. Surprised by what he saw, he examined it with his flashlight, noticing in the light how fast the water was flowing, far too fast for his net to stay in one place. With a sinking heart, he had to admit that he was no match for a current like this. He felt helpless. The uncertainty that he was feeling for the very first time in his life was eased slightly by the realization that even the fish could do nothing but let themselves be carried over to the south bank in a current like this. That must be why everything was so topsy-turvy tonight. It looked like he'd have to return with nothing but an eel and a turtle, and when it became known that this "sewer" had gotten the best of him, he'd be the butt of everyone's jokes.

"Heh-heh." He suddenly laughed grimly. "You may have taken my fish away from me, but do you really think I'm going to let matters end there? Fat chance! The old master . . . old master here isn't about to let you climb up and shit on his head!"

He stuck his right foot into the river and thrashed it around violently a few times — "splash-splash". It sounded just like a big fish and fallen into his net.

"So, god-damn it, you've finally come, have you!" Feigning delight, he turned on his flashlight briefly.

"What kind is it?" the man on the south bank asked, having fallen for the ruse.

"Don't know," he answered disdainfully.

The man on the south bank didn't feel like asking again, but he knew it must be a big one.

Liu Caibao waited a while, then repeated the deception, this time making the splashes louder than before, as though he had netted an even larger fish. After that he sat down on the wet ground, lit a cigarette and had a leisurely smoke.

He was laughing to himself. His obvious good mood showed how confident he was that he was back in control of the situation, doing something he knew well and for which he had plenty of experience.

By now the wind had died down a bit and the rain was falling more lightly. All the sounds of the night were taking a break in order to watch this top dog in action, remaining hushed as they observed the artistry of the King of Thieves.

Liu Caibao looked at his luminous waterproof watch. It was 10.57. If the past two nights were any indication, the fellow on the south bank should be heading home within the next half hour for his midnight meal. But it was possible that the excitement tonight might make him put it off for a while or even forget it altogether. He knew it was up to him to make things happen, and in such a way as to avoid any suspicion. Having thought out his plan, he moved into action: he turned on his flashlight and climbed up to the ridge of the bank, where he waved the flashlight, splitting the darkness with its beam for a moment before heading off toward his village. As he walked he sang an amorous mountain-song:

Late spring drizzles are the maiden's woe,
Her man's gone fishing and she misses him so;
The night is late, where can he be?
He has to eat, doesn't he know?

Late spring drizzles are the maiden's woe,
Her man's gone fishing and she misses him so;
The night is late, where can he be?
Resting his head on another's pillow?

As the sounds of his singing trailed off into the distance, the light from his flashlight grew dimmer. He stopped suddenly. "Heh-heh," he chortled, turning off his flashlight and groping his way back to the bank of the canal under the cover of darkness.

Before he had made it all the way back to his original spot he saw

a beam of light where the man on the south bank was standing; the fellow was heading home to eat.

Liu Caibao was delighted to see that everything was going according to plan. He rushed over to the edge of the water, quickly stripped to the skin, and slid into the water, swimming with the current over to the south bank. Once there, he groped along until he got to the spot where the fish were tethered by their gills. He was looking for that big fish, the one that had been his (but had escaped) before being taken by someone else, and which by rights was now his to reclaim.

He located the stake, around which several lines had been tied. One by one he tugged on them to see which one had the strongest resistance. Once that was determined, he followed the line back to the water until his hands touched his fish. He was so expert that all he had to do was touch it to know that it was a grass carp and that it weighed between six and seven kilograms. After untying the line from the stake, he started pulling the fish behind him, in cowherd fashion.

He had gotten what he came for, just as he had a thousand times before, and all was well.

Now all I have to do is get this fish over to the north bank and I'm in business.

But there was no bridge over the canal.

As far as Liu Caibao was concerned, this entire episode was merely a single battle in a lifetime of campaigns, and the question of how to transport the spoils of war back with him was a trifling detail. No illustrious commander of thousands of troops would ever notice a mundane technical procedure like that. The annals of history have never recorded any of these mopping-up details! Yet even for someone as shrewd as Liu Caibao it is difficult to get through life without making mistakes. The absence of a bridge was a fact, pure and simple, and far be it from him to entertain ideas of building one now. So from the moment he had slid into the water on the north bank, the thought of making a get-away on land from the south bank had not entered his mind. Since it was to be an assault against a naval encampment, it was only right that he take his prisoner back to the north bank through the water. He foresaw no problems, there was nothing to worry about. Victory was all but in his grasp. But as he set out with his prisoner in tow, he began to notice how powerful a swimmer the fish was.

"This damn thing's sure no pushover!" Liu Caibao thought derisively, intrigued by the stubbornness of the fish. But this only added to

his excitement, for Liu Caibao had a very high opinion of himself. He was a fishcatching demon, top dog, the King of Thieves. In more than twenty years of living the life of a fisherman he had experienced more difficulties and encountered more obstacles than he could count, but in the process he had acquired as many skills as a man could handle: he had mastered all the eighteen weapons in his arsenal, from the net to the spear, from the hook to the trap, and he knew the habits and characteristics of every type of fish, turtle, shrimp and crab like the back of his hand. They were like putty in his hand; it was truly amazing how deftly he worked them — he was a magician. The snapping turtle is so mean it will just as soon bite you as look at you, but he knew how to immobilize one simply by grabbing hold of its neck. The Chinese herring can prick you with the thorns all over its body, but he knew how to neutralize one simply by grabbing hold of its belly. The eel is so slippery you can't catch one even with both hands, but he knew how to keep one from escaping by using only three fingers. A three- or four-kilogram snakehead is more than you can handle with both hands, even on the bank, but he knew how to scoop one right out of the water with two fingers in its eye sockets. The blackcarp, grass carp, silver carp, and flatheads were such feeble adversaries that the battle was over the minute he laid his hand on them. For as long as he could remember, all members of the fish kingdom were nothing more than docile followers subject to his every whim. He had caught more fish in his lifetime than kernels of rice consumed by other people, and this had earned him riches, a reputation that placed him head and shoulders above others, and spiritual contentment. It was truly a case of "Happiness is a good fight with a tough fish".

As long as there were fish to be caught, he would eagerly jump out of a sickbed, weapon in hand, and sally forth to meet the enemy. Just seeing those aquatic creatures driven to a frenzy, frantically thrashing around and struggling to escape him, only to end up hopelessly trapped and strung up by their gills, made him sweat from head to toe from sheer excitement, and this in turn cured his colds. He was a man who lived for the smell of fish and who derived all his pleasure from it. It would have been unthinkable to look upon this puny little six-kilogram grass carp as a worthy opponent!

Without another moment's hesitation, he made up his mind to swim across with the fish in tow.

But he discovered as soon as he pushed off the bank that the line with the fish attached to the other end took one of his hands out of commission, and this made it necessary for him to stay where he was

in the shallow water until he figured out what to do. After pondering his predicament for a moment he tied the rope into a slipknot and put his left foot through the noose, allowing the rope to tighten around it in order to free his hands for swimming. Without further delay, he pushed off from the bottom with his other foot and headed out to deep water.

Not having considered any prospect of danger, he was oblivious to the courageous nature of what he was doing. He had complete confidence in his own strength.

He pressed forward. He was an undeniably strong man, for not only was he swimming against a treacherous current, but he had all that added resistance tugging against his leg; and yet his body was ramrod straight, and even after ten metres or more he was still on course.

But he found he had to keep swimming faster and faster to make up for the force pulling against him. His breathing grew laboured.

Suddenly the fish pulled him sideways, then began tugging him downward. By now he was swimming for all he was worth, but sometimes he was off course.

"So, it's a fight he wants, is it?" he thought — he was getting angry at the fish. He recalled an incident of the previous autumn when he had been pole-fishing in a spillway and a black carp weighing four and a half kilograms had taken the hook and dragged the line out to the middle of the river. Not daring to pull too hard for fear of snapping the line, he had run along the shore, letting the fish lead him wherever it wanted. After nearly two hours of being locked in this struggle, during which Liu Caibao had trampled down all the crops along the bank of the river, the fish finally tired and he pulled it up on to the shore.

This current engagement was only the latest in a lifetime of campaigns with fish, from which he had never come out on the losing end. By now he had grown used to victory, for he was a man who knew how to persevere.

Just like that time before, a fish was once again pulling him in circles.

Even as he struggled, even as he was being pulled in circles by a fish in a treacherous current in the middle of the canal, still he sensed no danger. But he was gradually becoming aware of his predicament, and the essential difference between this situation and the earlier fishing incident was becoming apparent: for now not only was the fish out in the middle of the canal, but so was he, and since he couldn't touch bottom, he was unable to make full use of his strength.

As the grass carp fought for its life it jerked the line this way and that, pulling the slipknot more and more tightly around Liu Caibao's foot, causing him more and more pain. Then it dawned on him that if the pain in his leg was that great, the fish had to be hurting just as much. Cheered by that thought, he began jerking his leg in an attempt to make the fish's mouth hurt so much it would stop pulling *him*. But the fish fought on, taking everything Liu Caibao could dish out and never letting up for a moment.

The struggle was rapidly sapping Liu Caibao's strength. He was angry at himself for wasting all that energy. Since he was gasping for air, he decided to save energy by putting his head underwater and coming up only when he needed to take a breath.

By now the fish was pulling him underwater more and more frequently, and finally he sensed the danger he was in. With a sudden change of heart, he decided that it was no longer worthwhile to keep up the struggle with this aquatic adversary, and he might as well untie the rope around his foot and set the fish free — this time he would spare it.

But the grass carp wasn't one to beg for mercy. It wanted a fight. Racing through the water, it pulled the rope so tautly it was like an iron rod, with no slack at all, making it impossible for Liu Caibao to untie the knot.

Three times he tried holding his breath, letting the fish pull him wherever it liked, while he took hold of the rope with one hand and put some slack in it between his hand and his foot so he could untie it with the other hand. But he could never hold his breath long enough, and each time he was forced to let go and fight his way to the surface to gulp in some air.

The plan wasn't working, so he finally gave up trying. He — Liu Caibao — and the fish were unalterably locked in a struggle from which only one of them was going to emerge alive.

As soon as this fact sank in, Liu Caibao steeled himself for the decisive battle. Remaining firm to the end, he had no regrets over having taken on this creature at the other end of the rope — it would ultimately prove to be no match for him. It wouldn't have altered matters if his opponent had been a man instead of a fish, for Liu Caibao had run into danger more than once during all those times he was stealing other people's fish. Whenever he had been caught in the act, the people had shouted and run after him as though it were a wolf hunt. But he had never panicked. While being chased he had simply removed the large-eyed casting net wound around his waist and thrown it behind him, entangling the crowd that was chasing him

and causing them to fall to the ground in a heap. Then he had walked away as though it were a stroll in the garden. No man could get next to him; no man could pin him down. So why worry about a fish?

Gritting his teeth, he flailed his arms with all his might, like a man possessed, stirring up the water around him like a maelstrom. But he hadn't gone five feet before he was pulled back underwater.

He felt like he was sweating, but he was chilled to the bone at the same time.

Another burst of energy and again he was pulled underwater; then one more. . . .

He opened his mouth to yell for help, only to swallow a mouthful of water.

During his final clear-headed moments, Liu Caibao's thoughts were not of the reality that he was about to die in the "mouth" of a fish, but of his regrets that he had not been able to separate himself from that creature, for now, when they found him, he would have been caught red-handed with stolen goods.

He began to lose consciousness. Feeling that he was becoming unbearably bloated, he was reminded, however dimly, of an old fishing tale. According to legend, the Chinese herring defends itself against water snakes by feigning death and floating on the surface belly up. After the snake swims stealthily up and rapidly encircles it, the fish comes to life, stirring ever so slightly, forcing the snake to wrap itself tightly around the fish to keep it from escaping. Then, puffing itself up until it is bloated, the herring spreads the thorns on its body, quickly slicing the snake into several pieces. After that it makes a leisurely meal out of the sectioned serpent.

The bloating sensation gradually made Liu Caibao feel more and more comfortable, and the object coiled around his foot was not a rope, but a water snake.

He imagined that he was puffing himself up with all his might. But where were the thorns. . . ?

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Translated by Howard Goldblatt

About the Author

Gao Xiaosheng, born in 1928 in Wujin, Jiangsu, is a well-known contemporary writer. He works in the Writing Group of the Jiangsu branch of the China Federation of Literary and Art Circles. Since 1979 he has published a number of short stories, among which "Li Shunda Builds a House" and "Chen Huansheng's Adventure in Town" won the national best short-story awards for 1979 and 1980. His short stories "All the Livelong Day", "Chen Huansheng's Adventure in Town", "The Briefcase", "The River Flows East" and "Chen Huansheng Transferred" were published in Chinese Literature *in 1980, 1981 and 1982.*

Love

Liu Yunsheng

My father was a miner. But, before I went down the mine too, Father was really against my following in his footsteps. He would often tell people that he'd enough of the hardships of a miner's life for the next generations as well.

From the time I started school, Father paid a lot of attention to my studies. I say this, but really it was only supervision and encouragement, because Father could not read. He would say, "You study hard for Father. If you graduate, you won't have to go down the mines. . . ." I didn't understand what was wrong with this, so I said, "If you can go down the pit, then so can I." At this Father became angry, and he shouted, "You're just a child!" I hung my head and shrank back into the corner. Gently, Father pulled me back. Stretching out his hands in front of me, he said, "Look at my hands." I took a good look at his hands, which were large, the palms horny and cracked, the cracks full of coaldust. The left thumbnail was black and flattened. I didn't think there was anything wrong with his hands. In my eyes they were for giving me apples and oranges, for cuddling me at night, and for smacking me. I couldn't say for sure if they were good hands or not.

I began to study in earnest, both because of Father's encouragement and because of the attraction knowledge held for me. For whatever reason, Father was always happy. In those days, people mostly ate in the canteen. Father ate in the workers' canteen, and Mother and I ate in the canteen for family members. In the beginning we ate quite well, but not for long. Later on the food got worse, and we were never full. Every day, Father would take a flapjack with him down the mine, but he begrudged eating it, and would bring it back for me.

So after I had finished my homework I was able to enjoy a flapjack of pure white flour. Father would often watch me as I ate it. I understood what he meant, so studied even harder, and with my outstanding marks gave substance to his dreams.

I hadn't been in lower middle school long, however, when the "time of upheaval" arrived. Before much of the school curriculum had been completed, we came face to face with our "graduation job assignment". Before work was distributed the teacher told the students to go home and ask their parents whether to go down to the countryside or to go down the mines. I went home and asked Father. After his initial shock, he answered, "Go down to the countryside."

I'd been in the countryside for about a year when my mother died. Father was left on his own to bring up my two younger brothers and little sister as best he could.

I used to go home twice a year. Every time I went back, Father seemed a little thinner, a little older. Every time he would rush about buying the best food especially for me to eat. In the middle of the night, when all was quiet and my father and little brothers and sister were all sleeping soundly, I still lay awake. Father snored loudly. Listening to his snores took me back to my childhood, which seemed a very, very long time ago.

"Cha cha cha, cha cha cha." The chirp of the crickets from our neighbours' house filled my heart with longing. I hung on to my mother's legs and kept asking her to get me a cricket. She said, "When Dad comes home he'll take you to catch one." As soon as Father came home from work I asked him to take me, but he said, "I've only just got home." I protested. So he said, "Well, let me have a bite to eat first," but I wouldn't let him. He looked at Mother and laughed, then took me up into the hills. The grass up there was verdant, the flowers were bright and the wind was cool. There were plenty of crickets. I skipped and ran happily about, chasing them. I shouted, laughed and made merry. Then Father caught one and said we should go back. I said, "I want one more," so he caught another. "Come on, let's go back now," he said.

"I need a cage now," I said, so Father took me to the stream, and wove a cage with strips of willow. I was delighted.

The strips were supple. With their green skin stripped off, they looked white and tender. Countless strips were woven by my father's deft fingers into a cage.

"Let's go," said Father then.

"Yes, let's." I agreed, but I couldn't go any further. So Father

started to give me a piggy-back, but I climbed on to his shoulders and rode back that way. He carried me all the way back along the twisting hill paths. White clouds floated on the breeze between the contours of the undulating hills, which stretched far into the horizon. It didn't occur to me that my father still had an empty stomach, and neither did I realize that the path was quite so long. . . .

My father lay curled up on the bed, snoring loudly, his arm outside the quilt. I wanted to cover it up for him, but I didn't. I got out of bed softly, and took out an electric torch. Rolling a book round it, I switched it on, and a beam fell on his hand. It no longer seemed so big, nor the palm so fleshy. The calluses looked harder than ever, and there were more splits, which were now full of grease as well as coal-dust. The black, flattened thumbnail still had a thin piece of garlic skin stuck to it.

I was already twenty. I also had a pair of hands. Twenty years old, a pair of hands. Although I had work to do, I still needed a few yuan from him every month to make ends meet. After a few years in the countryside, although materially I had gained very little, the simple and plain living and the purity and honesty of the peasants had led me to understand a thing or two about human feelings.

Early the next day I went back to the countryside. Once back I worked even harder than before. The other students said to me, "Have you gone crazy? Even if you earn two more workpoints a day, that's only worth another four *fen*. Are you mad?" I replied, "Four *fen* is four *fen*," and worked on as determinedly as before. But I couldn't help wondering if I really was mad.

Some people came from the mine to recruit workers, and called it "giving top priority to educated youth". I signed up. After going down to the countryside, I often read by a kerosene lamp, so my eyesight had got progressively worse. In order to get recruited, I had even spent a few days memorizing the sight chart, until I had it off pat. However, when the crucial moment arrived, it wasn't much help. Luckily, the doctor turned a blind eye, so I was accepted!

One of my former classmates came and congratulated me. I bought a chicken and some wine. Just as we were making a toast, Father arrived. I had been away for four years, and this was the first time Father had come to visit me. Normally, whenever I left home, Father would beg me, "Come back often. I don't have any time to come and see you." All the same, he had come to see me. But he hadn't even changed into decent clothes. As always he wore his faded overalls and a tool bag stuffed with five catties of fine dried noodles was slung over his shoulder. Father had come to see me. Travel-

stained and weary from his journey of over one hundred kilometres, he was being led by a grubby child to the place where I lived.

I welcomed him, at the same time signalling to my friend that we had to deceive him. My friend nodded. Laughing across at me, he quickly offered Father some wine.

"What's all this?"

"It's Sunday."

"Oh, so that's all."

Father took a sip of wine and a mouthful of food. He inspected both the inner and outer rooms, then all of a sudden asked me:

"Has anyone from the mine been here to recruit workers?"

"Yes."

"Did you sign up?"

"No."

"Ah, you did the right thing." Father took several swigs of wine, one after the other.

He was exhausted and went to bed early. As my friend was leaving, he said to me in a low voice, "What if your father asks in the village?"

"My dad believes what I say," was my reply.

As expected, Father did not ask in the village. He wanted to go back early the next morning. I invited him to stay longer, but he said no, he had to get back to work, and anyway he didn't want to leave my younger brothers and sister at home alone any longer. I was actually only too anxious for Father to go back as soon as possible. As I saw him to the edge of the village he said, "Don't come any further. Stay here. Our forefathers were all from peasant households. It wouldn't be a bad thing to stay here." I nodded my head in assent, and didn't go any further with him. Father strode on towards the yellow loess hills, the empty canvas bag swinging along behind him.

Father had been gone a month when I returned to the mine. Storing my luggage at a friend's house, I went home carrying nothing, like normal. As always Father rushed about buying food to give me a good meal. That day he was very happy and drank a couple of glasses of wine more than usual. After dinner, he sent the younger children outside, shut the window tightly, and even went to look outside the front door. When he came back inside, he closed the door firmly. From the bottom of a case he pulled out a small parcel and opened it to reveal a pile of notes.

"Look, I've saved all this." He held the notes out for me to see. "Learn to be a bit sharper, get in with the village cadres, and if there's

a chance of a factory or something, get them to pull a few strings."

"Put it back for now, I'll take it when I need it."

So Father wrapped the money up again, was silent for a while, then said, "I'm not very clever. Don't mind me. If you can go into a factory or something, my mind will be at rest."

During the night, maybe because he'd had quite a lot to drink, he snored all the more loudly. His arm lay outside the quilt, so I covered it for him several times, but to no avail.

The next morning, I went to the mine to learn about safety procedures. Just before I left, I told Father I was going to visit some former classmates. When I got home at lunchtime, I noticed immediately that he hadn't prepared a meal. The children were all huddled up together, watching each other. Father sat there puffing at a cigarette, black-faced with anger. I stopped short in the doorway. He shouted at me abruptly to come inside. I went and stood before him. "Did you sign up?" he asked.

"Mm."

"So you've been lying to me?"

"Dad. . . ."

"Don't you 'dad' me!"

I hung my head and didn't utter a sound, aware only of his hand trembling as he held his cigarette.

"Tell me why you lied!" I didn't make a sound. Wham! I was boxed on the ear.

"I know, you think you're grown up now! Think you're an adult! Reckon you can leave your old man, do you!"

I covered my burning cheeks with my hand and slowly lifted my head, Father's face was purple with rage, and a dribble of saliva trickled from his trembling lips. Under my direct gaze he dropped his head and, slowly, lowered himself on to the kitchen range. Running his hands through his short black hair that was now streaked with white, he scratched his head with force, and stayed like that for a long time.

I cried.

That lunchtime, nobody had anything to eat.

2

So I became a mine worker too. On the extraction shift, I could shovel around ten tons of coal with an iron spade. On the other shift, when we put in the pit props, I could hump several dozen at a stretch, each weighing more than a hundred kilos. Although I found the

work tiring and hard, I was up to it. I felt that I was helping Father by taking on half his burden. I also felt that doing manual labour was worth more than the "four *fen*" I had earned in the countryside. I was never absent from work, I didn't skip off duty, and sometimes I even worked on my days off.

One day, when some new machines were to be installed, I was sent to help carry them. The work area was so hot that you would have been covered in sweat even if you had just stripped to the waist. With towels as shoulder pads, we first moved the dynamo, which weighed about half a ton. It wasn't so terribly heavy for four people to carry, but the roof was low, so we couldn't stand up straight, and the ground underfoot was not level either. We were half crouched over as we stumbled along with the dynamo. In front was a place where there was a big hole in the roof, from which fragments of stone had fallen and formed a pile on the ground. To be safe, we had to get past this place as quickly as possible. With one mind, the four of us charged forward with all our bodily force. We had thought to get past quickly, but just as we were right under the big hole, one of us fell over. We all cursed and swore. Our colleague didn't say a word. Clenching his teeth, he did his best to get up. We staggered past the dangerous place, threw down our carrying poles and collapsed on the ground. Our hearts beat wildly as the sweat coursed down our bodies. The sound of our gasping as we tried to get our breath back echoed throughout the cavern. Our tongues were silent, our minds empty. None of us moved a muscle, so great was the relief.

And after the dynamo there were the scraper trough conveyers. . . . When the shift was over, we got dressed and went to the mouth of the tunnel to wait for the mine car. A strong draught was blowing down the tunnel. I wrapped my arms tightly around myself and huddled back against the cavern wall.

I had now experienced the hardships of a miner's life for myself and appreciated Father even more.

The mine car still had not come, and if we waited for it we might not get out of the mine before ten o'clock that night. One minute late out of the mine meant Father would spend one more minute worrying at home. I came out on foot and reached home at exactly ten. Father sat there in his glasses sewing me some inner shoes. His fingers were rough, and he gripped the needle tightly as he stitched the shoe uppers, one stitch, two stitches, in rapid succession. With the soles he would first dig the needle in and then use the

edge of the *kang* to push it through. Then he'd get the needle between his teeth and slowly pull the thread tight.

I finished my meal quickly, then said to him, "You go to bed now. I'll finish stitching them."

"I'm old now, I don't need so much sleep. You go and get some rest," Father replied, and not until I went and took the sewing out of his hands, saying, "Let's both go to bed," would he go and lie down. When I awoke the next morning, he had already gone to work. Beside my pillow was a brand new pair of inner shoes.

The inner shoes were made from the canvas of a pair of gloves that had been unstitched. Father never wore the gloves he was issued. When I was little, I liked to eat sweets. If someone came along the street selling sweets or melon seeds, I would gaze at them and refuse to move. Mother would shout at me, "You think money just grows on trees!" I didn't care about money. I would just tag along behind the street vendor and refuse to leave. On these occasions Father would either make Mother buy me some or he would exchange his gloves for them. I was happy, but Mother would often sigh, "When will you ever learn?"

I reckoned that Father wouldn't have gone down the pit yet, so I scrambled out of bed at once and got dressed. Grabbing the inner shoes, I set off for the mine.

Father had just come out of the pre-shift meeting and was changing his clothes in the washroom. Sitting on a bench, he was busily engaged in vigorously rubbing the material he used to wrap round his feet. In the early days, he went down the mine in tennis shoes and leg wrappings. After that he wore gumboots and thanked Heaven for his good fortune. Every six months he would be issued with a foot of fine cloth especially for wrapping round his feet, which he always begrudged using, saying, "It's a waste to wrap my smelly feet in that white linen," and would wrap his feet in hard canvas. This was what he was rubbing now. I held the inner shoes out to him. As soon as he looked up and saw it was me, he said quickly, "No, I don't need them. They're for you to use." I pulled the canvas wrappings from his hands and threw them aside. He immediately stood up and went to retrieve them. Some of the others said:

"You're a right good-for-nothing old man! Your son shows you a bit of filial piety, and you still don't put them on."

"Just look at your son!" someone else exclaimed. Father glanced at the inner shoes, then at me and then at everyone else. At last, he sat down and began to put them on.

Hand extraction was very hard work, and the hours were long.

Father cooked the meal and waited for me to get home. The water in the pot would boil dry, so he would add some more, but that would boil dry too. Still no sign of me. Then he went to watch the street, half muttering to himself, "What can have happened? Haven't the extraction teams changed shifts yet?" When he spied anyone he knew, he asked, "You haven't heard of any accident or anything, have you?" He looked down the street but still didn't see me coming, so he went across to the mine.

This was what the neighbours told me. They said, "Other people wait for their sons too, but they seldom worry like your dad." I said, "A mother worries if her son goes far away. My mother died a long time ago, so Father is my mother too."

The neighbours sighed and said, "Yes, that's true, poor old man."

Father looked very old, much more than his fifty years. And it was even harder to listen to his loud snoring at night. In the morning he would always cough, his body racked by one spasm after another. I had thought that after I started to work down the pit the family would have more money and Father would be more joyful and healthy. I hadn't expected that reality would not live up to my expectations.

In the early seventies, the mine often launched mass campaigns. Our team leader often "put on red shoes" during the mass campaigns. Whenever he was wearing "red shoes", everybody would come and congratulate him, from the mine directors down to the primary school band. When our shift was over we weren't allowed to go home but had to rally round and listen to bulletins and watch performances. When one set of workers left, another came, and everybody had to welcome the performances enthusiastically.

It wasn't difficult to notice the team leader's absence during the activities. He would steal off secretly and eat steamed buns in the corner. When he heard the sound of applause, he would rush up on the stage to give a speech. He would talk on and on, then suddenly his neck would straighten, his head would go up, and a peculiar clicking noise would come from his throat. The audience couldn't help laughing. Gradually the clicking noises ceased as his speech became more and more enthusiastic, but even so his eyes would still keep going over to the window. And there was Father, one hand over his forehead, peering into the room, for the light in the room was dim, and there were lots of people, so he probably couldn't see me. Therefore he moved over to another window. He couldn't spot me from there either, so he went to the doorway and stood there clutching the doorframe, looking into the room. He just caught the entertainment team

leaving and kept being pushed aside as they hurried to get out, but still he refused to shift. The team leader went over and rebuked Father in a loud voice:

"You, old fellow, you're really getting to be a nuisance! Every day you come. How many times do I have to tell you? Still you come every day. Haven't you realized your son's a miner yet? How on earth can he ensconce himself like this?"

I was really angry and dragged Father away before the team leader could declare the meeting closed. On our way home, I couldn't help losing my temper with Father as well.

"You really are the limit! I kept on saying, don't come any more, don't come, but still you come, and if something did happen to me, what could you do about it even if you did come! You don't look after yourself, but you make such a fuss about other people that they can't stand it!" Father didn't say a word. He just hung his head and silently followed me home.

After that day, I never once saw him come looking for me at the mine.

The mass campaigns carried on as before. I was put in charge of a work group of sixteen people in all, but excepting those with work injuries, the sick, those who were on holiday seeing their families and those on leave, skivers and those away on business, there were only seven or eight who actually turned up. But every day I led a team of twenty or thirty people, including middle school students, teachers, doctors and office workers. These people often helped to give a high production yield, although they were only just learning the ropes. I just had to take a few extra safety precautions on their behalf. The team leader made us go at it hammer and tongs. He was pretty good at "stealing food from the tiger's mouth" and having done this for several years was fortunate in that nothing much had happened up till now. As we cut away at the coal face, the area of unsupported roof grew and grew. However, since we weren't putting supports in at the same rate, a muffled creaking sound could be heard, but the team leader still urged me to "dig and fire the blast" and to keep extracting coal. I was really worried. . . .

When I got home, I began to feel really dispirited. Father served my dinner and then suddenly said to me, "Don't you listen to that old dog's foolishness. He's directing you against the rules. You do whatever is necessary."

I'd been down the mines for more than two years, and this was the first time I'd heard the term "directing against the rules". I stared wide-eyed at Father but his wrinkled face looked the same as ever.

"After dinner you go straight to the director of the mine and get some more pit props. When you go down the mine tomorrow you must somehow reinforce the supports. In addition, get old Zhang to change over from the scraper trough conveyor and just listen to the roof. It's not a waste of manpower at all."

Father hardly ever said as much as this. And if he did, it was rarely so direct and precise as today. Although he was not assigned to the same part of the mine as me, he still knew all the background details of my team. I hadn't really thought of any of these things carefully. I felt that what he said made sense.

The next day, as soon as I went down the mine, I first got some people to reinforce the supports. When the team leader found out I'd gone over his head to the mine director the previous day, and that today we weren't extracting coal, he said, "What d'you think I'm here for as your team leader?" We argued until we were red in the face. He telephoned the branch headquarters and reported me, accusing me of not following his instructions. I said, "I'll listen to you if you give me a guarantee that if there's an accident you'll take full responsibility." The team leader was furious and hurled vicious abuse at me. "Big head! Think you're pretty smart, don't you!" The operation was partly completed when old Zhang suddenly flashed the lamp and called out, "Quick! Get back!" Quick as lightning everyone ran to the safety zone. All eyes on the tunnel, nobody made a sound. We waited tensely. The work face was very quiet, except for the occasional sound of the coal splitting and cracking, which appeared to be the same as in the past few days. We waited for ten minutes and still didn't see any movement, so we all began to relax a little. After another ten minutes we still didn't see anything, and some people wanted to carry on working. But old Zhang held us back and wouldn't let us move. Another ten minutes went by, and suddenly there was a great rumbling sound, and the roof fell in on the end of the scraper trough conveyor.

When the team leader heard there had been a cave-in in Number Two, he immediately ran over in a panic.

"How is everyone? Is anyone hurt?"

Several people answered at once: "It's all right. Everyone's safe."

The team leader leant against a pit prop and just stared into the tunnel, breathing in the cloud of dust that now filled the tunnel in great gulps.

We stopped work for the day. The production team leader called me aside.

"Pretty smart! Come and have a drink with me tonight."

At last I could set my mind at rest after several days of anxiety. My back felt sore, and my legs ached, and I felt completely worn-out. I stayed down there a while before going up to the surface and washed my hands and face in the cool water of the underground stream. As I climbed back up the concrete steps, which were worn smoother every day, I thought of all the wounded colleagues I had carried up them in the past. I thought: who knows when my turn will come? The most painful thing would be the thought of my father's suffering. I suddenly remembered that somebody had told me that Father still came to the mine to meet me like in the past, but not to the team headquarters or to the pithead. He used to hide in the clump of trees that grew in front of the wash-house, secretly awaiting my return. On one occasion, when it was cloudy and drizzled with rain all day, Father was wandering about behind the clump of trees dressed only in scanty clothing, which had got him into trouble with the mine security patrol.

Perhaps Father was there again today waiting for me. I couldn't help looking over towards the pithead. The pithead was bathed in an extremely bright white light.

3

Father retired. From then on he devoted all his energies to finding me a wife. In the beginning, interest was high. He thought that his son was pretty tall and robust and could make a lot of money and marry a good wife. We hadn't expected that out of several possibilities, none would be a success, some beating about the bush with the excuse: "There's no need to rush into it. The boy's still young. First get him shifted and then we'll see."

Some were blunter and more to the point: "We're not looking for a pit boy!"

"Blast you! If you're not interested, there's plenty of other fish in the sea!" Father pretended not to care, but actually he was quite anxious. He got most of his old pals working on it, and they all rushed about blindly looking for anyone who might suit. They got through the preliminaries with one or two, but they all came to nothing. One of them eventually suggested, "Nowadays young people want freedom. Haven't you asked your son if he's got his eye on any of his old classmates?"

So Father came home and asked me.

"They're all very nice," I replied. Then I took a deep breath and said, "Well, they're all much of a muchness."

Father sighed and went out.

In fact, behind our parents' backs we young people were even more impudent. We only had to get together and every one would be saying that so-and-so had married so-and-so, and someone else had married someone else. In addition, we would matchmake among ourselves, divulging secrets and boasting and bragging to each other. But very few actually came to anything. The main reason for failure was this: the mine lads wanted workers and city residents as wives as well. That was the custom of the time. Whoever got to marry a worker was terribly pleased with themselves. I also ignorantly suffered from this "perverse" trend. Not knowing any difference, I wrote to several girls one after the other, with the result that one by one they all ended in failure. One of my friends who had been in a similar position gave me the benefit of his experience. "You have to both be keen in this sort of affair. It won't work if it's just you."

But who was keen on me? I had been enthusiastic for such a long time, but now I grew cold.

On my days off I no longer did extra duty. In the early morning, as if I was on the early shift, I would go up into the hills. I went round the grazing meadows of the horses and beyond the cow fields, climbing upwards over stone fragments. Then I turned and looked behind me. I looked at the land that had given me life and raised me, looked at the mine that was so familiar yet strange. I climbed up to the hill crest and gazed into the distance: under the vast and boundless sky, the undulating hills stretched on and on. The mining district appeared small and insignificant under the great expanse of sky. With the hill breeze blowing strong gusts in my face, I couldn't stop myself from climbing up to the far hills. Gradually the mine was submerged by the billowing crests and dips of the hills.

There were only the hills and myself left in the whole world....

"Ding dang, ding dang." The sound of iron hammers striking drill rods reverberated throughout the hills. A dozen or so strong fellows stripped to the waist were quarrying stones from a sheer cliff. The sunlight was brilliant, the cliff face dazzling white. That spot was sheltered from the wind, and the startled birds soared way up above. To earn a little bit of extra money I joined the quarry-men and put my life into that cliff. Salt sweat numbed my head and stiffened my tongue, while we worked on in silence. Our strength evaporated, we wiped away the sweat, then lay down in front of the wall to rest.

Between the green hills and azure sky, a tiny black speck appeared on the skyline.

"Little Swallow!" Everybody became excited.

The black speck on the hill opposite gradually grew larger. As we looked, the speck became two specks. The little path turned and twisted its way between the hills, the two black dots now hidden from view, then reappearing round a bend.

"Hi. . .!"

Little Swallow waved her straw hat at us from her side. A donkey's little white head emerged from the emerald fronds, the baskets it carried brushing against the tall grass. Full of laughter, in her little white straw hat and fluttering pink smock, Little Swallow came over to the cliff, carrying willow branch.

The stone workers all crowded round her. "What have you brought?" they repeated. Little Swallow was not forthcoming and imperturbably distributed the food to the workers one by one.

The little donkey went to a stream to get a drink. Then Little Swallow came back and gave out a second helping. When everyone had finished eating, Little Swallow ladled us some vegetable soup from a pot and then handed me the pot. Her black round eyes winked at me meaningfully. I understood, for in the vegetable soup there was a shiny white boiled egg.

It was time for Little Swallow to go back, but some of the bowls were missing, and the spoons had disappeared. She chased the suspects, hitting them and cursing, and sounds of laughter broke out on the hillside. She was worn-out, but the mischief-makers still didn't want to give her back the spoons and bowls. She shouted at them, "I dare you not to give them back to me after work!" And driving away the donkey, she departed along the same road she had come, climbing leisurely towards the blue sky at the top of the hill. . . .

On that day off, I spent the whole day rambling in the sea of hills. When I got back I went to the team leader and asked for five days' leave. The next day I went back to the countryside. The village I hadn't seen for two years remained unchanged, green grass and brown earth, willows and sandy slopes. Little Swallow had grown up, but her mother, who I called "Aunty", seemed older. The side room on the west I had occupied two years ago now belonged to Little Swallow's brother and his wife.

Aunty was terribly pleased. She made chicken and beancurd, washed glutinous millet and pressed noodles. Little Swallow was rather quiet, unflurriedly helping her mother to prepare everything.

My heart grew warm, and I regretted leaving it so long before coming to see them.

On the third day, Aunty made dinner early. Afterwards, she suggested that Little Swallow take me to Xiaowang Village to see a film.

The road to this village skirted a small hillock, traversed a sandy slope, and then took us across a stretch of open country. Little Swallow and I walked side by side, the road gently receding behind us.

"What brought you to come and see my mother?"

"I remembered you bringing us food, with the donkey."

"D'you know what the villagers are saying you're here for?"

"Probably that I've come to find a girlfriend."

The sun fell into the embrace of the mountains, flushing the sky with a red glow. When it was dark enough, the film started. Little Swallow leant on my side, her hand clasped in mine. Beautiful scenes appeared on the screen, but I couldn't have said what it was all about.

"I've seen this film twice already."

"Me too."

"Well then, let's not stay."

"Yes, let's go."

So we left.

Practically the whole village had turned out to watch the film. The streets were silent, and there wasn't a soul to be seen. Once in a while a small animal would dart across our path, to quickly vanish again into the pitch-black night. But once outside the village it seemed lighter. As we returned along the same path as we had come by, the sounds of the film gradually faded into the distance.

"D'you seriously like me?"

"Yes. What about you?"

"I've loved you all along."

A curving crescent moon hung on the edge of the sky. The long road twisted into the fields. Beside the earth mound grew a clump of willow trees, and under the willow trees was a patch of soft sand.

"Let's sit here for a while."

"All right." Little Swallow and I left the path.

When my holiday was over, I went back to the mine. When I told Father of my engagement, he was against it and tried to dissuade me. "It'll be tough going if you marry a peasant. If you get the chance, you should marry someone with a job, then later on if you get a transfer to a surface job and don't earn so much, you won't have to worry about getting by."

But I was resolute. I was going to marry Little Swallow. Father persisted in disagreeing. I got people to try and persuade him, and he did the same to try and talk me round, which just ended in stalemate. "If he wants a peasant then let him do it himself." he got them to tell me. I was determined. If I had to almost kill myself to make one or two thousand yuan, I would still marry Little Swallow. In one month, I had done an extra ten shifts or so. When I finished the early shift that day, the team leader asked me if I wanted to do the second shift as well, since they needed an extra pair of hands. I agreed.

"Okay. I'll get someone to bring you down some food," he said. Everyone left. I went to the transportation tunnel and scraped the loose coal on the ground flat with a wooden peg, then lay down. In order to save electricity, I turned out the light. It was now pitch dark, the work area silent as the grave. Only in one corner a few hundred metres down was the slight sound of my breathing. . . .

Little Swallow came over, waving a luxuriant willow branch, treading on the loose sand, with one thick, jet-black plait trailing like a rope down the front of her eggshell-blue smock.

"I've given you what you wanted. Go home tomorrow. I don't resent it."

"I want to marry you."

"You'll need a lot of money to marry me."

"I'll find it."

"Later on, when my little brother gets married, it'll cost a lot as well."

"I'll find it."

"You'll regret it."

"I won't."

. . . . . .

The second shift still hadn't turned up. I was so hungry that my stomach was rumbling, and the ground was damp, so that I was getting cold. I turned on the light and sat up and thought about finding something to do. I rubbed my hands together, and the palms were sore in places. I fixed the lamp on to my rubber helmet and shone the light on to my palms to dig out the splinters.

In order to earn money and marry Little Swallow, I had sold the gloves I had been issued with at the beginning of the month. I foresaw that in the days ahead money would be even tighter. But I had no regrets.

Everybody has his own slot in life, as well as his own sphere. A marshal commands thousands of troops; a tinker travels from household to household. And also everyone has his own fate: my mum married my dad and had me. I became a miner behind Dad's back, secretly choosing a girl for my wife. Whether you have a high or low birth, whether you are rich or poor, whether your circle is wide or narrow, whether you can do as you choose or not, I wanted to do what I had set out to do. And that would be enough satisfaction.

Because I still insisted on marrying Little Swallow, Father started to feel sorry for himself. At lunchtime he took to drinking and then falling asleep, and then when he woke up he would cough. During the day he would saunter along the streets, and when he encountered someone he knew, he would say, "I've lived to such an age, and only now do I realize the pointlessness of raising a family." In the evening he would turn on the ancient transistor radio and listen to whatever was on for the rest of the night. But then he fell ill, with a pressure on his chest, so that he couldn't eat anything. He took out three hundred yuan and sent someone to buy a coffin and gave the two account books and remaining pile of notes to me, saying, "Dad's been saving up. Go and 'save the world' then. That's how things have always been. Go on."

4

So Little Swallow and I became husband and wife.

Life was pretty good. Our two families became inseparable. Little Swallow's sister-in-law was the first to pay a visit to the mine to see us. Sister-in-law came from the backwaters, and when she married into Little Swallow's family she had already had her heart set on it for a long time. And now she could also go to the "big place" and see her relatives. It was said that she was so delighted she hadn't slept properly for three nights.

Sister-in-law was a hard worker, and when she'd been here for two days she had already done nearly all the washing. She was especially good at making oat noodles, rolling them out long and thin. Father found them delicious.

On leisure days, Little Swallow would take her sister-in-law out into the big streets, to the cinema. She bought fizzy orange for her. The vendors took off the bottle top and inserted a straw. When Sister-in-law was handed the bottle she gave the vendor a look of disapproval, then took out the straw and threw it away, then she'd drink straight from the bottle, making "glug glug" noises. After a few mouthfuls, she choked, tears started to her eyes, and her nose

began to wheeze. When my younger sister came back, she imitated her, and we all laughed. Sister-in-law went red and said, "If I lived here for three years, I wouldn't know any less than you!"

Father laughed too but smoothed things over: "Which of you lot can make noodles like Sister-in-law?"

Sister-in-law had been with us for over a month when my elder brother-in-law came to take her back.

When she had gone, a letter came from Father-in-law: None of his children could read. The youngest was quite good at his studies, but the village teacher was no good. Could he come to the mine and do his two years of upper middle school? Little Swallow made me ask Father first. When I did, he said, "We ought to let him come, so let him."

Since I had married Little Swallow, family life was very full. However, expenses had gone up. In order to make up for this, I had given up a chance of a transfer to the auxiliary unit. The leader praised me for sticking it out down the pit.

So I carried on like before, as a loader in the coal recovery team. One day when we had finished loading, we went to fetch pit props. Since the roof was low, we couldn't carry them on our shoulders, so we carried them in the hollow of our waists, under one arm. As I went along carrying the timber, head down, I suddenly heard the sound of the mine car speeding along behind me, so I hurriedly stepped out of its path and leant against the coal face. As the mine car whizzed past, it caught the end of the pit prop I was carrying, which, as soon as I let go, fell on my leg. I fell over, breaking out in a sweat with the pain.

My workmates hurried over, some helping me up while others called for people to come or rushed to the phone. They carried me up to Number Five shaft. I thought of Father and Little Swallow.

The ambulance was waiting at the pithead. They wanted to lift me in, but I commanded them to carry me home instead. They wouldn't listen, so I bit the person carrying me on the neck. The team leader saw me and said, "Take him home, two of you."

When we reached the end of the street, the neighbours all gathered round, but in a loud voice I insisted, "I'm all right. I'm all right."

Father came out and saw it was me. He was seized with fright, then quickly made me come into the room. Little Swallow's face was deathly pale. In a short time the team leader also arrived. I heard them talking before they came inside.

"It's nothing serious, is it? What happened?"

Father went and met them. "He's all right."

The team leader affected to look at my injured leg. "Even if it's nothing much, you should still go to hospital and have it looked at."

Father said, "Yes, we should. Can you get a car?"

The team leader went off to get one, but as soon as he stepped outside he saw that one was already waiting. I was lifted in.

"I'm hungry," I said, but Father just grunted and didn't take any notice.

I had to stay in hospital. Little Swallow was here again, this time with a stack of language and mathematics books, which she put on the end of the bed. Then she studied my leg.

"Does it hurt?"

"No."

"When you don't have anything to do, have a look at these."

"Mm".

"Are you interested?"

"Yes."

"But you must read them properly!"

Then Little Swallow left and didn't return for a long time. I asked my little sister, who said, "She stays at home and cooks." I started to concentrate on studying. It was funny, but the subjects I had found hard at school seemed easy now, without proper instruction, just the book. I found I was able to learn a lot of things I had never studied before. After lights out, I silently memorized my trigonometry.

Gradually I got to know it. When I left the hospital, Little Sister said, "Sister-in-law has lost the baby. Dad is livid but doesn't say anything. After she sent her brother back to the village, she arranged to get a temporary job, moving stones. But after a couple of days of humping stones she miscarried."

In the night, Little Swallow sat opposite me, but without looking at me, and said in a low voice:

"I lost the child."

"I know."

"D'you resent it?"

"No."

"I wanted you to get into school." She raised her head and looked at me. "Do you agree?"

"Yes."

Little Swallow was thinner and pale, and her eyes seemed darker and larger than ever.

I started to study with a goal in mind; and I would continue late

into the night. Day and night, standing, sitting, lying down, during meals and in my dreams my brain was full of calculations and words.

In the morning I would walk the winding mountain paths with a stick. It was not yet daylight, but the light from the snowdrifts and gullies with lit houses in the open hills made it seem lighter than day. It was freezing, and my toes hurt with the cold. My face was glowing, however, as if all the warmth inside me had gone up to my head.

The sky gradually grew light, and I could see wisps of smoke curling upwards from the chimneys down in the valley. I went down the mountain. As I reached the door of our house, I heard the team leader talking inside the room.

"At the moment we're issuing piece-rate wages, also attendance and safety bonuses." He was here "tapping potential" again.

As I entered the room, the team leader greeted me. "Been out for a stroll?"

I grunted in acknowledgement. "How about it?" he said. "If you come and work on the scraper trough conveyors, you'll get a fair bit by the end of the month."

I said, "If I could, I would have."

Father said, "If he could, I would have made him."

Little Swallow said, "Let him recover a bit more."

The team leader lit a cigarette and inhaled, his brows knit into a frown.

I carried on studying late into the night.

When Father saw that my leg was on the mend, he became more and more agitated. First he urged me to take more exercise every day, and then said:

"Why don't you go back to work if you can? Or maybe you don't want to?" Since I made no reply, he continued, "You've made your bed, now you've got to lie on it. If you were meant to be a scholar you would have been one by now. Now you've chosen to get married, so you can't study as well. Otherwise how many years d'you want your wife to go on shifting stones?"

As before I didn't reply. Father was angry but didn't lose his temper, just started to drink again.

After Little Swallow recovered from her miscarriage, she went to shift stones again, but the construction team wouldn't take her back. I knew it had something to do with Father. From then on, she put her heart and soul into cooking for us. And to cook for a whole family was plenty of work. After my accident, she was in the habit of cooking three kinds of food: one for my Father and myself, one for my brothers and sister, and one for herself. She would mostly only eat

coarse grain herself, and leftovers. She would wait until everyone else had finished, bringing her bowl to the edge of the brick bed, where she would gobble her food standing up. Sometimes Little Sister would offer to change with her, but she would hold her bowl up high and turn her back to dodge out of the way. Other times she would give a slight laugh and compromise.

Father gave me a meaningful look across the room. "Take a good look, is this how a family should be?" I told Little Swallow in private not to cook for us separately any more, but she said, "Father's old, you're sick, and the others are only young. Also we often have guests. That little bit of flour and rice isn't enough for everyone. Besides, I'm used to coarse grain. As long as you're at the dinner table, whatever I eat tastes good. While you were going to work, if I'd finished getting dinner ready and you hadn't come back, if you'd given me ginseng to eat I wouldn't have been able to swallow it."

This kind of talk made me very distressed. But Little Swallow laughed. "D'you really think you're tough? That's the rule in our country, how do I dare go against it? You're a worker, I'm a peasant. Don't you see that all my ration is coarse grain?"

I studied Little Swallow's somewhat mischievous laughing face and was silent.

After a while she added, "I've thought, if I was greedy now, in the future when you went to school, your portion of rice and flour wouldn't be here any more, and then, without rice and flour, I would starve to death. That might just suit some woman."

Little Swallow shot me a look, then again laughed mischievously.

Unexpectedly I did pass the exam, only what I received was not notification that I could start college, but instead, of a job transfer. I was to become a "comprehensive mechanization coal extractor".

The streets bustled with activity and were lined with vendors of all kinds. It suddenly occurred to me to buy something to liven up our meal that day, so I bought a roast chicken, some beancurd skin, some strong liquor and wine.

As soon as I stepped in the door, Little Swallow asked me if I had got through. I waved my purchases at her, and she laughed.

"Which college?"

"Let's eat first," I said.

That day as an exception, Little Swallow didn't cook separately. She and Little Sister drank a whole bottle of wine between them. Father also drank quite a lot, at a leisurely pace. He had already made his own inquiries as to the results of my exam.

I didn't show the notification to Little Swallow until we were back in our room after dinner. As she began to read, her happy expression vanished, her eyes were full of doubt, her face still burning from the wine.

"Not university?"

"No."

"Not technical college?"

"No."

"You're still a worker?"

"Mm."

Little Swallow hesitatingly put down the notice, turned over on one side, and slowly pulled over a pillow. Laying her head and arms on it, she closed her eyes.

"Tomorrow you must write and tell your brother to come back to the mine and study, and get Sister-in-law to visit us too."

There was a long, long pause, before Little Swallow finally said, "Women are stubborn."

Translated by Frances McDonald

About the Author

Liu Yunsheng, born in 1951 in Shanxi, is a coal miner. He writes in his spare time and has published a number of short stories. The story "Love" is taken from Shanxi Literature, *No. 3, 1986.*

Facing the Cliff

LANDSCAPE PAINTINGS BY HUANG QIUYUAN

Morning Mist

After Snow

High in the Lushan Mountains

Far Among Hills

Tale of the Stone Bell Mountain

Watching a Waterfall

Procession of Beauties

Huang Qiuyuan and His Landscapes

He Baoliu

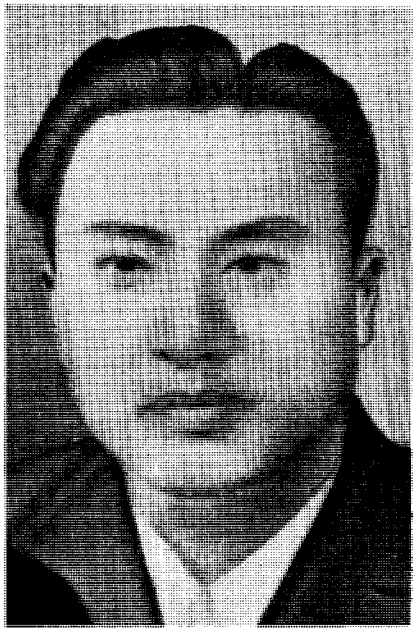
Huang Qiuyuan (1941-1979) was little known in his lifetime. Born in Nanchang, the capital of Jiangxi Province, he was attracted as a child by painting and calligraphy and began to paint at the age of twelve, being particularly inspired by the landscapes of Shi Tao (1642-1707).

Financial pressure cut short his schooling but luckily apprenticed him to a mounter of paintings, in whose shop masterpieces passed through his hands. By the time he was nineteen he had had successful exhibitions in Wuhan, Changsha, Jinan, Lushan and Nanchang.

He spent the anti-Japanese war as a bank clerk and then in the late fifties established the Nanchang Calligraphy and Painting Studio. Elected president of the Nanchang Chinese Painting Study Society, he also founded the Jiangxi Geshan Calligraphy and Painting Study Society.

The single-minded diligence with which he had steeped himself in the arcana of traditional painting — and indeed of calligraphy and verse too, wherewith he embellished his work — only earned him, upon the outbreak of the "cultural revolution", the label of "reactionary painter", and from 1966 to 1976 he confined himself to his studio, expressing now his lofty nature in a painting of a scholar wearing homespun in the woods, now his erudition in a set of verses accompanying a branch of plum blossom. Beauties and palaces were frequent subjects too, and to this

He Baoliu, a painter, works for the Jiangxi Artists' Association.



Huang Qiuyuan

period belong *Procession of Beauties* and *Goddesses Scattering Flowers.*

In the freer atmosphere of the late seventies, Huang Qiuyuan was preparing a book entitled *The Techniques of Traditional Chinese Painting* and completing a 15-metre scroll painting of the Lushan Mountains when he died of a stroke. He was just beginning to acquire a reputation, for his early work was mostly lost and the work of his middle age had gone unrecognized.

While consciously traditional, Huang's work was never hidebound. *Snow Scene in the South* is a good example of how he developed his brushwork from an inherited Song-Yuan-Ming-Qing basis to novel methods of conveying white without using white and adapting Song claw and antler brushwork to the bare trees. Even the brushwork of his idol Shi Tao would be, he said, "loose" and "disorderly" in anything but a small picture.

Huang's freehand landscapes are unique in the density of their structure — often there is no blank space even in a large composition — but the inherent orderliness creates a paradoxical impression of void and transparency. It is a measure of his skill that this was done without any preliminary draft.

His impeccable line drawing — here calligraphy has left its mark — is seen to great advantage in *High in the Lushan Mountains* and *Far Among Towering Hills* here.

He extended the use and variety of dots from their classical application in depicting moss and slopes to suggesting curled leaves by hollow dots done with a bald brush and enhancing the atmosphere of heavy lines with light dots and vice versa. He liked also to use opaque colours for a robust, "hairy" effect and to outline rocks and mountains heavily on damp paper to suggest mist. This last is evident in *Morning Mist,* where, typically, it is used in concert with a variety of contrasting techniques.

High in the Lushan Mountains is an example of his layered style. First he uses heavy ink for the outlines of the rock, tree, cottage, pavilion, waterfall and stream; opaque ink strokes then give shade and texture; finally dots point up the detail. The mossy slope, rocky hill and mountainous ranges thus stand out in clear relief, while the light colouring gives depth without dullness to convey the majestic gloom of the scene.

A passionate and well travelled observer of nature, Huang Qiuyuan was yet able to select and organize what he saw into works which are at once objectively realistic and the studied subjective statements of an artistic mind.

Translated by Niu Jin

Ding Ling and Her Works

Ding Ling, born in 1904 in Linfeng, Hunan, read Chinese, European and American novels even as a girl. She entered middle school in 1919 and was much influenced by the May 4th Movement of that year.

In 1922 she transferred to the Pingmin School in Shanghai, where she went on to university to read Chinese. Rejected by Beijing University, she met her future husband Hu Yepin at a continuation school.

The failed 1927 revolution started her writing, and "Miss Sophie's Diary" (1928) brought her to fame. She joined the League of Left-wing Writers in 1930, later becoming editor-in-chief of the League's journal, The Dipper, *where she published "A Certain Night" about her husband's execution in the white terror in 1931.*

Arrested in Nanjing in 1933, she escaped in 1936 to the Communists' Yan'an headquarters, where she was welcomed by Mao Zedong and Zhou Enlai and worked on the Liberation Daily's *literary supplement. The two stories reprinted here were written then. Her novel* The Sun Shines over the Sanggan River *(1946-1948) won a Stalin Prize, and after Liberation in 1949 she edited* Literary Gazette *and* People's Literature. *Silenced by ultra-Leftists from 1955 on, she resumed writing in 1979, becoming a standing committee member of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference and vice-chairwoman of the Chinese Writers' Association. In 1985, though failing in health, she started the literary magazine* China.

Ding Ling died on March 4, 1986. Her life was never dull, and her words will always move her readers.

— The Editors

A Bullet Still in the Gun

Ding Ling

"Are you telling tales? Child, don't be afraid, tell me the truth. I'm just an old widow; how could I hurt you?"

The old woman, clad in a worn-out cotton tunic, had a wrinkled mouth. A few scattered grey hairs, poking out from under her black headscarf, straggled across her forehead. Leaning on her staff, which was made from a tree branch, she gazed warmly at the apprehensive child before her, who was so raggedly dressed that he didn't even have a hat. Cracking a smile with her toothless, trembling mouth, she said, "You're.... Ah, I know...."

The boy, who was about thirteen, his two nimble eyes darting back and forth, looked hesitantly at the old woman; she looked friendly and honest enough. Then he looked far out across the boundless plain and saw not the shadow of a single person or even, for that matter, a tree. The sun was already behind the mountain, and wisps of evening mist were rising on the horizon, obscuring the far-reaching, endless highway, on which his dreams, also obscured, were being carried afar. Turning his head around, he sized up the old woman once more and repeated his question:

"You really don't know anything?"

"Really. I haven't heard any guns or seen any people, except that last springtime the Red Army came by here. Those comrades were good folk! They stayed three days, sang for us, told us stories. We slaughtered three sheep for them, and they insisted on giving us eight dollars for them — shiny silver dollars that dazzled the eyes! Later the Northeast Army* came after them; that doesn't bear talking

* An army of the Kuomintang.

about, *ai*. . . ." She shook her head and fixed her eyes, which had been staring into space, once more upon the boy's face. "Come on, it'd be better if you came back with me; it's getting dark. Walking around, you might fall into somebody's hands, hm?. . ."

Leaning on her cane, she hobbled forward, long felt socks encasing her tiny bound feet.

The child was still gazing fixedly at the evening scenery, but felt he couldn't not go with her. He asked sweetly:

"Granny, how many people do you have at home?"

"One son, who's gone to help somebody herd sheep. His wife and daughter both died the year before last. A lot of people died that year, all of the same sickness; who knows what evil wind brought it. . . ."

"Granny, where have you been today?"

"I have a niece in labour; I went to see her. But I couldn't stay the night, and it's more than ten kilometres there and back. I'm dead tired."

"Lean on my shoulder." The boy hurried forward and put her arm over his shoulder, and looking up at her warmly through his long, unkempt hair, he asked, "And how many families are there in the village?"

"Not many, seven or eight; they're all hardworking farmers. Are you afraid someone will do you harm? Impossible. What brought you here, anyway? Tell me, you little Red Army soldier!" She slyly winked an old, dim eye at him, warmheartedly caressing this lost child with a gaze that no longer sufficed to express her emotions.

"There's no need to bring that up." He was smiling too, but he told her quietly, "When we get to the village, just say I'm a kid you found on the road. Granny, I'll really be like a son for you; I know how to cook and chop wood. Do you have any livestock? I also know how to feed livestock. . . ."

Livestock. He thought of the bay, a fine steed, all of one colour except for a stripe of white down its snout. He would often stroke that snout, gazing at the horse, and the horse would gaze back at him and nicker softly, nudging him with its nose. Such a tame beast! He had fed it for half a year now. It had been got at Manzidi and belonged to the political commissar. Even the regimental commander's horse wasn't as good as this one. He thought about the horse, the mane brushing its neck, its tail that reached to the ground, and its. . . . He felt the two wise, loving eyes of the horse fixed upon him, and all of a sudden unbidden tears fell on to his face.

"I have fed livestock! I have fed livestock!" he stubbornly repeated, over and over.

"Huh, you're a feeder of livestock, but where are your livestock and where is your master? Now you've ended up here!"

Moving along slowly, the two had come to the mouth of a ravine. Scattered about the ravine were a few cave doors, and there were two compounds walled with rammed earth. Taking her hand, he led her down the slanting path, but he dared not speak a word, merely looking around him with wide-open eyes. It had already begun to get dark in the ravine, and faint rays of lamplight could be seen in two of the cave doors. A donkey was still walking around the millstone, turning it, but no people were to be seen. They walked past two cave doors from the cracks of which smoke issued, and the boy hid behind her. Stopping in front of another cave door, she removed the padlock and bade him enter first. It was pitch-black in the cave, and he didn't dare move. He heard her feel her way in and grope around for something. She lit the lamp — oil in a dish with a wick — and little sparks rose from it.

"Don't be afraid, child!" she said, muting her voice. "Go light the fire, and we'll make ourselves a little millet gruel. You must be hungry too."

The two of them sat before the earthen stove, the light from the fire flickering on their faces and steam issuing from the pot. Every now and then she'd fondle him. As for him, now that he was warm he felt very hungry, and he knew that tonight, at least, he'd sleep on a warm *kang*; this made him quite pleased. He was already fearfully tired, and sleep was doing its best to overpower him.

Winter nights in northern Shaanxi often bring gusts of northwesterly winds. The lone and frigid moon sails among the thin clouds, spreading its rays like dark water over the barren, endless plain. But on this night, inside this black cave hidden within the yellow earth, a sweet dream was enveloping this lost, wandering child: he was back with his contingent, enjoying himself with the bugler or a member of the propaganda corps, or letting the regimental commander twist his ears and playfully scold him: "You broomstick! You eat; why don't you grow?" Or perhaps he was leading the bay stallion by its bridle, nudging the lower lip, with the bit in it, with his shoulder. The ragged, dirty old widow was also far away from the wind outside the ravine; she slept deeply by his side.

"I'm from Wayaobao." The people in the village often repeated this sentence to him, amused; everyone knew it was a tale. There were a few young women in particular who would come before him, hold-

ing the soles they were sewing between thumb and finger. Rubbing his hands, which were chapped with the cold, they would ask him, "Where *are* you from, anyway? We can't understand your talk! Wayaobao? Child, you must be joking!"

The boy, running after the others, went with them to a far place to cut grass, and shouldering a huge bundle that was so heavy it seemed a person were inside it, carried it back to the village. In all directions across the waste there was not a single person, and on the dusty dirt track there no more than a few scattered hoof-and foot-prints. By the rising and the setting of the sun it was possible for him to orient himself; he gazed affectionately towards the southeast, where lay his friends, his loved ones, and the perpetually mobile "home" he lived in. How far away had his contingent gone? He felt remorseful, thinking of the last few days, when with a few fellow grooms and some special service corps members and their senior officers he had hidden from enemy airplanes in a mountain hollow. He had been hiding in a little cave, listening to the ceaseless explosions of the bombs; he thought of how many times his life had been in danger. Later, when it was quiet, he crawled out from the cave and discovered he was the only one left. He called out to them, and then ran madly down the road in what he thought must be the right direction, but he never did find the others. He hurried along the road for a whole afternoon, and at night he was so cold he couldn't sleep. The next day, he walked again until dusk, and at last he encountered the old woman. His luck was good; everyone in this village liked him and took good care of him. They had just about all guessed that he was from the Red Army, but they did not feel particularly worried by the fact. On the other hand, his luck was terrible: how could the others have gone without him knowing? He would go back; he was used to life with them, and that was the only kind of life that could sustain him. He wanted terribly for them to come by the village or for himself to find a few other lost members of their group. In the evening he went again to fetch water, but there was no news at all. He stared at the vast, bare plain, and it seemed to him that a sound came to his ears; perhaps it was the familiar roll-call bugle.

The kid who lived in the cave next door, who had two lively black eyes and a large mouth, had slapped him on the shoulder and asked him to sing a song several times now. From the first, the boy felt he would like to be friends with him; later he noticed how much the kid resembled their army commander. He had only seen the army commander a few times; once when they were on the march, he had led the stallion over to drink by where the commander was resting. The

commander asked him, smiling, "And where are you from, little groom? How did you come to be with the Red Army?" He remembered that he had answered, "However it was that you joined the Red Army, that's how I joined, too." The commander smiled even more broadly: "Let me ask you: why must we defeat Japanese imperialism?" And then he heard the commander say quietly to someone beside him, "We must educate them properly; these 'little devils' are all real good guys." At that point the boy had almost jumped up and pounced on the honest-faced commander out of sheer affection. After that, he had liked the commander even more. And now here was this neighbour kid who looked just like the commander; it made him think more longingly than ever of the troops who were so far away by now.

Someone brought steamed buns made from corn, and someone else a bowl of pickled vegetables. Moreover, now he had a pair of wool socks on his feet and a felt hat on his head. His cap with the five-pointed red star on it was still tucked in his breast; he didn't dare bring it out. Everyone cheerfully interrogated him, all expressing the hope that he would tell them the truth, tell them a bit about the Red Army.

"The Red Army's great, eh? In spring this year my elder brother went to one of the Soviet Areas;* he said life there's just fine. The Red Army helps the common people plough their fields!"

"Such a young kid, and already in the Red Army! Do your mom and dad know?"

" 'Comrade'! Right? Everyone calls each other that. 'Comrade'! Don't be afraid, tell us everything. We're all of one family!"

An innocent, affectionate smile stole over the boy's face. He had often heard such comments and enjoyed such kindness at the hands of the peasants, but he had never expected that when he came alone to a village they would be even more warmhearted. He forgot his worries for a time and began to explain what sort of an army the Red Army was, repeating things he had heard in meetings of their group or in speeches, coming out with all sorts of military terminology he had mastered.

"The Red Army is a revolutionary army, and it exists to benefit the great masses of workers and peasants.... The present task of our Red Army is to struggle for the liberation of the Chinese nation and the defeat of Japanese imperialism. Japan is about to destroy China;

* Chinese Soviet Areas were established during the Second Revolutionary Civil War period (1927-1937).

all those who do not wish to be slaves from a conquered nation must all join the Red Army and fight against Japan. . . ."

Looking at the faces surrounding him, he saw the excitement in their gazes and their boundless admiration; this made him even happier. Pressing her lips together, the old woman said:

"The first time I saw him I knew this child wasn't from around here; listen to the mouth he has on him!"

Then he told some stories about his experiences in combat. Although he did not exaggerate, his description of reality was almost unbelievable, so he had to add the following:

"It's because we are educated; other soldiers are just fighting for their two dollars' salary a month. And we're fighting in the interests of our class and our nation; that's why not a single Red Army soldier is afraid to die. Who is willing to throw away his life for two dollars?"

Then he sang a number of songs for them, and the little children tried to sing along. Brushing back the bangs on their foreheads, the women smiled, showing their pearly teeth. But in the evening, when they had all left, he grew silent. He thought again of the troops, thought of the horse he used to feed. He felt a thread of terror run through him: if by chance one of the people in the village were to leak news of his presence, what would become of him?

The old woman, it seemed, could see what was on his mind, so she wrapped him in the quilt on the *kang* and said craftily, "If any bad men come, you just lie here and pretend you're sick, you hear? You just put yourself right at ease — everyone here is honest!"

And the people in the village comforted him thus: "The Red Army will come round again; when they do you can go with them, and we'll all go too — how's that?"

"I'm from Wayaobao!" This sentence still appeared from time to time in good-natured jokes; when he heard it, he could only respond with an embarrassed smile.

One night, the dogs started barking, and then a whole flood of sound including the whinnying of horses, the tramp of feet and the shouting of men streamed into the village. It was impossible to tell how many men and horses there were bringing this village, which had seemed dead, to sudden, seething life.

"Get down; don't make a sound. Let me go see what's going on." Leaning on the boy at her side, the old woman got up and went to the door of the cave. Tending the fire, the boy felt his heart thumping wildly: "Could it be that my people have come?" He sat on the

floor, leaned his head against the wall and held his breath, listening attentively to the sounds outside.

"Bam!" the cave door was pushed open with the butt of a gun, and a swarm of human figures was silhouetted in the sky's dim light.

"His mother's. . .!" Blundering in, the soldier knocked the old woman to the ground. "What dog's cunt is blocking my way. . . ." Cursing, he strode over to the stove. "Hunh! I see that dinner for me and my pals is cooking in the pot."

The child had a peek from his place in the dark. He knew the shape of that cap; its badge was different from his. His heart shrunk within him and he wished he could melt into the wall, or suddenly sprout wings and fly away, away to it didn't matter where, as long as it were far from this group of new arrivals.

Another few soldiers came in, and the children in the next cave trotted crying into the courtyard.

Trembling, the old woman rose to her feet, and shaking her head stumped over to where the boy was by the fire. With spastic hands she caressed him. Her dim eyes wandered over the strangers, but she dared not speak a word.

The grain basket was overturned, someone brought in two chickens he had seized; the courtyard was filled with the sound of running feet. What sounded like a woman's voice cried, "You don't deserve to die a good death. . . ."

"Old witch, stoke up the fire!"

People were running here and there; bayonets were clashing, and gun butts kept knocking against door-frames and other objects. The wind came in gusts through the open door, bringing with it an atmosphere of terror. The air was full of fear and confusion, pressing heavily upon the village, and the moon had hidden itself behind the clouds.

The confusion continued for a time, but after they were fed, men and horses calmed down somewhat, leaving a litter of dirty bowls and chopsticks and uneaten grass lying about. Quite a few of the men were already lying on the *kang* smoking opium they had seized; others were sitting in a circle in the centre of the room around a fire they had lit on the floor, drinking tea and singing bawdy songs.

"His mother's. . .! Tomorrow we should get the day off. We've been walked to death these past few days. The further we chase, the further they run. What're those Red Devils' legs made of, anyway?"

"It's better that we move slowly, so as to keep them from circling round and attacking us from the rear. There've been too many times that's happened."

"We'll be billeted here tomorrow for sure. The rearguard's still fifteen kilometres behind, and we've only got one company of men. *Ai*! Pals, we've really been battered by these Red bandits in the last six months! Forever running back and forth, and hardly any people live in these parts so there's not much grain, and it's damn cold. What a hell of a time we're having!"

Someone's gaze fell across the old woman's face. She was still cowering on the floor, protecting the child behind her. "Ptui!" A mouthful of spit landed on her body.

"What's that old witch doing, staying in one place? Zhang Dasheng, go search her and see if she isn't hiding a girl over there."

The widow moved, revealing the child behind her.

"You're right! There's someone behind her — it's a girl!"

Three of them pounced.

"Sirs! Please let me be! This is my only grandson — he's sick!" She was pushed roughly to one side, her hair falling over her face.

They dragged the child over before the fire, where Zhang Dasheng boxed his ears. Why was he only a boy?

"That doesn't worry me, damn it!" Another pair of fiery eyes closed in on the boy. Seizing him, the man began to rip the boy's clothes.

The old woman, terrified, cried, "Heaven! These killers!"

"His mother's. . . ! If I had a gun I would shoot you, you beast!" This shout came from the boy, who in his anger had lost all sense of terror. He stared calmly at those two eyes, and it seemed that they blazed with an evil fire. He sent out a kick which unexpectedly sent the soldier sprawling; then he made for the door, only to be seized in the grip of a big hand.

"Where did this wild weed come from?" A blow descended on him once again. "Speak! What's your name? What do you do? Listen to his accent; he's not from around here!"

The boy made not a sound, staring with his eyes wide open clenching his jaw.

"Old Man Heaven! They're going to kill my grandson! Take pity! I only have this one; I'm going to need him when I die. . . ." The old woman, struggling up from the ground only to be knocked down again, began to sob.

Suddenly the door opened and a figure appeared standing erect in the doorway. The room suddenly quieted, and the soldiers all jumped to their feet. After saluting, Zhang Dasheng said:

"Sir, we have a stinking little spy here."

The company commander entered the room, and looking carefully at the boy, sat silently on a low stool.

The news went out immediately: "*Heya*! He's interrogating the little spy!" Outside the cave, layer upon layer of people crowded to watch.

"He's my grandson! Take pity — he's my only one; if you don't believe it, ask around, everybody knows it. . . ."

Several trembling villagers were interrogated; plucking up their courage, they answered, "That's right, he's her grandson. . . ."

"You must search him, sir!" This came from one of the soldiers who saw that the commander apparently wanted to let the child go. But outside the door, other soldiers objected: "He's just a kid; that's no spy!"

The company commander, after staring fixedly for what seemed a long time into the boy's eyes, which stared right back, suddenly ordered: "Search him!"

A small dagger and two paper notes were produced from his pockets. A black hat was stuck in his belt. These objects produced a wave of excitement in the room, and all eyes were fixed on the commander's hands, which were turning over the objects. Printed on the notes were two heads, one of Lenin, the other of Marx; on the reverse were the words "State Bank of the People's Soviet Republic of China". On the hat glittered a shiny, five-pointed red star. When he saw this badge, the boy's heart glowed within him and a lofty, warm feeling surged through him. He awaited judgment silently.

"His mother's. . . ! This small, and he's already a Red bandit!" the soldier standing next to the company commander exclaimed.

"Confess, boy!" the company commander ordered him.

"There's nothing to confess; why don't you just finish me off? But the Red Army are not bandits; we have never disturbed the common people. We are welcome everywhere, and we are good to soldiers of the Northeast Army. We are trying earnestly to unite with you to fight against Japan — some day you will understand and come round!"

"This little bandit is a plucky one! That's just how the Red Army is — tough!"

Although the boy's courage inspired anger in some of their hearts, it also commanded their respect; this could be felt in the air.

The company commander was still staring at the boy dispassionately. He asked calmly:

"Are you afraid of death?"

Apparently this question embarrassed the boy somewhat, for he impatiently raised his head and replied quickly, "If I were, I wouldn't be in the Red Army!"

More and more people were pressing around to watch, and many of them were sweating nervously, worried. The light in their eyes became timid and fearful, and they gazed abjectly at the company commander. But the company commander hid his feelings, only saying coldly:

"Well, then we'll give you a bullet!"

The widow began to wail afresh. Most of the eyes in the room were cast down. Some people left. But no one, even the ruthless soldiers, asked whether the summary sentence was to be carried out immediately.

"No," the boy said quietly, "Sir! Save a bullet, save it to fight the Japanese! You can kill me with a knife!"

The commander could restrain himself no longer. Running forward out of the press of people, he scooped up the boy and hugged him fiercely, shouting:

"Does anyone want to kill him? Where is everyone's conscience? The Japanese have occupied our villages, killed our parents, our wives and our children, but we do not take revenge; instead here we are killing fellow Chinese! Look at this little Red Army soldier: who of us compares with him? He is from the Red Army, it is we who call him a Red bandit! Who still wishes to kill him? Better to kill me first. . . ." His voice became choked.

Everyone crowded together, and the child felt something hot, something like water, falling on his hands and clothing. His eyes gradually grew cloudy, and he saw as if in a mist, or behind frosted glass, that red star, floating, rising; then he felt himself being lifted up as well.

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Translated by Stephen Fleming

The Steamer

Ding Ling

The early steamer came down from Taoyuan and stopped on its way to Wuling, the county seat. On the river, which was bordered on both sides by green hills, the boat looked like some kind of large high-backed fish, parting the water as it proceeded downstream. The twin ribbons of spray it threw up as it ploughed through the water looked from afar like catfish feelers hanging lazily from its sides. A group of Baihe and Mayang boats with sails spread or stern oars a-sculling made haste to give way to the steamer as soon as its black smoke came into view. Every time the boat steamed up to a small pier it would give a sharp blast on its whistle, at which time two or three wooden loading rafts would busily come alongside the slowly moving steamer, and the passengers, smelling of mud, would scramble on and off the raft and the steamer. Everyone on the steamer would gather at the gunwales to watch, and from every window of the cabin three or four heads would poke, crowding each other to catch a glimpse of this riverside mountain town with its thirty or forty tiled houses. Most of the houses next to the river had little houses on stilts over the water, in which women in red jackets or coarse green tunics would gather, three or four times every day, to gaze reverently at the steamer, which was black with the thickly clustered passengers. The women enjoyed watching each passenger board and debark. That house there with glass windows was sure to have a crowd of spectators. It must be the social hub of the wharf area, So-and-so's Teahouse. Surrounding the area of tiled houses on both sides were thatched huts of every size and condition. Only when the undulating mountain ridges and the long, reed-covered breakwater reappeared did the scene on the boat regain some sem-

blance of order. Because the trip to Wuling was not too long, some passengers simply cracked melon seeds and gossipped, while those who had been blessed from birth with the ability to fall asleep anywhere and at any time were curled up snoring, their heads lolling to one side. And the one thing that was never missing on any of the steamer's trips up or down the river was a thick clump of people squatting in a circle in the three-foot-high public cabin playing dominoes. These were the folk in tunics and grass sandals; as for the "venerable sirs" in the private cabin, naturally, since they were privileged, often only 12 strings of cash — the same price the common people paid — were required for them to descend to Wuling or return to Taoyuan. Most everyone felt quite at ease and passed the few hours on the boat happily, but there were also those who felt extremely uncomfortable with life on the steamer during their short journey. Of course, everyone could see that these were single women who were not used to talking and laughing with others. Today there was just such a woman passenger suffering on the boat.

Just at dawn on this same day, Mistress Jie was escorted from a small street down to the dock by a few of her more beloved pupils and some colleagues with whom she was on good terms; they were seeing her off at the end of her stint of several years at the school. Her colleagues knew of the anger and sadness in her heart, but they did not know how to comfort her without sounding awkward; hence they could only keep silent. The pupils, seeing how quiet their masters were, were only all the more melancholy at their mistress' parting, so that even the most spirited among them was left without the energy to entreat her to stay.

Because they arrived early, most of the seats in the private cabin were still empty. One of her colleagues was the first to break the silence:

"Be sure to write often!"

Another said:

"I still approve of your idea of going to Beijing. I myself really can't afford the journey, otherwise I should be delighted to accompany you."

Mistress Jie simply compressed her lips and nodded silently. At any other time — this was pure conjecture, of course — if anyone had expressed a desire to be her travelling companion, she would have been delighted. But now it only made her think of certain other subjects. She truly felt that people were just cold, unfeeling objects. She thought to herself:

"*Ai*, what need is there for these lies? You've all got good jobs

as teachers; why ever would you want to go to Beijing? Only I, I who can find no place for myself, have need of exiling myself to that frozen city. I've heard that when it's very cold in Beijing, one's nose is in danger of freezing off!"

The others, sensing that she was not happy, all fell silent again. The silence only made them all the more uncomfortable.

Usually, Mistress Jie was equally pleasant with everybody, but ever since she had received news of her imminent dismissal from the school, she had been especially grateful to these colleagues and old classmates of hers for quietly letting her know they had already received their contracts for the next year. She was the only person not to receive one, and it was not because the school authorities had forgotten her. Now was she supposed to hang about the school after classes had started like an idiot for all the students and teachers to laugh at? There was no reason for her to hate them. But did she have to have a reason? She could hate them if she pleased. They had no worries; they were happy. They could pity her — that was reason enough. She could hate them for these reasons alone. But upon reflection she saw how preposterous all these thoughts were, so she behaved even more modestly towards them. She was always able to hold her temper in check. She said to them:

"Why don't you all go on back? I've put you to the inconvenience of sending me off, and then there are these children.... I'll write as soon as I get to Wuling. It's not sure that I'll go to Beijing — if Wuling turns out to be nice, I might just end up staying there."

The youngest student, nine years old, could stand it no longer. He wailed:

"Why isn't Teacher going to teach us anymore? She must not like us anymore!"

The others expressed their agreement, saying that Teacher must surely be tired of them.

Mistress Jie, seeing these few bright children she had come to love in such a state, was at a loss to deal with the situation. She could not explain the difficulty of her position to them, so she could only say earnestly:

"I know you all like me, but the school doesn't want me anymore!"

The students all thought she was lying and refused to believe it. This only added to the unspeakable pain in her heart, and she urged them to go back. Only when the whistle had sounded for the second time did they descend from the steamer, board the small loading boat and exchange with her sorrowful parting glances.

Soon the steamer cast off; looking out the window, she caught sight

of a chain of green hills. *Ai*, this scenery had become so familiar. At the school, there had always been at least twenty times a day she would lean on the windowsill and gaze at this very scene. She remembered that Mount Lüluo had been faintly visible from that window; from here, however, it was further away, and even when she stuck her head out the window she couldn't catch sight of it. She looked across the cabin to the other window, and in the space between the heads of the two passengers sitting there she could see the unbroken chain of tiled houses receding behind the steamer, but she had no desire to figure out which streets and places she was glimpsing. She returned her gaze to her immediate surroundings, and her eyes fell upon her luggage, of which there were three pieces: bedroll, trunk and basket.

Usually back in her room she never noticed, but today being on the broad expanse of water and catching sight of the rolling hills, she was aware of the floating, illusive quality of this body and the absence of anything to depend on. Naturally this feeling of bleakness was exacerbated by leaving a school to which she had grown accustomed over seven or eight years and by feeling anger that she was unable to express. Lifting her eyes, she looked forward; was there a home there to which she could return? Looking back at the town again, she felt no particular regret at leaving. She was simply floating, with no sense of purpose. She just wanted to get to Wuling as quickly as possible, but at the same time, it seemed that it would be even better not to get there at all. She had no idea how to pass the time on this utterly boring boat.

She began to take notice of her fellow passengers, and only now did she notice that the entire cabin was full. Two women sat by the door nursing their children; two others, younger by a bit, were squeezed in next to them. Looking beyond the women, she saw three or four merchants who looked quite prosperous, their faces shining with a stupid satisfaction. On beyond them, not far from herself, was one of the most fashionable personages in Taoyuan, wearing gold-rimmed spectacles and a grey Western suit with black flecks. He was a doctor in the missionary hospital, his name was Kong; she knew him. She quickly moved her gaze to her left. There sat an old villager; she had no idea how he'd found his way into the private cabin, but here he was, contentedly smoking his long pipe. Next to him were two middle-school students who had just come from upstream, still with that air of honesty and straightforwardness that all students lost after two or three years in Wuling. Beyond the two students was a country official with a forked beard. And over by the door in that

direction were several members of the gentry who were quite well-dressed. Between Forked-beard and the aristocrats were seated two local prostitutes from Taoyuan, their bangs cut straight across, medicine plasters they would wear until their dying day stuck on their temples, a stripe of purple through their eyebrows, deep green foreign jackets on their shoulders, and pale red socks and silk shoes with blue flowers on their pigeon-toed, unbound feet. Knitting their brows, they smiled at their neighbours, now and again digging into their handkerchief bundles to get out some melon seeds to crack. She was frightened to death by them. She could not understand why all these people were so unappealing; she wondered how it was she had never seen people like them before. She could not obtain the least amount of pleasure from the trip. If she had realized how awful it would be on the steamer, she would have found a way to wait a few days until someone could be found to accompany her. This brought her to thoughts of her first trip to Wuling.

At that time, five or six years ago, she was still a student herself, and she and her classmates had heard that the army of Feng Yuxiang,* which was stationed at Wuling, was going to sponsor a big rally. It was very exciting.

All the schools in Wuling took part in the rally, and everyone in their school had caught the fever too. Students grouped themselves and went down to Wuling to visit, and she joined a group of 40 or 50 to make the trip. On that trip, they had practically taken up half the boat, and they sang songs at the top of their lungs. What a wonderful trip that was — they were so happy! Full of the wild exuberance of youth!

She thought of the other times she had been down; hadn't they all been pleasant trips as well? There had been plenty of companions; they didn't lack for camaraderie. Moreover.... She didn't dare let her thoughts wander any further. Thoughts of two of the trips would make her much too sad.

It had been last year in the spring, just when the red of azalea blossoms was covering the mountains and filling the valleys; that was when Kun Shan had come quietly along. She had asked for a few days' vacation from teaching and had declined the offers of her colleagues to accompany her — they didn't know her real reasons for going — to Wuling. She had gone with him one morning to Mount Wenshi for an excursion, and they had taken an afternoon boat to Wuling, because on the afternoon boat they could be sure of not run-

* Feng Yuxiang (1882-1948), a patriotic general.

ning into anyone they knew. She had been a bit shy; sitting facing her, he had spoken of all kinds of interesting things, but she hadn't paid close attention. It was as if the sound of his voice alone could intoxicate her. And if she had been a bit more self-conscious, she would have been even more shy, too shy to lift her head. Back then, her heart was overflowing with a pure, undifferentiated hope: she had hoped that she could belong not only to herself but to another person as well; then everything would be all right. Things were really strange; after seeing her more or less by chance two or three times during his winter vacation, Kun Shan had somehow become quite attached to her. *Ai*! Wasn't it a very simple matter for those letters, full of the language of love, to conquer her heart, which in twenty years of life had never once before been set a-thumping because of a man? It was pitiful — standing in front of her pupils, she looked so adult; alone with this man, she became weak and meek as a lamb. In Wuling she stayed at a private primary school, and Kun Shan came every day to visit the teachers, who were struck by his attentiveness and treated him even better, so that he ended up sitting like a king, surrounded by female teachers, for quite a spell. After that, every two or three weeks she would find an excuse to go downstream for a visit; she thought that no one would know the real reason for her going. Who was to know that of the letters Kun Shan sent to her, not a few were scrutinized by others before reaching her, and that the school authorities already had intentions of firing her, although they all felt she was a better teacher than anyone else? Only now did she realize that her past actions had made such a bad impression on others. First she had felt wronged, and then she began to hate a number of people.

She had good reason to feel wronged. If it could now be like it was at mid-autumn, when she put her hands in Kun Shan's and they leaned against each other under the moon and he told her his woeful personal history — the indignity he had suffered by being forced to marry a wife with bound feet — she would of course be delighted and determined to go, and she would not be so miserable on the boat. Everything would be compensated for later; she would only have to hope for an early arrival at her destination, and she could imagine what their meeting would be like, using her imagination to keep her surging emotions at bay and helping the journey not seem so long. But now, she felt not only wronged and vexed but absolutely washed up, at a loss to know what course to take. Why should she think of Kun Shan when it only made her feel worse?

Actually, she *was* thinking of him, and had been for quite some time; this was making her more and more resentful. Making an effort to shake off these thoughts, she turned her head and looked at the somehow depressing scenery of verdant hills and green water. She had been up and down this river she didn't know how many times, but she still could not tell how far they had come from the landmarks on either shore. She knew only that the clock would strike eleven before she would catch sight of the large pagoda on the hill facing Wuling. She looked at her watch, which said three o'clock; then she remembered she had forgotten to wind it last night. Then she thought to herself that it was all the same whether they got there early or late, so she didn't pay any more attention to the time. Looking down the cabin, she saw that the country official was eating a bowl of noodles with gravy and that the old villager and the merchants had all fallen asleep. Everyone else was talking to each other, and it seemed that people who hadn't known each other before getting on the boat were becoming friendly with each other. Only that doctor named Kong had his head down; he was absorbed in reading the Gospel of Mark. She stared at him. Suddenly she felt that his cheekbones and jaw looked somewhat like Kun Shan's. She stared at him even harder, and somehow what had been a feeling of anger towards Kun Shan turned into agitation: her heart beat wildly, and she thought over and over: what is he going to say when we see each other? But soon after, even before the official's bowl of gravy and noodles had been finished off, she slipped into melancholy again, and this led quite naturally to recollections of that day at the time of first frost.

That had been a wonderful day, a day created for lovers, a day resplendent with sunlight. She had been to a wedding with a few friends. That had been the day Kun Shan, stubbornly resisting the first marriage his family had arranged for him, married for a second time. The bride was also a classmate of hers, older than herself, twenty-six, thin, and not as attractive as herself. The news had come so suddenly, taking everybody by surprise, but especially herself, as just the week before she had received a very flowery love letter from him. Before the announcement of the weddding, he had been treating her very well; then suddenly, as if it were a joke, came the announcement of the wedding, and only two or three days later, the real thing! She had contained her anger and attended the festivities with a smile on her face. Her cold stares she reserved for the bridegroom, but they were answered with glances as tender as ever, now with an admixture of regret and apology that only made her feel the more uncomfortable. She got terribly drunk and then came back. What an awful day that had been!

Now she remembered Kun Shan's explanation, which she still

didn't quite understand: one evening, having drunk quite a bit, his thoughts turned to her and he did some crazy things he didn't remember. The next day, people laughed at his antics of the previous night, saying he had embraced his present wife, saying how much he loved her, and had kissed her.... Just as he was feeling chagrined at these revelations, the woman came, and putting on a show of bashfulness very casually stayed there. Eventually, her father came and took him to have a meal. He had no way out; it was all his fault. For the sake of his conscience he could only try to make amends; he hoped she would be able to understand and forgive. She could not believe his explanation; she felt only that she had been deceived, but she could not understand why anyone would want to deceive her, and moreover why he would want to keep on deceiving her. Although Kun Shan was going to be a father, he still wrote her extremely intimate letters behind his wife's back. As for herself, she had no more illusions about the matter. She was not willing to let him upset her overly, so she had not gone down to Wuling all during winter vacation. She only looked forward to the beginning of school so she could teach her beloved pupils again. Who was to know that after waiting all that time all she was to get was a notice of dismissal from the school? She could see from her colleagues' looks and hear from their comments that the reason she was being fired was for having taken too much time off; this she really could not defend herself against. If the reason for her dismissal had been that her teaching was unsatisfactory, that would have been unimportant; if they had let her go three or four months before, it would have been an entirely different situation altogether. Now it was February and all of the schools were about to open; where was she supposed to find a position? Although she had told everyone she was going to Beijing to study, the problems entailed by that prospect were simply overwhelming: firstly, it would not be easy to get together the money for the journey; she had no more in hand than the two hundred yuan back pay the school had given her. Secondly, she was afraid she wouldn't pass the entrance exams, so was she supposed to go back to middle school? Moreover, now was not the time entrance examinations were held; it would be March when she arrived in Beijing, and she would not be able to gain entrance to any school. Although her colleagues understood the difficulty of her situation and had been to intercede for her, the reputation of the school was at stake, and no room was left for negotiation. She nursed an unspeakable hatred for the school authorities who had framed and slandered her, and she hated herself even more for having been taken in so completely. Therefore she found it impossible to allow people

the forgiveness they desired of her, and she ended up only hating them all the more.

Now there were even more people in the cabin. The country official had already joined in a game of mahjong at a small table with a few of his neighbours, and more than twice their number were gathered around kibitzing. Thinking they might get a few tips, the attendants had all flocked into this cabin. She couldn't stand the noise, and she was getting more and more irritated. Looking at her watch, she saw that it still read only three o'clock. She looked at the sun, but with no standard to read it by she could not tell what time it was.

Moreover, that Doctor Kong was sitting too near her, and the constant sight of those cheekbones and that jaw that seemed so familiar were adding yet more twists and turns to her already tangled and undefinable feelings of conflict.

She didn't know how she was ever going to pass the long time on this boat.

Eventually the steamer arrived at its destination, but while the rest of the passengers surged joyfully on to the bank, she sat staring. Now that she had been fired, she wondered whether she would be welcome at the school where she used to stay. She grew even more hesitant at the thought that she might see Kun Shan. All she would get from him, she felt, would be those false and self-satisfied glances....

The passengers had all debarked, and the porters were gone as well. The boat was almost empty, and she was still standing blankly in the middle of the cabin. An attendant came walking over, and surprised to see her standing there, he said loudly:

"We've arrived, miss! Why haven't you gone ashore? If you want a rickshaw, I'll go and call you one, all right?"

Only then did she suddenly realize she was still on the boat. No matter how suspect the friendship that awaited her there, she had no choice but to go to the school so familiar to her. Silently she followed the attendant, who had picked up her suitcase, on to the landing-stage.

Taken from *Diary of a Suicide*, published in May, 1929, by Guanghua Publishing House

Translated by Stephen Fleming

In Memory of Ding Ling

Duanmu Hongliang

In 1933, when news of Ding Ling's arrest reached Beiping, it was said she had been killed. At that time, I was editing the *Science News* in Beiping, and we editors said in her obituary that "with her work, the production of which was sped by ceaseless effort, this untiring writer graced our literary scene. . . ." Now Ding Ling has truly left us, and I think that these words of fifty years ago still characterize her entire life.

In her story "Beliefs in Tears", we can see how strong were the beliefs she held. The French novelist Romain Rolland said: "Faith consists in embracing the world, heart to heart, and in not resting content with the dust of the senses." This applies well to Ding Ling, who opened her arms to the world.

Ding Ling's difficult and obstacle-ridden life aptly symbolizes the course of the raising of Chinese women's consciousness. From her early representative work "Miss Sophie's Diary" (1928) to her famous novel *The Sun Shines over the Sanggan River* (1948), all of her works reflect her breakthroughs in the state of the art of writing and her advance towards maturity.

In 1938, at the invitation of the poet Zang Yunyuan, I went from Wuhan to Shanxi University of the National Revolution to teach. When I arrived at Xi'an with the famous poets Ai Qing and Tian Jian and the woman writer Xiao Hong, we happened to meet up with the Field Service Corps of the Northwest. When Ding Ling heard everybody had come, she quickly made preparations to come and visit. But Tian Jian couldn't wait, and went to visit her first. Upon his return, he told me Ding Ling had said that among current women writers, Duanmu Hongliang was the most promising. Then he said, smiling, "She still doesn't know you're a man — I neglected to tell her on purpose." Before long, Ding Ling appeared, looking travel-stained. To see each other in wartime, to see each other in the wind and dust of the Northwest, brought us inexpressible joy. Ding Ling was wearing a Japanese military overcoat. When she saw Xiao Hong, she embraced her warmly and then brought out a pair of leather puttees, spoils of war captured by the Eighth Route Army — and gave them to Xiao Hong as a souvenir. When she found out I was Duanmu Hongliang, she shook my hand, laughing, and said that after all I did look a bit like a woman. We had so much to talk about, and we wanted to get it all out at once! So every day when it came time to light the lamp we would gather together and put our aspirations into words. The smoke from poor tobacco and the greasy fumes from the oil lamp seemed only to provide an even warmer atmosphere for our exchange of words. At that time, our material conditions were extremely poor; soldiers were still covered with the dust of the Long March. Ding Ling and the rest of the Service Corps shared both bitter and sweet with the soldiers. Ding Ling told us of the many times she had slept in temples in the wilds and been kept company in slumber by coffins awaiting burial.

During the retreat from Linfen, Ding Ling invited myself, Xiao Hong, the contemporary writer Nie Gannu, Tian Jian and certain others to accompany the Field Service Corps back to the Eighth Route Army Office in Xi'an. Just after we passed Fengling Ferry, that area was cut off. On the train, Ding Ling suggested that Sai Ke and a few others of our number write a play together, I had long ago agreed to write a play together with Sai Ke and Xiao Hong to be performed after victory in the War of Resistance at the Madi'er Theatre in Harbin. Upon hearing Ding Ling's idea, we all agreed readily. On this same train to Xi'an, we happened to meet Zhao Shangzhi's younger brother, Zhao Shangwu, and his little sister and brother. After delivering his brother and sister to Yan'an, Zhao Shangwu was preparing to go to the front lines. We talked about the evil fates of our hometowns and of exploits in the struggle against the Japanese in the Northeast. The strength and intelligence of this little brother of Zhao Shangzhi's left a deep impression on us; taking him as our model, we wrote the play *Surprise Attack*. Ding Ling was very pleased to hear about it, and she called over Li Jincai, a woman member of the corps and an alumna of Yanjing University, to make a record of it. After determining the plot, we worked on the dialogue, reworking the structure while polishing the language. With Sai Ke copying it out, we finished the play very quickly. After we arrived in Xi'an, thanks to the unstinting efforts of Comrade Chen Ming, Ding Ling's husband, in planning and preparing, before long *Surprise Attack* was presented to the masses. The rate of attendance was very

Duanmu Hongliang is a famous modern Chinese writer.

good; Comrade Zhou Enlai received us very hospitably, and we all had our portrait taken together with him. The melodious name of Ding Ling also caught the interest of the Air Force pilots in Xi'an, and they often came to the regiment's quarters for get-togethers or went with us on excursions, taking photos for souvenirs.

On the eve of the establishment of the People's Republic, I returned from Hongkong to Beijing. There I saw Ding Ling, who recommended I return to the Northeast to complete my novel *The Grasslands of the Kerxin Banner*. This was exactly in line with my own plans at the time. As it turned out, however, due to my involvement in agrarian reform in the suburbs of Beijing, I was not able to return to the Northeast. Who was to know that both she and Ai Qing would end up passing so much time in the Great Northern Wilderness, their sweat flowing on to the black earth, leaving here some of the milk of Dayanhe* and some of the spray from the waves on the Xiangjiang River,** making the colour of the earth even deeper? When I saw Ding Ling at the Fourth National Conference of Writers and Artists in the Great Hall of the People, I wished her health. Later, whenever I saw an article of hers in a newspaper or magazine, I would sense that the ever-present Hunanese tone in her articles was as strong and ringing as ever.

Now Ding Ling has left this world, but her works are still radiating brightness over the land from south to north. And in the midst of the wreath formed by this brightness is the name Ding Ling.

Comrade Ding Ling, your road has been a hard one, and it has made firm your beliefs. "The strong soul walks over the rolling surface of time, like Peter on the lake. He who has no faith sinks." (Romain Rolland)

Ding Ling, you have not died; those whose faith is firm do not die, because there remain those who will complete the unfinished task.

Translated by Stephen Fleming

* *A reference to Ai Qing's autobiographical poem, "Dayanhe — My Wet-Nurse".*

** *A reference to Hunan, Ding Ling's home province.*

Huang Beijia

In Silent Remembrance

My first visit to Teacher Ding Ling was an adventure.

Once when talking in my dormitory about Ding Ling with Zhang Jingde, a reporter from the *Guangming Daily* whom I knew well, he asked me if I would like to co-operate with him in writing a critical biography of Ding Ling. At that time I was in my freshman year in college and was curious about everything. Thinking how wonderful it would be to see this legendary figure of the older generation of writers in person, I happily assented.

That was in the summer of 1979; Ding Ling and her husband, Chen Ming, had just returned to Beijing from Shanxi. Very few people knew where they lived, and hardly any articles about the couple were appearing in the media. Finding them in a city as large as Beijing was as difficult a prospect as finding a needle in the sea. Zhang Jingde volunteered himself for this thankless task, and instructed me to take advantage of my library privileges at Beijing University to sift through magazines and newspapers from the years both before and after Liberation corresponding to Ding Ling's career, and to take notes, using index cards, on all articles about Ding Ling's activities as well as those written by Ding Ling herself. That summer I spent every day at the library pursuing this assignment.

Reporters do after all have remarkable abilities; Heaven knows from whom Zhang finally found out Ding Ling's address. One day he came to call on me grasping a piece of paper between his thumb and forefinger, and asked me if I wanted to go pay a call on Ding Ling with him. However, he said, he was not sure that the address on the paper was correct — it was merely a possibility. "This may be the place; let's go and try our luck," he said. So we busily made our preparations: he shouldered the camera, and told me to take the

pens and notebooks. Then he asked if I had one of those small tape recorders; I had to answer no. Forget it, he said, we'll take it next time. As we were leaving, I wondered how I should address this veteran writer. Finally, I decided to call her "Teacher". This form of address is appropriate for anyone, and besides, I was a young student.

So we set off full of exuberance, without the least expertise to rely on. Having entered the Friendship Hotel, we found our way to a very ordinary-looking little building. We climbed the stairs, Zhang knocked on the door, and I hid behind him. I was thinking to myself that I would never have the daring to come alone to visit someone so famous unannounced.

I think it was Chen Ming who opened the door, but looking towards the interior we could also see the face of Ding Ling. Immediately I felt there was no need to ask if it really was her; my intuition told me it was. After all, as a student of Chinese literature, I had read practically all her works! Zhang took it upon himself to exchange formalities with her and ask her questions. I sat in a chair, very reserved, and didn't say a word. I didn't even write a single character in the notebook I had brought; I felt too embarrassed. I could never get used to the style of interview favoured by professional reporters. The contents of that conversation and of many more we had afterwards have all run together in my mind. Later I recorded many of the conversations in the notebook from memory, but later with my graduating and going to work, getting married and moving about, I don't know what became of the notebook. I have always been a careless, forgetful person. However, the photos of Ding Ling, Chen Ming and ourselves that Zhang took on that first visit remain in my possession. Ding Ling in the photos is already an old woman of 75, with silvery white hair and a slightly rotund body, blue eyes round and lively, much younger than her age. When she looked steadily at you with those eyes you almost felt they could see through you. Many people like to use adjectives like "gentle" and "motherly" to describe elderly women, but such phraseology does not fit Ding Ling well. The qualities she possessed were honesty, seriousness, a strong will and vigour. Even when she was laughing, her face showed an indomitable self-confidence.

After that first time, I went once or twice with Zhang again. I came to know Ding Ling and her husband better. Finally there came a day when I went by myself for a visit. At that time the Fourth National Conference of Writers and Artists had not yet taken place; Ding Ling had only just regained her status and returned to Beijing, and was

living in an apartment rented at the Friendship Hotel for her by the Writers' Association, which while it was neat and clean seemed a little cramped. I think she was in the process of writing her full-length novel *In Days of Frost*; every time I went to visit, she would emerge from her pile of books and papers to chat with me, ask how things were at university, wonder what classes I was taking and what books I was reading and inquire about youth nowadays. Sighing, she said that having passed so many years in a remote mountain valley, she was completely out of touch with present-day society, so she wanted to hear all about it from me. But most of the time it was she who talked and I who listened. Because her Hunan accent was so thick, I always had to listen carefully to catch what she said. I liked to watch her eyes as she talked; they were wise, bright, and full of humour, tolerance and understanding as well as a boundless love of life and the people.... She spoke of her life in the Great Northern Wilderness, of the chickens she raised and the job she had as a cultural instructor, the sufferings she and Chen Ming had undergone during the "cultural revolution", and her relations with the cadres and peasants there. We sat facing each other and talking like this for a long time. Through her I came to appreciate the ideals of the older generation, born of the fires of war, and I came to understand more fully the works of hers I had read. Moreover, I began to comprehend what is meant by the words "a generous heart". Although at the time of our conversations she could not be said to have been lonely, it was certainly not like later when an endless stream of visitors was forever knocking on her door. Our conversations were only rarely interrupted; for me, this was extremely pleasant and I enjoyed it very much.

In October that year, on the eve of the Fourth National Conference of Writers and Artists, I interviewed Ding Ling for the newspaper *Wenhui Bao*. This was the first thing I had written about Ding Ling since I met her, and it turned out to be the only thing I ever wrote about her. As for the critical biography of Ding Ling I had planned with Zhang Jingde, later I abandoned it because I was busy with my own work writing fiction.

About one year later, Ding Ling moved to a very nice apartment block at Muxidi. I still went to see her every once in a while. Since I had no family in Beijing, at holiday time I often felt lonely, but as soon as I arrived at her place I would feel a natural, homelike atmosphere surround me, making me feel very comfortable. Perhaps because I was young enough to be the granddaughter of Ding Ling and Chen Ming, there seemed to be between us that sort of special relationship that exists between family members separated by a

generation. She often asked about my family and my personal life, and I was always happy to tell her every detail. That year my younger brother made it into Qinghua University, and once I took him specially to see her. She liked him very much and kept us for dinner; when we were about to leave, Chen Ming stuffed my brother's bookbag full of apples. I will never forget that evening.

By that time I had already published quite a few works of fiction, but somehow I never took any of them to show to Ding Ling. She was always asking me to bring them, but I always managed to brush off her requests perfunctorily. I don't know what was on my mind then; was I embarrassed to let her see them, or did I feel she was too busy and would never have time to read them? People are strange like that sometimes: whenever I am not confident about my work, the more near and dear a person is and the more they understand me, the less willing I am to let them see my work. It's much like when a man and woman are still courting: they always want to show their best side to the other and are deathly afraid the other will be disappointed in them. Or I may have kept my works from her for fear she would not like them. I imagined her to be an ultra-orthodox "Party member", believing in everything members of that generation of old revolutionaries believed in, and my fiction of that time was all wreathed in a mood of depression and grief, as if my outlook on life were very bleak. I didn't think she would enjoy that sort of fiction.

In 1980, the Jiangsu People's Publishing House was going to publish a collection of my pieces for children called *Little Boat, Little Boat.* Perhaps because they thought it would sell better, the editors advised me to find a "famous author" to write an introduction for me. I am not very socially active, and I really didn't know any "famous authors", so after racking my brains, the only thing I could do was to ask Ding Ling to do it. I knew she did favours of this kind very seldom; she was getting on in years and her eyes were failing, yet she was still working on two full-length novels. She could only write a few hundred characters a day, and for her to write an introduction to my book would mean that she would certainly have at least to skim through it — not a simple prospect for a woman nearing eighty. As I handed over the thick envelope containing the manuscript to her, I felt a certain trepidation: Would she find some polite way to refuse? If she did, I thought, I would never be able to come visit again, because I have a strange sense of pride. But she did not refuse. One week later, the introduction she had written came to me at Beijing University in the mail. It was written in rather large characters, with no attention paid to the lines and with quite a few corrections, on two

sheets of big manuscript paper. I could see from what she had written that she had carefully read quite a few of the stories from the book. She said she liked very much my pieces of children's literature. . . .

I have kept that handwritten draft of her introduction until this very day. In it, she said: "I hope that young authors can throw themselves into the struggles of the lives of the great masses of people, strengthening themselves, deepening their love for the people and their understanding of the people's joys and sorrows. This is not merely a question of decorating their language to make it more beautiful, but of earnestly reflecting the needs of the people — voicing their grievances, hymning their lofty emotions, producing works of sufficient depth to reflect an entire era." These were the hopes of an older author, who had experienced much hardship in her life, for the younger generation of authors, and they were also her own ideals, which she realized fully. Were not such works of hers as *The Sun Shines over the Sanggan River, In Days of Frost* and *Du Wanxiang,* running altogether into the millions of words, all written in this manner?

Unfortunately, in the past I did not understand these words Ding Ling wrote for me, because I was young and had too many romantic fantasies. I was always impatient just to get my feelings down on paper, and I could not stand to work seriously at anything else. Now it's too late; even if I could write something worthy to give to Ding Ling, she would not be able to read it! When I think of this, I feel an icy chill in my heart.

I am reminded of the summer of 1980. Summer vacation had started, and Ding Ling and Chen Ming were talking about going to the Great Northern Wilderness to visit the place they had lived in for twelve years. They asked me to go with them and escape from the "ivory tower" of the university for a while, to live with the masses for a time in order to feel life more deeply and get closer to it. They said this would be good for my creative work. But at that time I had fallen into the deep well of first love and could not pull myself out. I wanted only to sit in my dormitory room and ruminate; I had no desire to find another state of mind, another atmosphere. Using some excuse or other, I refused their invitation. When I think about it now, I realize that my refusal must have wounded them both. How could I have been so mixed up, so idiosyncratic, so insensitive?

Early in 1982 I graduated from university and was sent to work in the Foreign Affairs Office of the Jiangsu Provincial Government. Before I left Beijing I went to say goodbye to the old couple. Because

the job I had been assigned did not fit with the major I had studied, I was very dissatisfied. Ding Ling could see this, so she made a joke of it: "It's not so bad to work in foreign affairs — later on you can become a woman diplomat!" As I was leaving she took my hand and shook it again and again, not releasing it for a long time. Her hands were warm and soft, and they seemed to express a wordless consolation. Suddenly feeling a pang of grief, I quickly turned and fled into the elevator. I was afraid that if I remained another moment I would burst out sobbing.

Who was to know that I would never become a woman diplomat, and that this was to be our final farewell?

After leaving Beijing, I did not return for a very long time. I cannot remember whether I wrote her one or two letters; she answered me once. In early autumn of 1982 she went to Nantong, passing through Nanjing. She called my work unit to make an appointment with me, but I was out of town on assignment and never got to see her.

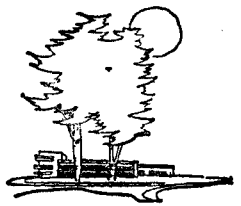
After that I never wrote to her again, because I heard that some of my old classmates had spread rumours that I cultivated contacts with "famous people" exclusively during college in order to advance myself, and that the only reason I had been able to publish so many works and have a book published when I was still in college was because my "famous" contacts helped me. An editor even asked me if I was Ding Ling's granddaughter. All of this infuriated me, but since I have a weak disposition, when attacked I can only hang my head. I didn't dare seek any more contact with Ding Ling; "people's gossip is to be feared", and I still wanted to publish books and live my life.

So I never saw or heard from her again. Last year, when I went to attend a conference in Beijing, I resolutely determined before I left that I would go see the old couple. When I got to Beijing, I was going to go several times but hesitated each time. We had had no contact for several years; if I did go, what would I say? Would we feel like strangers to one another? If other people got to know about my going, mightn't it stir up trouble? In the end I didn't go. The distance of a few bus stops became like a thousand miles. Later, when an editor from Beijing came to Nanjing, he said Madame Ding Ling had told him to ask after me; she was starting a magazine, and could I write a little something for her? When I heard this, my eyes felt wet. After so many years, she still remembered me and was thinking of me!

Who was to know, who could foresee that this was the last I would ever hear from her, and that I would never see her again? My weakness and hesitation have left me with the prospect of a lifetime of regret. My laughable, pitiful pride and competitiveness — since I was small, I have suffered so much trouble on their account, and yet I cannot seem to get rid of them! And chagrin is no use at all.

I can only silently remember my teacher in my heart, and pray that her soul can pardon all that I have done.

Translated by Stephen Fleming



Xu Qixiong's Paintings of Beautiful Women

Xia Shuoqi

Xu Qixiong, born in Wenzhou, Zhejiang in 1934, has painted since boyhood. He was "discovered" drawing picture posters in the street in 1950 by the cultural troupe of the army and admitted to the unit. In 1953 he entered the Chinese painting department of the Central Academy of Fine Arts, where he studied figure painting under the celebrated artists Ye Qianyu and Jiang Zhaohe. After graduation, he was appointed fine arts editor of the *People's Daily*, travelling the country to learn the local customs of ethnic minorities, and began producing genre paintings. In 1965 he was transferred home to Wenzhou and became a professional painter in the Zhejiang Academy of Painting.

Xu's genre paintings of women have been called lyrical and modern. He views female beauty through the local customs from which he draws his material, delineating the subject's inner spiritual life as he depicts her beauty. He captures her feelings in his execution, so that the female beauty he paints springs from the beauty of life; his artistic goals have nothing in common with the "pin-up girls" of calendars and advertisements.

An art critic, Xia Shuoqi is on the editorial staff of the magazine Fine Arts.

Yangtse Springtime

Paintings by Xu Qixiong

Southern Style

Off to See Relatives

Glaze

Permanent Spring

Miao Bride

But he does not lopsidedly and mechanically portray features, posture and grace, nor does he fabricate a plot, because he has his own extensive visual angle. He often finds in the beauty of local customs an impression of the entirety of time and space. His appreciation of life, treatment of material, formation of composition and artistic expression obviously involve great mental effort; consequently his work is filled with a motivating force all his own which expresses his individual aesthetic.

Miao Bride, for which he became famous, illustrates his sensitivity to emotion and skill in presenting beautiful images in tender, lyrical language once he has come to grips with the beauty of local customs in real life. This freshness in the image can still be sensed. In the last ten years he has remained faithful to his exploration of the modern painting of local customs. His works *Return at Eve, Glaze, Yangtse Springtime, Southern Style, Permanent Spring* and *Off to See Relatives* show increasing mastery.

In the sixties Xu Qixiong's improvements in choice of material and aesthetic visual angle, form and style acted like a breath of fresh air on the painters of the meticulous style, who, unlike those of today, held that every brushstroke had to reveal its source. Unconventional methods, brushwork and colouring were branded "outlandish". Xu's work counted as watercolour or gouache, whereas today it is unhesitatingly considered Chinese painting. Xu quips, "I have got my *Miao Bride* and *Zhuang Sisters* passports to Chinese painting."

In respect to meticulous figure painting he holds that "colour is the first stimulus of sight"; this must be the mainstay whenever colour is applied heavily. Also, "the conventional colours are not enough for modern figures. So the fundamental way out lies in innovations in colour and technique." He devotes his energy to studying the relation between light and colour, their effect upon the visual organs and their relationship to the feeling and mood of figures, as well as their place in the language of painting. No mean respecter of tradition, he has studied the Tang Dynasty painters, copied murals in the Yong Le Palace, assimilated techniques from folk art and researched popular colour aesthetics. Starting with traditional colours, he has incorporated watercolour, gouache and chemical pigments into his work. The traditional art of China has much to teach in the simultaneous employment of colour and form, for instance in the facial make-up of Beijing opera, the blue hair and gold bodies of clay Buddhas, the red flowers and black-ink foliage of flower-and-bird painting, the yellow tiles and vermilion walls of architecture, and the gold and black lines of meticulous painting. But in the traditional heavily coloured meticulous painting, colouring was mainly based on the intrinsic colour of an object. Through studying the principles of colouring and learning from Japanese painting, impressionism and modernism, he tries to combine intrinsic colour, lighting colour, surrounding colour, spatial colour, emotional colour and symbolic colour, especially emphasizing light in the hope of thereby capturing spatio-temporal immediacy and the atmospheric charm of light and colour.

He first intended a golden sunset glow as the background for *Return at Eve,* with a group of fisherwomen

Xu Qixiong

coming home from the shore trailing long shadows, but the distribution of the figures proved too monotonous. The second design, a rectangle over which the figures were spread, brought out the colour but was otherwise unsatisfactory. At last he devised the small bridge, at once characteristic of seaside villages in south China and connective of the figures and their dwellings as homecoming raises their spirits. The bridge steps facilitate the distribution of the figures and the gradations of colour as well as lending movement and rhythm. The bridge's height above the horizon sharpens the contrast of light and shade in the colouring while bringing out the brilliant sunset, the atmosphere and the joy of the figures, so that the painting blends the mental and environmental states into a beauty of light, colour and feeling.

Yangtse Springtime, Off to See Relatives, Permanent Spring, and *Southern Style* have these same qualities. The elder of the two Miao girls in *Off to See Relatives* amuses the baby on her sister's back with a toy windmill as mother and son beam at her over their shoulders. The lower side of the yellow background is denser than the upper but not so transparent, the bright, warm colour evoking rape flowers and mountains as it reveals the inner world of the figures.

Xu pays particular attention to colour tone, as in the cheerful, bright yellow above the quiet elegance of *Glaze* and the misty greenish blue of *Permanent Spring,* where the artist has suited his firm or quiet colours to the feeling, the thought and the circumstance.

Xu Qixiong has a favourite phrase, "the best choice". Before he began *Return at Eve,* he prepared a series of sketches and colour drafts. Only after careful consideration could he choose the "best" and put brush to paper.

Customs differ from people to people. Xu is right when he says, "You have to strike roots in a people's customs to give your work local flavour." He has certainly done just this, lyrically illustrating the poetry in working women's lives as well as their beauty when he brings his rare talent and originality to the portrayal of women at work.

Xu's paintings need no signature. Finding a style marks an artist's move towards independence and the recognition and manifestation of his personality in his work. Without an individual style, he can never be a genuine artist. Yet finding one's style should be not a cosmetic process but one of character moulding, for the affected individual style, which distorts the nature of an object so as to defeat effective expression, leads to bad habits rather than beauty.

Xu's style was laid down step by step in the long course of creation and exploration. His colouring, composition, style, mood and drawing are visibly his own. He even has his own ways of experiencing an object, his own criteria of interest and talent for artistic treatment. In the execution of a painting he mobilizes every creative function to obtain a delicate harmony of components that embodies his style.

Permanent Spring, his latest painting in the meticulous style to reify time and space, obviously does not simply represent two Miao women drawing water in the morning; everything, from the composition, the drawing and the colouring to the depiction of circumstance, externalizes feeling. The morning light on the tips of the palm leaves and the thin mist are a paean to honest industry and an expression of faith in natural beauty.

Style is a unity of the subjective and the objective where the former's wilfulness must be curbed by the latter. The right balance is paramount. Life has its highlights and its shadows, its miseries and its joys, its lofty sentiments and its silken whispers. Xu's choice, I think, fits his personality, striking a natural balance between subjectivity and objectivity. *Return at Eve* is in effect a joyous duet between artist and subject, an aesthetic combination of the latter's instinct and the former's treatment. In general, Xu lets his own personality blend into the objective characteristics of what he portrays, generating a compelling lyricism. The distinctive rustic beauty of the two fisherwomen in *Southern Style* reveals the artist's aesthetic and the mood he imparts to his figures. Their attitude, their movement, the tiny red ribbon round the bun and the string of white beads all bear Xu's hallmark. The blue background symbolizes air, mental depth and breadth. The pictorial realm is used for the conveyance of feeling, and the genuine lyricism inevitably falls for strong subjectivity and originality of expression. Xu's lyrical style, elegant, natural, novel and lifelike, has enriched the form of female portraiture.

Xu Qixiong is on the standing committee of the Zhejiang Artists' Association and is a committee member of the Zhejiang Academy of Painting and chairman of the Artists' Association in Wenzhou. An album, *Meticulous Portraits by Xu Qixiong,* has been published by the Tianjin People's Fine Arts Publishing House; another, *Xu Qixiong's Meticulous Portraits,* is to be printed by the Beijing People's Fine Arts Publishing House; and a third, *Children by Xu Qixiong,* will be published by the Zhejiang Children's Publishing House. *Three Thousand Line Figures,* which he has been preparing since 1966, is in the draft stage, and he hopes to complete this record of the widely dif-

fering subjects now familiar to him by 1988.

Critics vary on Xu. But it is a variance he says he has "struggled through". And the struggle goes on: "We middle-aged artists were condemned by our elders for knocking tradition and called conservatives behind the times by the young. What we really are is a sort of bridge connecting the generations. The future will decide."

Translated by Song Shouquan

The Well

Lu Wenfu

Gossips at the Information Centre

The East Hu Family Lane Information Centre had been gossipping about relations between the sexes for at least two hundred years. It had no chairman, no adviser; what attracted the gossips was an ancient well which refused to dry up.

The well was at the western end of the lane, under a camphor tree outside the right panel of the courtyard door of Zhu Shiyi's two-storey house. Two stone slabs placed on stacks of bricks served as benches where people waiting their turn laid their shopping baskets or sat down to chat. Before 1978 half the inhabitants of the lane had used water from this old well. Although running water had been installed since then, it did not run to every household, besides which the water in the well, warm in winter and cool in summer, was free. Grandmothers and aunts who earned no money but spent a lot continued to come to the well to do their laundry, wash their vegetables and rice and meat twice a day for informal sessions at which a wide variety of gossip was exchanged. Thus this ancient information centre survived the attack of the installation of water pipes. And the centre's standing committee did carry some weight, for they were walking dictionaries of the lane, often consulted by the courts and the local police and always eager to give their services free.

The aunts and grandmothers took their time over their sessions at the well. First they laid down on the stone benches their shopping

baskets, wooden tubs, enamel or plastic basins and buckets. Conversation would then begin with this two-storey wooden house and gradually broach more detailed ground, because the frequent commotions and changes in this house offered handy topics for gossip.

All of twenty years ago the people at the well spotted something of grave importance through a window in that house: to wit, Zhu Shiyi, the occupant of the upper floor, holding a girl tightly in his arms and kissing her. News of this stirring event took wing and spread to every corner of the lane.

"My goodness! Zhu Shiyi has a girlfriend who's as pretty as a goddess!"

Zhu was a bachelor in his thirties who had held a job now for seven or eight years. What was so strange about a man of his age finding a goddess? Simply that the inhabitants of the lane hated him so much that they had hoped he would never find anyone if he lived eight lives, though they wouldn't have minded his becoming infatuated with some hideous shrew.

The fellow came from a scholarly family. It was said that his great-grandfather had been received by the Empress Dowager of the Qing Dynasty. Of this there were no witnesses, but there were witnesses that his father had been an opium smoker and a heroin addict who had beaten a hasty retreat from life in less than thirty years.

His mother never did anything and lived by selling her property, first antiques, paintings and calligraphy scrolls, then furniture, embroidery, porcelain, bonbonnières, water jars, candlesticks, copper basins, red lacquered chamber-pots and mahogany knick-knacks. She had sold everything before Liberation, to the point of mortgaging her house to a businessman, and had to pay rent to live upstairs. Selling everything proved to have been her lucky star, for after Liberation, when people's status was being classified, the Zhus came under the category of city paupers.

The work team was in two minds about a family like the Zhus being counted as city paupers, but after some investigation they found that for three years before Liberation Zhu had been apprenticed to the Wankang Private Bank. Having sold everything, they had no links with the past, and an apprentice belonged to the working class, so without a doubt the Zhus were city paupers and Zhu Shiyi was a worker. There was no question about that.

Of course the walking dictionaries of the lane debated at the well whether "that fellow Zhu" was one of the working class. The Wankang Bank had been owned by his mother's brother, who had given him a sinecure post for fear that he and his mother might borrow

money from him every month. But, sinecure or not, social status was decided by one's main source of income in the three years before Liberation, so Zhu could be nothing but a member of the working class.

No one had expected that this social status was more valuable than a whole pile of wealth, but in a few years it became a rank that commanded first priority in admission to the Party, becoming an official and even having the right to take part in the "cultural revolution". Right away Zhu became an activist in the lane, someone to be trusted, and soon he acquired a job in a government organization. At twenty-eight he joined the Party, and at thirty he became a section chief in charge of the district's industry.

True, his social status was not the only reason for his coming up in the world. He had know-how too. But in the East Hu Family Lane he was still his old self with the same habits, not changed one whit for having turned working-class. He was priggish, cunning, miserly, with the air of a young master who disdained to haggle. Miserliness and disdain were a pair of contradictions which originated from his background: the son of the great family looked upon gold as dirt, while the scion of the declining family lived by selling mahogany knick-knacks. These contradictions together made Zhu a man who talked big and spent stingily. It seemed that he didn't care a damn about anything because his family had had everything; what was so special about things? But he begrudged using his new bucket because he didn't want to wear out the rope, which was quite flimsy. When he wanted water, he waited at his window until somebody came along, then went down and used their bucket, muttering wordily, "The rope on your bucket is rotting and slippery. A new rope only costs a few *fen*. Why so miserly?"

No matter how poor the son of a great family becomes, he never loses his airs. Zhu thought too well of himself to mix with the hoi polloi of the lane, and looked down particularly on the "vulgar" women and girls who came to the well. He was of course badly in need of a wife, but a man from a scholarly family looks for an elegant, noble young beauty with the looks of a stage ingenue. Young ladies, desirable as they were, needed a lot of money to spend and did not wait on their husbands. Zhu had no money to hire a maid and wanted to be served like a lord. This contradiction could only be solved by a wife who was as pretty as a young lady but who would act as a maid, and naturally none of the girls in the lane met these criteria.

The women in the lane did not spare him either, often lashing him with their tongues when they gathered at the well. Sometimes

their tongues ran away with them and they made vulgar jokes about things in bed. "Shut your foul mouths!" Zhu would rail at them. "How can you talk such filth?" Yet he often hid behind his window to look at the girl's legs, scaring them into turning their backs to his window when they squatted down at the well.

The women at the well judged people not by status or official posts but by behaviour. They didn't like Zhu's rise in the world and consoled themselves with the fact that at thirty years of age he was unable to find a wife. Heaven had eyes. It was a judgement.

The news that Zhu not only had a girlfriend but a goddess at that so upset the lane's inhabitants that they bombarded Aunt Ma, the discoverer of the secret, with questions.

"Your old eyes must be playing tricks on you. What girl would be so blind as to let Zhu kiss her?"

"Slap my face if I tell a word of a lie," swore Aunt Ma.

The little house was watched even more closely, and new discoveries were made daily. They saw Zhu standing in the light of the window combing his hair again and again, a small round mirror in his hand, suddenly conscious of his looks. Day after day he sprayed water on his cotton tunic, smoothed it by hand and hung it outside the window. Although unpopular, Zhu was quite good-looking and, once spruced up, quite smart.

Then finally they saw the girl at the window. Though not a goddess, she was prettier than the girls in the lane. She had fine, long eyebrows, a full face and a chin like the tip of a melon seed. She was well-developed and refined. Her naturally curly hair was caught into two plaits, and she wore a fluffy fringe over her forehead. She had on a polka-dotted blouse and a light-green cashmere waistcoat which emphasized her lissom shoulders and full breasts. Her clever, smiling eyes were tinged with innocence. Zhu stood beside her as if purposefully talking to her and making her laugh so as to show her off to the people at the well, which made the local girls' blood boil.

"She may have a pretty face, but who's to say she isn't bowlegged?"

But when Zhu and the girl came out of the door rubbing shoulders, everyone gaped. She had the lithe, neat figure of a ballet dancer.

They set about discovering who she was and how she had got hooked by him. They would report it to the police if he had abducted her.

All these Sherlock Holmeses soon got to the bottom of the affair. Her name was Xu Lisha, twenty-four years old. Her grandfather was a capitalist, and her father had left the country. Graduating from a pharmacology institute, she had been assigned a job in a local

pharmacological factory because of her unsatisfactory family background. Zhu often inspected the factory, and after some courting had won her.

For two or three months discussion at the well centred around why a clever college graduate could be so purblind as to fall in love with Zhu. If she overlooked everything else, she shouldn't have overlooked the difference in their ages. She was twenty-four, and he was thirty-one, a difference of six or seven years. You just couldn't understand young girls. A pretty thing like her marrying a man old enough to be a widower.

But Aunt Ma could understand her.

"You don't know anything about it. It's quite all right for the husband to be six or seven years older. A woman has babies and brings them up. She gets old fast. At forty, she'll look the same age as her man. A woman in her sixties looks very old, while a sixty-six-year-old man has a round belly and a ruddy face. She won't look so well beside him then, you'll see. Anyway, that one's sly enough not to have told her the truth. I'll bet he's told her he's twenty-seven at the most. In any case, he keeps his registration card locked up in a drawer."

"That's as may be, but he can't lock himself up. The way he walks about like a tight-fisted prig of a young master: surely she must have noticed?"

"There you go again. When a prig's after a woman he's sweetness and light. They're not so tight-fisted, either. If she wants gold he won't give her silver. And he's not so much the young master any more, to look at him. You must have seen the young lords on the stage, jumping over walls after women for all the world like puppy dogs wagging their tails. Once they're married, mind you, they sit tight and won't budge an inch. When the fish is in the net it can't get away. Well, there's no use telling all this to you young girls. When your time comes, you'll be just as stupid. Love is blind."

Her words unnerved the girls, who began to imagine that all men on earth were dangerous.

". . . . . ."

"I'm not convinced. If she can't see how old he is or what's wrong with him, she must see something in him. But what? Tell me that."

"What? A lot of things. He's not scarred or pockmarked or cock-eyed. His features are all in the right places and he's good-looking. If he put on makeup and got up on the stage, you'd be following him round with your eyes. He's a section chief while he's still young and he earns a good wage. What else do you want? He came from a

poor family and he was a worker, which is too good for a bourgeois young lady. Your bourgeoisie, they're lazy, work-shy. They sit around all day drinking coffee and singing shy little songs. What's the use in being as pretty as a flower? It blooms one day and withers the next. And however pretty it is, it's going to lose its attraction when you see it day after day. Zhu's waited long enough and he's grabbed the first one that's come along. Anyone else would have to think twice about a girl with her background.

The conclusion reached was that Zhu Shiyi and Xu Lisha had an even bargain: both were rotten beams in a foul stream.

Love Is Blind

The ancient information centre had no computer. Their data were inaccurate and their conjectures mere guesswork mingled with a certain inexplicable prejudice. They came close enough to the mark on Zhu, but their petty, conventional ideas did not suffice to analyse Xu.

Why did she love him? It was as much a puzzle to her as to the people at the well. Love is in itself a complicated matter, a combination of physical, psychological, moral and aesthetic elements, and resistant to analysis. At times, however, it becomes simpler, when one element stands out, pushing the others aside. Xu's reason was pitiable enough: she longed for a man to look after her, sympathize with her and love her. This meant everything to her. She didn't need help in her career or a man's power or ability to rely on. She trusted herself in these respects. But she envied the sympathy that everyone else in the world had. Even beggars had that. Yet she had grown up devoid of it. True, her grandfather had been a great capitalist, but a dissolute one with a wife and three concubines and a dozen children, not counting those by his mistresses. Her parents had left no impression on her. Her mother had died after giving birth to her, and all her father had done was give her a name. He hadn't even bothered much about that, just naming her after Da Vinci's Mona Lisa. He had said he was going abroad to study, but no one knew where. Xu was brought up by a maid who swept the garden, who merely fed her and clothed her then left her alone to play with the flowers and plants and bricks and ants and other insects in the garden. She was never hungry or cold or maltreated, but neither did she have sympathy, love or concern. She often dreamed that

she was dead and no one cared and no one cried but three women hired by one of her grandfather's concubines.

Xu was beautiful and realized the fact, but her beauty had given her neither pride nor courage, for she had seen roses grow in wall corners, beautiful but pitifully lonely. The boys in college treated her like a princess. The shy ones dared not raise their heads, and the brave ones assumed a chivalrous air before her. But she had a fear of cavaliers who might at any moment draw their swords and fight a duel. It was not conquest she wanted but sympathy. Strength gave her a more acute sense of her own weakness, while her self-pity was part and parcel of an inferiority complex caused by her family background and her uninvestigable connections abroad. The boys she liked passed her by without raising their heads, which she took for their contempt of a bourgeois young lady. As a matter of fact, the people who did pay her special attention were those in charge of her personal life. She was not qualified to remain on at the college as a teacher, nor to go on to a research institute. While medicine cures, it also kills, so the only place for her to go was to a local pharmaceutical factory — as if that small factory didn't produce medicine for human beings.

He Tongli, director and Party secretary of the plant, was a serious man who frowned on frivolity. He would stare at a woman worker's pretty dress or a man worker's greased hair and demand sternly, "Have you come to work or to visit? Because if you've come to visit you can go home." Anyone who liked sprucing up was a revisionist to him. Clothes kept you warm, that was all there was to it. Why get spruced up? Women dressed up for men and men for women, and there was no call for that sort of thing between husbands and wives. The very fact of dressing up was fishy. If it wasn't meant for somebody, why spend the time and money?

The first impression she made on him was bad. The place for this pretty, frail bourgeois with her suitcase, her string bag and her hair fluffed up as if with tongs was a song and dance troupe, not a factory. Ah well, let her get toughened up first. He meant well by getting toughened up, of course. As a country man he knew about farming and how to look after a weak aubergine seedling. You can't water and fertilize it right away. You have to let it get half dry and dead to let the root grow, and then give it lots of water and fertilizer when the stem was hard and the leaves were turning black to prevent spindling and lodging and guarantee lots of fruit. Director He did not realize that human beings are different from plants in that to

toughen them up you had to tell them, for they had ideas and feelings. Instead, he told her stiffly and straightforwardly, "Well now, you go and wash bottles in the preparation shop. You can live in the dorm."

Xu left his office with tears in her eyes and proceeded to the dormitory with her suitcase and her string bag. When she had learned that she was going to a small plant she had envied the luckier ones and cursed her family background. But then, she thought, she had always been one for wishful thinking, and maybe it was better this way. In a small factory where there were fewer people the leaders mixed well with the workers, and it might turn out to be one big family. Her dream was shattered when she left He's office. The dormitory was a damp, gloomy room beside a warehouse. There were four two-tier bunks for the night-shift girls who lived far away, but none of them slept there, however hard it was to commute. White cogongrass grew in the mildewed room. Xu sat motionless on one of the bunks for a long time, feeling that she had landed in an even more dreadful situation than before. Supposing she fell ill? Who would fetch her some water?

It was the time of the Big Leap Forward, when people did ridiculous things with passion, often going without sleep for three days and nights until they were too tired to concern themselves with anybody. Workers, old and young, kind and cordial, knew nothing about where Xu lived or where she came from. Some presumed she was a Rightist sent to do physical labour or an educated person undergoing factory training. Day in, day out, she washed bottles. After work she had to take part in the iron smelting campaign. A home-made furnace in the plant yard emitted dense smoke, but the iron it produced was useless, a waste of materials and manpower.

Instead of making her sleepy, overwork kept her awake. She lay wide-eyed on her bunk listening to the noisy furnace blower while her imagination ran wild. She found solace in frequent and varied dreams. The home-made furnace recalled to her mind the crude equipment Madame Curie used to extract radium, and then the furnace where the Supreme Master in Heaven made his pills of longevity. Maybe she could make some miracle cure and become China's Madame Curie. And Madame Curie made her think of Monsieur Curie. . . . She dared not hope for a husband as good as Monsieur Curie, but she would like a good-looking man who was neither proud nor too humble, and more importantly so very considerate and sympathetic that she could link her fate with his, with that of another

person in the world, saying and doing things that she had never said or done before. On Sundays she would have her friends over or go to the park with her husband. Then she would move out of this gloomy, damp room and leave suffering behind. Xu was sure there was a man in the world who lived up to her imagination. But where was he now?

He came. That fellow Zhu Shiyi came. To inspect work in the factory. And at the sight of this beautiful girl in real life, he was swept off his feet. Investigation showed that she was a college graduate. Excellent. Someone with education. That made her elegant, not like the ignorant girls in the lane who couldn't ever talk properly.

He used his brains. He brought pressure to bear on Director He to double output in a week's time as evidence of dedication to the aproaching National Day. Director He, an honest man, knew that one shouldn't do such things with medical products made to set formulas and in set concentrations. You can't just add gallons of distilled water. Besides which, you didn't have that much distilled water, and tap water was dangerous. But he couldn't say no. It was a time when any slogan was possible, regardless of whether it was feasible, and once it had been thought up anyone who defied it had Rightist inclinations. All he could do was beg Zhu not to report this to anyone higher up, not to tell any leader of this wanton idea. Meanwhile he would try his best to boost production in his home-made furnace and triple the output of iron, since the iron they smelted was useless anyhow. He could put it straight back into the furnace. He could even raise output to four times its original level if necessary.

Zhu agreed reluctantly as a token of good will, but criticized Director He for being too conservative and not using his brains, putting a new college graduate to washing bottles instead of researching means of raising medicine production. If this continued he, Zhu, should not be blamed if he took stricter measures in the future.

Director He gave his immediate consent. "I'll put her in an office right away and let her get on with research. I'll supply any equipment she needs." No longer did he insist on toughening the seedling. Peasants are no fools when it comes to sexual attraction. He sensed that this weak seedling was soon to be potted out.

Xu was rescued from the pit and given two rooms, a work room and a bedroom, so that she could concentrate on her research in peace. When she learned that all this had been made possible by the concern of one of the local section chiefs, her heart warmed as if a lamp had been lit for her in the world to shed light on the heart

of an unknown girl, a lamp that had weathered many battles and storms to give hope and encouragement at all times. How else could so many boys and girls have thrown themselves into the stream of revolution in those years?

When the section chief in question stood before her, she was astonished to find him a charming young man. Zhu had just had a haircut at the best barber's in town. His eyes were brighter than usual and his white shirt and grey jacket tidier.

"Won't you sit down, Section Chief Zhu?"

"Please," said Zhu with the appropriate degree of calculated shyness, "don't call me Section Chief." Everyone else was expected to. "I'm not much older than you. If I had been able to go to college we might have been fellow students."

Fellow students! It was an attractive term. Everything is easy between fellow students and comrades-in-arms. It meant equality, closeness and a host of pleasant memories. Xu brightened and came straight to the point. "Are you trying to put me on the spot? How can I double production?"

"Ah, that simple student innocence!" laughed Zhu. "I was just the same. Since then I've learned how to go round about to get where I want to be. Of course the output of medicine can't be doubled just like that. It's ridiculous. I merely thought it was wrong to make a student wash bottles and carry rocks. Shouldn't she be putting what she's learned to good use? I would feel awful if I was asked to wash bottles after four years of college."

Xu nodded, sensing a similarity between him and a student she had known in middle school who had shown concern for her. "I am grateful for that, but what should I do about production?"

"Don't you worry about that," said Zhu with a wave of his hand, "Just get on with your studies and research anything you like. I'll look after the rest. I have no scruples. I can lie and beat about the bush. Nasty, isn't it? Goodbye now. I'll come and see you when I have time." Zhu walked off with natural grace.

Don't belittle this fellow. He really was a master of all situations. When he played false, he said so himself sincerely and nobly instead of whitewashing himself. If he had gone on at length about how he had spoken up for her out of sympathy and a sense of justice, Xu would have thought him a hypocrite, just another cavalier with evil intentions. But he had come over as natural and friendly, a man with a sense of humour. She accepted his sympathy, and as a smile crept surreptitiously to the corners of her mouth, she regretted only the quick departure of this interesting man.

She needn't have worried. He would return. He found an excuse to come and work for a time in the factory and began to see more of Xu, but he was careful not to show his eagerness. He knew that girls like Xu should be treated differently than those at the well. He needed a detour. He appeared at her door as if just passing by accidentally, poked his head in to say hello and noticed that her chair was too high. He was soon back with a rattan chair.

"Look, they gave me this to butter me up, but I never have time to sit down. You're the one who needs it. Your chair is far too high to be comfortable. You'll give yourself a hunched back. Have this one. I'm off to a meeting." And he was away again without further ado.

The chair was definitely more comfortable, and Xu could lean back for a blissful moment's rest after a long bout of hard work at her desk with the comforting thought that someone in the world cared for her like a brother.

Zhu returned in a few days with a hotplate. "See how wasteful people are," he said. "I found this in the waste goods warehouse. I've tinkered with it, and it still works. Take it. You'll find it useful at work as well as at home. Food in the canteen is so bad. You have to take care of yourself. Cold rice and porridge will give you a stomach-ache. When you're seriously ill you can go to the hospital, but who's there to take care of you when you're just off-colour?" These words found their way right to Xu's heart; she was touched almost to the point of tears. Zhu, who had never expected that words his mother had taught him could affect a young woman so, put down the hotplate and quickly made off.

He continued to find small ways to please her. He dared not engage her in conversation yet, afraid that as a college student she might want to discuss Beethoven and Da Vinci, which he wasn't up to, knowing nothing about music or art. He would look silly if he said the wrong thing. Once, trying to find something to say, he told her about an old couple fighting outside their house and calling each other funny names. The man had called his wife a bald-headed nun, and she had called him a slippery-top, then the old man across the way had emerged from his room and said, "Cut it out, you two. Neither of you can match me. Look!" And he had doffed his hat to reveal a perfectly hairless shining pate. Zhu might well have heard this anywhere, but Xu split her sides at it, almost choking with laughter, and wanted to know what the old couple had been fighting about. This opened up a whole range of topics for conversation based on anecdotes about the lane he lived in. Having grown

up in a house with a garden and then in college, Xu had never heard of such things, and they were a veritable *Thousand and One Nights* to her. Of course her interest was not excited solely by random stories which, if Zhu had collected them into a book and recited them in a teahouse, wouldn't have sold a single ticket. No, her interest was aggravated by a special catalyst, the dim stirrings of a girl's first love.

The home-made furnace no longer smoked; the countrywide iron smelting had brought in its wake three years of famine; and the factory canteen had nothing but rice, a ration of rice and hardly any vegetables or other food to go with it. Stoves could be seen everywhere. Ways were found to get food that one could cook oneself, and bowls, chopsticks, lunchboxes and bottles and jars of things people had found or scrounged lined the tables and desks in the offices and the dormitories. Xu, who had never worried about food, was helpless before this sudden onslaught of hunger, but Zhu managed to get hold of a few pastries once, and on another occasion came up with some potatoes and a can of meat, which he made into a broth that with some cabbage and the rice ration made a full meal for the two of them.

While they were eating, Zhu told her how difficult it had been for his mother and himself to get the food. Everything they obtained had a background of worldly wisdom, historical origins and social contacts. The more she listened to him, the more Xu felt how hard it was for a girl like her to live where she had no home and no relatives. Gradually she became dependent on Zhu, and not merely for food but for the blessed relief that she felt, like a wandering bird coming home, when he appeared, for when he was not beside her she was lost, knowing not where in the universe to fly. Every day she waited for Zhu to come and have supper with her. When he came she was happy, and lucky that she never waited in vain.

Zhu was of course observant. He knew that the time had come to court her. He had got the idea from somewhere that courtship — going down on your knees or making a long speech — was a necessary part of winning a beautiful girl. He was no good at extended speaking, and kneeling, besides hurting his pride, would give his wife an excuse to ridicule him later, like the woman in his lane who railed at her husband whenever they quarrelled, "How can you do this to me, when you went down on your knees and asked me to be your wife?" He must beware of this and avoid kneeling. Instead, he courted her by self-criticism.

"I'm not a good man, Lisha. I have unhealthy thoughts. Here I

am, coming to see you every day as if I can't live without you. I want to be with you forever. What shall I do if this goes on?"

Xu lowered her head.

"What's wrong with it? I. . . feel the same way too."

Zhu's mother now came to the fore. The old lady was sixty-six, fit, worldly and seasoned. He would never have done so well if she hadn't been directing his courtship from behind the scenes, for she approved of his pursuit of the beautiful college graduate and urged him to do all he could to win her, for the following reasons.

Firstly, she wanted a daughter-in-law, for like any woman in bygone days who had been at the beck and call of her own mother-in-law, she wanted to lord it over a daughter-in-law in her turn; she had been a daughter-in-law for a dozen or so years and a widow for thirty, and now she needed a daughter-in-law at her beck and call.

Secondly, she wanted to see her son marry a college graduate to annoy the vulgar people in the lane by showing what he could do and that the Zhus were a cut above them. It didn't matter that the girl came from a bourgeois family. She didn't like being a city pauper anyway. It didn't look good for the Zhus, whose ancestors had been officials, to be paupers. A thin goose was better than a chicken, and the poor were not going to be a match for them. The daughter-in-law must come from a prominent family, too, since the Zhus had always married young ladies. She herself had been the fourth Miss Chen.

Though her brains were stuffed with feudal ideas, she was flexible and had a glib tongue. She knew a great many modern terms and could use them as occasion demanded. She was on the neighbourhood committee, indeed was the member in charge of mediating family quarrels, and consequently had such wide and varied experience of courtship, love, hesitation, squabbling and suicide that she was able to instruct her son from the very beginning how to go about winning the hand of a young lady.

It was like catching pigeons. One had to hide one's intentions as, with pretended casualness, one slowly sprinkled rice on the ground. If one went right ahead and swooped, one would end up flat on the ground while the pigeon flew away. One should go at it slowly. After a time, the pigeon would come to believe in your good intentions and dare to peck at the millet in your hand, whereupon you could grab it just like that, tie its wings and put it in a cage.

Zhu understood and followed all her directions, reporting back on any drawbacks. Xu was not a good housewife and couldn't cook, so how was she going to look after a husband? This was bad, but mother said never mind: let him look after her now, and she'd look

after him later. The wildest of horses could be tamed. Did this girl have a fiery temper? No? Then there was nothing to worry about. She had no parents or brothers. Well, a girl without relatives was a crab without legs, and she would have to obey her husband's family. Even if she had had relatives, what would it have mattered? They'd have been bourgeois and wouldn't have dared oppose the working class. Mrs Zhu may have objected to being a pauper, but she realized that being working-class counted for a lot.

When she learned that Xu was in love with her son, Mrs Zhu felt the time had come to arrange his marriage for him, fearing the consequences of delay. She told him to invite her over for a meal so that she could see the Zhu home, confident that no girl would turn up the chance of such capability and domestic arrangements. Mrs Zhu was not unprepared; she had been saving a tin of mushrooms and a chunk of salt pork for six months. She had not invited the girl earlier because she had been unsure how she felt, and if Xu had fled after the meal, Mrs Zhu would have been a laughing-stock in the lane for having thrown away a handful of rice without catching her chicken. She herself had seen many such cases of greedy girls who ate on false pretences in those hard times.

Mrs Zhu set about the taxing business of hooking a daughter-in-law. She spent two days cleaning upstairs, downstairs and in the garden, taking special pains with her son's room on the upper storey. She washed the linen and even put a new green silk cover on her son's quilt, then looked out a chipped porcelain vase she had been unable to sell and put some cut roses in it from the garden, for this would be the bridal chamber, and she wanted her prospective daughter-in-law to like it.

The salt pork and mushrooms were not bad, but she exerted all her influence and got hold of some rabbit, some turnips, some cabbage and some peanuts, which, with careful planning, would make five or six dishes, small in quantity but a delight to the eye. Mrs Zhu had cooked for her husband, an opium addict, and was very good at snacks.

Xu came.

"My dear girl!" Mrs Zhu took her hand in hers. "My son has told me all about you. For two nights I haven't slept a wink, I was so sorry for you. To have lost both parents and then to be assigned to a factory where you knew no one. How you must have suffered! You should have come to me earlier and I could have given you a mother's care. I too have had my troubles. I lost my husband when I was thirty-three. I have a son but no daughter, and sons are never

as close to their mothers. No one's around in the morning or evening, and I have no one to tell my troubles to, especially when I am unwell." She dabbed her eyes on a corner of her tunic.

Xu was touched all the more. She threw her arms around the old woman, calling, "Don't cry, mother. I'll be a daughter to you."

Mrs Zhu smiled through her tears. "I can die content now you've called me mother," she said. "Shiyi, where are you? Fetch some tea."

Xu blushed crimson. Aunt was the proper term of address, but she did not really regret it, thinking that her own mother must have been like this sweet old woman. She had no means of knowing how wary she should be of these old women in the lanes who talked and laughed and cried as they saw fit and could by turns be cloyingly sweet or peppery enough to choke you. Truly kind and sincere old women were never that glib.

The old lady put on her apron to go to the kitchen. Xu rose too. "Do let me help you."

"Never mind for the present," said Mrs Zhu, waving her hand vigorously. "There'll be plenty of time for that later. Talk to Lisha, Shiyi. Show her around the house."

Zhu took her upstairs and pushed open the four long windows. The tender, early-summer green of the two tall camphor trees by the well was reflected in the vase of crimson roses in the room. For the first time in her life Xu felt that roses were splendid and delicate rather than merely pitiable. Recalling the lonely garden at home and her damp, dim room at the factory, she suddenly sensed that here was her home, her nest in the world. She could sit at the window and ponder life-saving medicaments while her husband and mother-in-law took good care of her. It might not make her Madame Curie, but it would be something. There is always beauty in a dream.

"What do you think of the house?" asked Zhu tentatively.

"Very nice. Your mother is nice too."

Zhu moved in on the pigeon by taking her in his arms and kissing her, and Aunt Ma, who happened to be drawing water, caught sight of them and spread the news.

"My Goodness! Zhu Shiyi has a girlfriend who's as pretty as a goddess!"

A Series of Trivia

During the difficult years, getting married was not a simple matter. You couldn't get furniture, throw a party and let off firecrackers,

because firecrackers were considered superstitious at that time. The only sign of their wedding was the red curtains at the four long windows. Aunt Ma stood at the well and looked up at these with disapproval. It was a fiery, angry colour. The young couple would quarrel. The others demurred on the grounds that all couples quarrelled anyway. They couldn't think of a single couple in the lane that didn't, the only distinction being that some shouted in the doorway while others did it behind closed doors. A couple which did not come to blows was considered happy. Hadn't Aunt Ma been quarrelling with her husband all these years without the benefit of red curtains? Aunt Ma was reduced to speechless shakes of the head.

Zhu and Xu did not quarrel to begin with. Honeymoons are always sweet, like listening to a stirring symphony as harmonious as a lake rippling in the spring sun. Concerts end, and you go out into the rain, can't get on the bus, grudge the money for a cab and wait drenched in the entrance of a shop whose owner grumbles about you being in the way until, the sweetness half gone, she blames him for not having brought an umbrella while he asks her baldly why she forgot one herself, and with the typical consideration of the married man, never thinks to offer her his jacket to put over her head or, better, over them both.

Such concerts relieve a life of troubles and trivia which lay bare character and true feelings.

Old Mrs Zhu was quick to bare hers by preaching to Xu like the head of the family. After supper one day, when Xu had washed up and was about to retire upstairs with her husband, the old lady detained her.

"You stay a minute. I want a word with you."

Xu nodded and waved Zhu on ahead.

The older woman took her time. She made herself a cup of tea and placed herself in the household's only easy chair with all the pomp and dignity of a mother-in-law.

"Well, now that the honeymoon is over with we need to plan our lives. You can't be a guest forever, and there are some rules you'll have to follow. There's a lot you don't know, since you lost your mother at an early age. When I was your age my mother had drummed into me a daughter-in-law's place I don't know how many times, how I should respect my parents-in-law and wait on my husband. In those days I had to kowtow to my mother-in-law every morning. Now the revolution has done away with that, but nevertheless you must treat me with respect. You are to greet me properly every morning and ask me if there's anything you should do, and

then come and tell me every evening where you have put the leftovers."

She paused for a sip of tea, having laid down rule one, that her daughter-in-law should report to her morning and evening. Xu blinked in amazement. What was wrong with ordinary communication at any time? Why these formal respects?

"You were a pampered child and know nothing. From now on you will have to learn to do everything, make tea, cook, clean and do the laundry. All the housework will be yours to do. I am getting on. I've worked all my life and now I want to enjoy myself."

Xu was bewildered by the rapidity of the change. Didn't she tell me not so very long ago that she pitied me for not having a mother to take care of me? Now for some reason I'm ill bred, and far from having had no one to take care of me, I've been pampered. How can someone who was so sorry for me suddenly turn so strict? Still, she reflected, it was for youth to care for age and not vice versa.

"You take it easy, mother. Shiyi and I will do all the work."

"Shiyi? No, he will not. I have always waited on him. Besides, a man's business is outside the home, a woman's inside. Only a man who is good for nothing else does the housework. When your father-in-law was alive I cooked all his meals, and the whole lane said what a good wife I was."

The old woman was pleased with herself, and what she said might have been true, for she belonged to an era far removed from Xu's experience. But forty years had passed since the May 4th Movement had pitted itself against feudalism. Why was her mother-in-law still preaching the Three Obediences and Four Virtues expected of women in feudal times?

The older woman eased up a bit. "There's another thing I wanted to mention. We might as well have everything out to begin with, as you're one of the family now. A family needs to eat and buy things, and all that costs money. How much could you give me each month?" She was on tenterhooks as she fixed Xu with her eyes, for this was a matter of importance. Ninety per cent of family differences in the lane were over money, and as a mediator she knew that a difference over five yuan could drag on for a year or two.

Yet Xu didn't much care about money. Never having been in want of food or clothing, she did not realize the importance of money, the mere mention of which made her feel awkward and mean. Neither was she very clear how she spent her monthly salary. She was willing to hand it all over if that was what her mother-in-law wished.

"There's no need to talk like that, mother. You take all my salary

and budget for the family. I'm no good at managing money. If I do it we may go hungry by the end of the month."

Mrs Zhu was satisfied, which did not prevent her despising her daughter-in-law's feckless stupidity in not wanting a personal nest-egg.

After listening to her mother-in-law's lecture, Xu went upstairs to share the joke with her husband.

"How funny! She's so feudal. She wants me to report to her in the morning and evening and even wait on you. I'm expected to be the virtuous wife, her husband's respectful servant!"

"I don't see what's wrong with that," replied Zhu offhandedly. "You can't expect me to wait on you always." Zhu wanted waiting on all right, by a wife turned maid, and a maid with no money of her own. "By the way, how much money are you giving mother each month?"

"It's all in the family. Why talk about it? She can have it all."

"Yes, that's best. You are a bit of a spendthrift."

It suddenly dawned on Xu. "What? You knew what she wanted?"

"Well, I had a vague idea. Let's forget about it and go to bed." Zhu yawned cavernously.

Xu, for the first time, felt indifference from her husband. She remained motionless at the window.

Outside it was raining, as when people came out of a concert.

She tried her hand at housework, and she actually had a mind to learn. A person with a family was bound to have housework. No woman could escape that or rely on others to do it for her. There were three sorts of housework: cooking, laundry and cleaning, and they all needed water. By dint of going to the well five or six times daily, she got to know the women in the lane.

At first they were wary of her and secretly held out against her, assuming that a bourgeois beauty — beauties are usually proud — married to the all-important Zhu Shiyi would put on airs. "Stick your nose in the air. We can all play that game."

But their impression of her changed with time. She was not a lazy, arrogant young lady humming a swingy song. Although she didn't speak much, she smiled at everybody and waited her turn patiently. She never jumped the queue or spoke out of turn, though when spoken to she would give unhurried, detailed replies as to where she had got her vegetables and how much they had cost, etc. When the well step was dirty she would quietly go home and fetch a broom to sweep it, then sluice it down with a few buckets of water.

They made their own reliable judgements based on daily acquaintance, untainted by a person's files and workplace records. Gradually their opinions of Xu improved. She was not a rotten beam in a foul stream, and they no longer objected to her having married the worthless Zhu. A fait accompli is always logical, and now that they were man and wife people were not supposed to be so critical or immoral as to sow dissension between husband and wife. Gossip they might enjoy, but there was no going against a moral code that had existed for thousands of years, exhorting you to stick to a chicken if you married a chicken and stick to a dog if you married a dog, or in Aunt Ma's words: there's nothing doing when the goose is cooked, the bird in question being the girl and the cooking effected by the fire of marriage that changes her nature.

Xu didn't mind cooking rice. That was easy enough. She dreaded preparing dishes. It was not so bad in the lean years when you could not get the ingredients for three or four dishes. Her troubles began with the free markets and the increased supply of food. Mrs Zhu and her son were distressed gentlefolk, and a lean camel is still a camel. They expected three or four dishes a day. Quantity was less important than presentation. They never finished them all at one meal. In winter, broiled meat would last at least a week, as they barely touched it with their chopsticks.

Every morning Mrs Zhu summoned Xu to her bedside and gave her shopping tips. "See if there are any small crucian carp. The big ones are tough and expensive. Get two of the three to four ounce ones. Don't forget to get spring onions and ginger and cooking wine. The last time you cooked fish you didn't season it enough and it tasted awful. And don't get the onions and ginger from that old man. He's a profiteer. Make sure you buy the right wine: cooking wine, not millet wine. Cooking wine's made from the dregs of millet wine, and it's cheaper. Get two heads of greens, with no outer leaves and no yellow leaves, and avoid the ones soaked in water that weigh more and don't cook so well. Their good looks only fool people like you. Keep your eyes open for those tiny little shrimps that are cheap and delicious cooked with bean paste, which you'll have to get at the same time, so take a bowl. If you see anything else good, the choice is up to you, only keep it under three yuan. Oh, it's a misery to have no money. Don't go to the pictures any more. They only swindle you." And on and on she went before eventually opening her drawer and pulling out three yuan, which she bestowed upon Xu.

Xu could memorize chemical formulae just like that, and she did her laboratory work with great care, but she could never remember the old woman's tips, no matter how many times she repeated them.

The market was a battlefield, where the old woman marched with sharp eyes, haggling over prices, cutting them down to round numbers, pretending to walk away then returning after a few steps. When the vegetable was weighed and paid for she would grab one more and put it into her basket, saying, "Don't be so stingy. They all grow on your plot anyway." How was Xu to learn all this? So night after night her mother-in-law blamed her for paying too much and buying dead fish. Hadn't she noticed it was white around the gills? Xu gave up.

"I don't do it well," she said. "Why don't you do it from now on?"

This put Mrs Zhu's back up. It was not for a daughter-in-law to talk back. She shouted at her so loudly that the passers-by in the lane could hear.

"Call yourself a daughter-in-law? Maybe you want to be my mother-in-law instead? Do you want a sixty-six-year-old woman to wait on a girl in her twenties? Whoever heard of such a thing?"

The frightened Xu clammed up, never having witnessed such a scene. She turned to her husband.

"Will you do the shopping?" she pleaded. "You're better at it than me."

"You'll have to learn sooner or later," said Zhu and walked away.

The old lady was old-fashioned and feudal and she talked a lot. That was to be expected. Zhu was her husband. Did his love fot her have to collapse the minute she needed his support? He had been perfectly capable, even after their marriage, of buying good, cheap fish for his boss and delivering it to the door. What was behind all this?

From this point on, life behind the red curtains lost its tranquillity. When the light was on in the evenings, two shadows could be seen pointing their fingers at each other like in a shadow play, except that the dialogue was muffled but for a handful of outbursts:

"Hypocrite!"

"Bourgeois! Reform's what you need!"

Well well, so marital squabbles were class struggle too.

Red Curtains

Aunt Ma's defeat turned to victory when the couple began to fight.

"Didn't I say they shouldn't have had red curtains? It's always the way."

"Shh!" they told her. "Shut up!"

Xu was coming out with a basin of laundry. She was preoccupied, dull, and seemed to see nothing. They knew how she felt and silently made way for her to use the well first, but she shook her head and sat down on one of the stone benches to rest, looking extremely out of sorts.

"What was the quarrel about?" asked kind-hearted Aunt Ma when no one was around.

"Food and clothing."

"You must be firm. You earn a wage. You can eat in the canteen."

"I give the old lady all my salary."

"Oh, you stupid girl! All of it? In the old days women were pushed around because they didn't earn, and even then they managed to have a little something laid by. You can't have nothing. You must hang on to your salary so that you can eat in the canteen and buy things and not be under their thumbs."

Tears rolled down Xu's cheeks.

"It's not the money so much, Aunt Ma. But they're selfish and feudal and despise women. It can't go on. I want a divorce."

"Goodness me!" cried Aunt Ma, startled. "That will never do. You can't go getting a divorce over things like that. You'll just end up giving yourself a bad name instead of getting anything done. You've got to stick it out, that's all. A woman has to put it down to fate when she marries wrong. Don't you get any fancy ideas about that. Look at me. I was worse off than you are. Even got two of my front teeth knocked out in those days. All false in the front, see? Still, I stuck it out over the years, and now I'm a grandmother. I've never done a thing they could pick on. Now the devil's getting old, and an old man's nothing but a stomach. Give him something nice to eat and he's satisfied. If I'd divorced him and remarried I'd have been looked down on. That's no kind of a life. All men have something the matter with them, and if you've picked one that can win a woman's heart, well. . . ." Aunt Ma sighed. She was a disillusioned woman herself.

Xu had decorated love and marriage with a garland and would not give up her illusion, but when the garland turned into a wreath she wanted to jump out.

"So you think I ought to stick it out like you did, Aunt Ma?"

"Well, it'll certainly take some sticking. But you're luckier than I was. You have a job and an income. You hang on to your money and you'll have a powerful little fist. You may at least get even with

them." Aunt Ma placed her hopes of equality in money and was peddling her housewifely experience to Xu.

Xu had never known how to quarrel. All she could do was use a few adjectives like "hypocritical" and "mean". She knew no other way of coping with the situation. Aunt Ma could well be right, she thought. It was an easily imposed economic boycott. So the next month she handed over only a third of her salary to cover her meals and with the rest of her money bought a checked woollen jacket, something she had wanted for a long time but to which her mother-in-law had not consented. She paraded it before her in order to show that she could not be bullied, had the right to spend her own money and if anybody objected she would eat in the canteen and not even pay her board.

Things boiled over behind the red curtains. Zhu shouted and cursed, and the old woman was hopping mad. The struggle intensified to red heat. Xu stood her ground silently, not giving an inch. She no longer cared for the sweet potency of love, she wanted equal rights. The people at the well sided with her and slipped her advice.

"Once you start to fight you have to see it through. Make him give you a hand with the housework and let the old woman do the shopping. You mustn't give in. A woman's weak point is a soft heart. Once you soften, things are half-baked, and you're the one to suffer."

This protracted war lasted a fortnight, going on every day from dusk to half past ten until it reached the point where Zhu pounded the table and smashed glasses. To boost his prestige he broke a windowpane, not with his fist but with his elbow so as not to cut his hand. The battle stopped abruptly at its second climax when he broke a second one. Xu disappeared, and he was seen to clear up the battlefield and nail plywood over the broken window.

Xu didn't go away like Nora. She couldn't. Old Mrs Zhu had her residence permit and grain coupons locked in a drawer. Xu transferred to the night shift, working from eleven till eight, and went to bed as soon as she got home. She was seldom seen at the well.

"What's the latest?" the well people would ask on the rare occasions they bumped into her, but she bit her lips hard, pasty-faced from the night shift, and never gave any explanation.

The Sherlock Holmeses of the lane got to work again and found to their dismay that Zhu had a fiendish plan.

When Xu refused to climb down, Mrs Zhu discussed it with her son, feeling that if this first battle was not won, their pretty girl would lord it over her mother-in-law and husband and might even run away. Confident in the old way, Mrs Zhu thought he should give her a

beating, the way Aunt Ma's husband had quelled her when she was young and wild, saying that a wife was just like a horse and he would ride and flog her as he pleased. But for better or for worse, Zhu was a section chief and knew that he could not do anything as out-of-date as beat his wife. Neither was Xu Aunt Ma. She had a college degree and could sue him for assault. Also it was just coming up to March 8, international labouring women's day. He could get into trouble. But Xu had a vulnerable bourgeois background.

One day when she had gone to work, Zhu made a big bundle of all her various stylish clothes, took them round to He Tongli at the Pharmaceutical Plant and made a self-criticism.

"I made a mistake by marrying a bourgeois young lady, Secretary He, and all because my class-consciousness was bad. She can't get rid of the brand of her class. She wants an easy life and makes a scene over a little housework, and yet she spends money as if it were water. She clings to her bourgeois way of life and spends all her salary. She would buy this checked jacket when she already had all these clothes. Take a look. I ask you, are these for the labouring class?"

He undid the bundle and displayed them one by one in the office. Exhibited in 1984, they might well have won Xu a prize as a fashion designer, but the time was wrong. The factory was having an exhibition of class struggle, and rags were *de rigueur*.

Xu did have a lot of clothes: patterned blouses and skirts and dresses, and three coats, the most attractive being a white woollen cape with a reddish-purple border. In the fifties, when the students' association had been all for a happy life, she had worn it to a student dance one weekend and been considered quite the belle of the ball. Now, however, after the Big Leap Forward and the three hard years, eyes had grown unused to anything but denim and blue, and "ooh!"s of surprise greeted the sight of the colourful clothes.

Secretary He saw red. Colours spelt bourgeoisie to his eyes accustomed to mud and machines. How could people like this woman be tolerated in his factory, a Red Flag plant in the fight against revisionism? He began criticizing Zhu.

"I was on my guard against people like her, brother. I wanted to reform her through labour, but no, you had to have her transplanted, and now your house is a bomb-shelter for the bourgeoisie."

"I know, I know. I should have known better. I see now that my home is witnessing class struggle, and it is a question of who will win. I should like to enlist your help to reform her, and to that end I want you, starting next month, to stop her salary." He had beaten about the bush, and now he had come to the point.

Secretary He thought for a moment.

"Agreed. All these bourgeois airs come from money. Accountant, from next month pay Xu Lisha's salary to Zhu here. We'll treat her as we do the other young spendthrifts." Some of the younger workers spent all their monthly pay in restaurants and on cigarettes in two weeks and had no money to eat in the factory canteen for the rest of the month, so they tried to get relief money out of the trade union and stayed away from work if they couldn't get it on the pretext of being too hungry. Because of this the trade union had people to take care of these young men and manage their money for them.

Luckily the accountant was a woman and had women's interests at heart.

"You can't give all her money to her husband. Women need women's things that you men know nothing about."

"True," agreed Secretary He. "Women are funny. Give her ten yuan a month pocket money."

Zhu had achieved his aim, but Secretary He wasn't going to let it go at that. This vision of the dead angle of capitalism not only not wiped out but right there in people's homes inspired him to convene a meeting of the entire factory and use the example of Xu, without mentioning names, to call on all the employees and workers to eliminate the said dead angle; to condemn the practice of socialism at work and capitalism at home; and to warn the younger men to be more politically minded in seeking a wife and not just chase after beauty. Many knew he had Xu in mind. Those who didn't made it their business to find out. The meeting room buzzed, with all eyes on Xu, lashing the weak willow like a wild storm.

Xu was put on the shop floor and worked the middle shift, though she was a technician not a worker, and Secretary He began to toughen his seedling all over again.

Zhu had not expected this. With her on the middle shift, who was going to do the shopping and the cooking?

The people at the well sighed at the Holmeses' report and blamed Aunt Ma.

"It was all your rotten idea, telling her to hang on to her salary. Now she's an outcast at work as well."

Aunt Ma could have kicked herself. "Yes, it was. I just thought that an earning woman should be the equal of a man. I never realized she had a hole in her head that people could pour all that dirty water into. The minute you have anything to do with capitalism, earner or not, you're done for. There's nothing you can do about it."

Xu of course was uncowed and saw no point in going on like this

with her husband. She petitioned for a divorce. The court shook their heads. Divorces were not granted over such trifles, and they referred the case to the neighbourhood committee for mediation.

Mrs Zhu, as head mediator of the neighbourhood committee, could not handle the case herself, so the chairman called the women of the neighbourhood together for a discussion on domestic frugality, respect for the aged and learning from the working class, at which Xu was again severely criticized. The newspapers wrote the meeting up, saying how proletarian ideas were ousting bourgeois ones in the home. It was an odd quirk of propaganda always to want the man sitting in the old wooden armchair to be wearing a Lenin suit when a long gown and waistcoat would have suited him better.

The Elixir of Youth

In effect, life in the East Hu Family Lane was as calm as a small river untroubled by large waves — the ripples raised by the breeze were negligible — and twenty-three years passed in the twinkling of an eye. The human frame was not proof against such a wink. Mrs Zhu passed away before it was over. Aunt Ma got too old to come to the well for water any more. Her hair turned white, and her back was bent like a shrimp as she walked in the lane with a stick as if she was searching for something on the ground. The young girls became aunts themselves and after twenty years in a factory had returned to the well to wash their children's clothes and rice.

Xu aged too, but not according to the usual rules. For a period of time she looked very old, and then she looked young again. It was noticed suddenly in 1984 that she looked only ten or so years older than her college-graduate daughter. The aunts almost envied her. Had she taken some rejuvenating drug? Why didn't she age? It was impossible to say whether she had taken anything, of course, but the way she dressed and the way she looked caught attention and roused suspicion at the well.

For at least twenty years no one had paid the slightest attention to this quiet, busy woman who never fought, didn't want a divorce and gave no one any cause to say that her marriage was unlike anyone else's. But in the eighties, when time and society were pressing forward, Xu seemed to be travelling in the opposite direction. She was filling out, almost putting on weight. She walked with her chin up and a lively expression on her unblemished face. She seemed taller,

and once more the smile that she had when young danced about the corners of her mouth.

It had been a long time since the factory had had the impertinence to give her salary to her husband; indeed they had raised it twice, which accounted for the fashionable clothes she wore, twenty years ahead of the women at the well. Twice a limousine drew up at the well and Xu emerged from her double front door in high heels, a tight skirt, a dark jacket and a blouse with a ribbon at the collar and climbed into it.

Once more, the people at the well gaped. Where had she got all the money? From her father abroad? Could she have come into a huge inheritance — eighty or a hundred thousand yuan, say — from her capitalist grandfather? No one discounted the guesses, as these were the commonest ways people came into money nowadays. Ten-thousand-yuan-a-year peasant families just weren't in it. That was all they ever got for all their toil.

The Sherlock Holmeses of the East Hu Family Lane were now too old to move, and the young people preferred modern means of detection. Luckily much of the news arrived via the modern media of newspapers, radio and television.

They first heard on the radio after the fall of the "gang of four" that Xu Lisha, a middle-aged intellectual and engineer in a pharmaceutical factory had, after more than two hundred experiments, produced a new medicine that broke new ground in China and was being acclaimed by experts. But what kind of medicine? No one had heard clearly, and those who had had not understood. What sank in was that Zhu Shiyi's wife was a middle-aged intellectual and an engineer. These two facts alone were more precious than class status. Intellectuals were no longer the lowly class they had been, and luck seemed constantly to be favouring them. No wonder Xu was so cocky, travelling alone in cars when none of the men in the lane was good enough to even get a ride in one. Oddly enough it was the women rather than the men who took this amiss, as if women were disqualified from riding in cars in their own right and ought only to ride in their husbands', an attitude which had, it is a pity to say, very likely been beaten into them.

Next they saw a newspaper article about Xu together with a pretty little picture of her.

The article stressed how Xu and her assistant Tong Shaoshan had experimented way into the night eating only cold buns, never seeing a doctor when they were sick and putting their sick leave certificates in their desks rather than take time off, acting, in fact, as successful

intellectuals seemed to do, without benefit of sleep, food or medical attention, harrowed in life, mourned in death.

The people at the well particularly disapproved of Xu. She was, they said, pushy and spent her big salary on good food. She had been seen bringing home a large fish only the other day.

"She looked in the pink to me. What was wrong with her?"

"A cold, maybe. They go away by themselves."

"Why didn't she throw her sick leave certificates away instead of leaving them in a drawer?"

"No doubt she's waiting for someone to praise her."

Public opinion was harsh on her. A few years back she had elicited sympathy as the weaker party, and now she was the stronger, and reaction to the stronger is either surrender or jealousy. There was yet more to be jealous of, however.

One evening, when they turned on the television, there was Xu sitting on the rostrum at an award ceremony — on the rostrum, not a face in the audience. The seven or eight prize-winners were among the people on the rostrum, and most of them were pot-bellied and grey or bald. Even the middle-aged ones were not all that prepossessing. Bespectacled and hunchbacked, perhaps from loss of sleep and a diet of cold buns, they resembled wizened old men. The cameraman, wanting an attractive shot, returned again and again to Xu and even took a ten-second close-up as if the meeting was for her alone. In a single evening she became a celebrity and a household name, but as an object of gossip rather than as the inventor of a medicine.

"That engineer's pretty enough to be a film star."

"I know, and she could have her pick of the men too, by the look of her."

It is a terrible thing, but if there are three things that are lumped together, they are beauty, cinematography and romance.

Some of the aunties embellished this.

"You're right. That Xu Lisha was none too proper when she was young. She wanted a divorce, but she didn't get it because her family background was bad. And look at the way she dresses now. I honestly don't know!"

This could have been really dangerous for Xu, because in Chinese society the most fatal blow to a woman was to be thought improper. Such women have been frowned on from time immemorial, and impropriety has covered anything from a careless word or action to being a socialite and taking a lover. Xu, of course, who no longer fetched water from the well, got no wind of what was being said. Running water and a washing machine had cut her off from her neighbours in

the lane. They had no common language in any case, and besides she was too busy. To her, commendation in the papers and on the news was a spur and encouragement to yet greater feats. She had no time to think of anything else. No wonder it is said that the best way to harm someone is with a few commendations.

The Demon of Jealousy

The people at the well saw Xu rarely now that she got home late and then never came downstairs. The light in her room burned until the early hours. The minute she stepped out of the door in the morning she glanced at her watch and just nodded at the neighbours as she hurried along.

"Look at the woman," they said as they glared at her. "Just who does she think she is?"

Though they so seldom saw Xu, not a day went past but they bumped into Zhu, who seemed to be at a loose end, going to work late, coming home early and taking a long daily nap. He, who had always despised the people at the well, now chatted with them freely and with enjoyment.

"So your wife's won another prize, then, Zhu. How many thousand is it this time?"

Zhu smiled. "It's more claptrap than money. She got a certificate of merit, two pens and a single-speaker radio-cassette player we'll never be able to sell."

"Don't be so stingy. You just want to hang on to the money. Don't worry, no one's going to cadge a loan."

"He can't do that any longer. She's the earner now, and he has to suck up to her."

"Hey, now she is somebody she might get sent on a mission abroad and take you along as her spouse."

There was laughter at this. "He wouldn't go, not that old wreck. Hey, Zhu Shiyi, you want to watch it, you know!"

It was true that Zhu looked older than his fifty-five years. Aunt Ma had been wrong long ago when she had said that men in their sixties were stout and ruddy. She was right and wrong by turns. It was attitude, not years, that aged a person. Full of vitality, Xu looked as if she had taken a rejuvenating drug, while Zhu's despondence had put ten years on him. All his hopes were smashed. The "cultural revolution" had swept him to the skies and made him an important man; when it subsided, he had been plunged from his cloud into a

gully, from which, though he survived, he was unable to climb out, for all his having been a city pauper before Liberation and a worker thereafter. He had no diploma or technical skill and was turning the corner in terms of age. Everything was going downhill, and nothing pleased him. It was just the reverse of his youth, when some god had seemed to grant him every desire and every achievement. He had wanted a beautiful, elegant wife, and sure enough an attractive young lady had come along; he had wanted to make a maid of her, and, despite some resistance, he had succeeded to an extent in doing so; his craving for an official post had likewise been realized. He had been promoted from district to municipal level, and though he remained a section chief, this post in the municipality was on a par with district bureau director. It had been no trifling matter. Promoted, he had asked his wife to dress up and parade with him before admiring eyes so as to satisfy his vanity. It would have been perfect if the wife beside him had not been cold and silent, but even that had not mattered, for women ought to be beautiful and aloof.

At the beginning of the "cultural revolution", Zhu's ambition had multiplied. Each rebel organization had wanted him at its head the minute he had disclosed that he had been a city pauper, and he had taken the lead by seizing the bureau director's seal, intending to supplant him and ride in his black limousine with his pretty wife, which was vastly more prestigious than walking down the road with her. He would seize a house like the municipal Party secretary's too, because there was no room in the East Hu Family Lane to turn the car. All this had become a febrile dream, and when the fever had passed, he had touched his brow and found to his dismay that his little official hat had disappeared with no explanation from its erstwhile donor. He had not dared to demand one, congratulating himself on not having been considered a follower of the "gang of four". He had no complaints.

He had, too, made some allowances for Xu, stopping short of treating her just as a maid. There was not much housework anyway with just the two of them. The only real chore was the cooking, and there he had taken an interest. Freed from his old interests, he cooked to please his palate, disliking Xu's cooking. In this way their life was, comparatively speaking, peaceful.

What he heard at the well cut him to the quick as the greatest insult. Those he had despised were ridiculing him like a clown. The world was being stood on its head, with intellectuals rising like kites as the workers became worthless, and women usurping the prestige due to men. The man was the spouse, and the woman rode in cars in

his place. Zhu's fevers recurred. How easily malaria reasserted itself! It was not a high fever this time. He did not want to seize power. His hatred focussed on Xu alone. Why the hard work? Why the limelight? "Hey, Zhu Shiyi, you want to watch it, you know." He pondered hard. Did she want to be rid of him? Probably she did. She had wanted a divorce once and had been cold for twenty years and more, hadn't she? Well, she wasn't going to get her way. She wasn't getting to heaven while he rolled in the mud.

They quarrelled again, but this time in a more civilized way. He no longer pounded the table or smashed the window with his elbow: the red curtain was almost black now.

"Ah, so you're home, Comrade Engineer," the people at the well heard him quip. "You must be tired. Do have something to eat. Your dinner's on the stove."

After a while they saw Xu dash out in fury, buy two loaves of bread in the little shop and take them back home.

"That can't have been dinner on the stove," they laughed. "It must have been the washing up to do."

"Yes. She's so stuck up she thinks she needs waiting on."

"What is the meaning of this?" she demanded of Zhu.

"Quite simply to let you know that men do not wait on women. A woman prime minister would still have to fry eggs for her husband, let alone a paltry engineer like you."

"So now I know just what sort of a man you are," she retorted through gritted teeth.

"You certainly took your time finding out."

Xu swallowed her fury along with the bread and some water. She had brought home too much work to have the time to quarrel. The drug she had invented was to be produced in large quantities, and her factory was going to import new equipment and send her abroad for six months to learn how to operate it. And she was now experimenting with another drug.

The big pile of material and reports her assistant gave her every day left her no time to get worked up. She controlled her anger. Twenty years had taught her self-control and numbed any feeling she had had for her husband. She was not a prime minister, she had no desire to fry her husband an egg, and she had abandoned any illusion that he would look after her. She had become independent leading a simple life. She breakfasted in a small eatery at the end of the lane and lunched in the factory canteen, which had a better menu now that the lean years were history. In the evening she brought something home to heat up or contented herself with instant noodles. Zhu could

no longer take away her salary. Aunt Ma had been right in believing that a working woman was a man's equal, at least as long as class struggle didn't override all else. Xu could afford to ignore Zhu's existence, concentrate on her material and enter the new world of her career, where all was springtime and lively prosperity.

For a while, there was no sound from behind the red curtain.

Suddenly Xu was beside the window with her hands over her ears, shouting, "Can't you turn it down a bit?"

Zhu had resorted to a new device by turning on the cassette player when she began to work, assaulting her with maracas, jazz drums, an electric organ and the hoarse voice of a popular singer, making such a din that her head throbbed.

"But my dear VIP," he drawled, "you want to work; I want to relax. Each to his own."

"Turn it down."

"And deny my own existence? No. I may have come down in the world, but let me just tell you that I am still here beside you. You can't run away from me, and you can't get rid of me. I can take you in my arms and have you whatever way I want. We are registered at the marriage bureau. Ha! Ha! You're still my wife, so don't give yourself airs." Zhu was gloating hysterically.

Xu could no longer ignore his existence, and the fact was agonizing. She regretted her naivety when young. Her simplicity and weakness for pity had given this demon a power over her that she could not now shake off. Once more she thought of divorce and the mediating committee. But she had no valid grounds. The last time it had been housework and daily expenses; now it was the cassette player. Neither was serious enough. True, they had fallen out of love, but love was intangible and invisible. Love for your career carried the day every time, but it wouldn't stand up in court. Many couples in the lane quarrelled. Some came to blows. Did they want to stick together? If they all got divorced, the courts would be so busy remarrying them that the world would fall apart. Perhaps, for society's sake, she had better, as the saying went, stick to the chicken she had married. But Zhu wasn't a chicken. He was a jealous, furious demon.

Xu couldn't sleep a wink that night. At midnight she heard a bucket clatter in the well as someone drew water, and at daybreak it was a tapping, perhaps of Aunt Ma's stick leaving the lane.

A Women's Liberation Manifesto

Xu's discomfiture began to be reflected in her work. The first to notice it was her assistant Tong Shaoshan when he came across her

one morning reading the previous day's report.

"What were you doing last night?"

Suddenly her grievance welled up inside her, clamouring for an outlet. She had no parents and no friends, and she never confided in anyone. In the factory they called her the frozen mermaid for the cold air she always wore. Much looked at, she was seldom spoken to. Trusting and liking Tong, with whom she had worked for three years, she poured it all out to him, unburdening herself by talking about it and hoping for the sympathy of her listener, for sympathy cures pain. And of course she won his sympathy, as well as his respect. He had never expected that she had such an unhappy marriage, or that she could achieve so much in such an unhappy life. So moved was he that a dishonourable thought passed through this honourable man's head: if only this nice, ever so elegant, pretty, talented woman were my wife! The idea flashed through his mind like lightning, and he never gave it another thought. His only concern was how to help her out of her strait so that she could concentrate on her work.

Tong had an idea. "The factory's completing an apartment building. Why don't you apply for a flat? Then you could move to the factory if things got worse and get away from him."

Xu thought it a good idea. She had heard of couples living separately, but she hadn't wanted to mention it to the leadership as the flats were for newlyweds. Why take advantage of people who were fervently in love?

"Don't you worry. I'll put in a word for you. We must think of your work." Tong volunteered his help, but eagerness to help sometimes bred trouble.

A few days later, two men banged on Zhu Shiyi's door.

"Who do you want?" asked the people at the well when nobody answered.

"Is Engineer Xu at home?"

"Engineer. . . ? Oh, you mean the good-looking one, right. Yes, this is where she lives. Where are you from?" Busy hands left idle mouths, and in any case they were interested in anything to do with Xu.

"We're from the housing group of the Pharmaceutical Factory. Engineer Xu's applied for a flat, and we've come to check on her present housing conditions before we decide."

"Do you think they'll give her one?"

"The whole factory lives off her. If she wants one, we can't stop her."

"And with a big house like that! Why don't you give us one instead?"

"Because the house is too noisy, what with you lot cackling at the well. We'll give her a small flat where she can work in peace."

The news was immediately passed on to Zhu.

"You'd better climb down sharpish, before she's off to her flat at the factory."

"Take a good, careful look at yourself. Are you really up to lording it over her at home now the way you do?"

Zhu lowered, itching to drag Xu home and give her a beating, a thing he had never been able to do in the past, let alone now. Cathartic as it would be to kick and punch her, he would be handing her grounds for divorce on a plate, and he realized the implications of that. He had bullied her because she had asked for it, but that was no use now. He couldn't point to her bourgeois background and exhibit her clothes any more, for fear of arousing interest at the television centre now that everyone took such pains to be well dressed. Media exposure would merely mean greater fame.

Growing up amid the gossip of the lane had taught Zhu a thing or two about what men and women got up to, and what he had just heard led him to surmise that Xu might be guilty of untoward behaviour. If she wanted a separation from him, who did she want to live with? All he needed was the merest thread of evidence to shame her so that she could never raise her head again. A master of character assassination, Zhu was aware that the worst thing one could do just at present was have an extramarital affair, at least if one was at all famous. Fame, built as it was on empty praises, would collapse when the prop broke.

Zhu's skill in character assassination had been acquired during the "cultural revolution". He began to watch Xu, following her secretly, and searched her handbag like a secret agent. Finding nothing for days, he turned to the method used during the "cultural revolution" for finding the culprit who might have written a reactionary slogan, by investigating everyone she had anything to do with in order to throw up a suspect. He knew that she no longer saw her relatives and former schoolmates. All her acquaintances were in the factory, where Zhu knew many people, having worked there for a period of time. He made devious inquiries into her friends and who she saw. The results were all the same: she saw no one. Every day she shut herself away in her laboratory with her assistant Tong Shaoshan. Zhu pricked up his ears.

"Is this Tong a man or a woman?"

"A man. Tall, forty-five or -six. Looks like a younger version of yourself."

"Aha!" Zhu had found his target. When a man and a woman shut themselves away together day after day, there was bound to be some funny business. And they couldn't explain it away either. A man in his prime and a woman of talent who saw things alike: oh, the beauty of it! Zhu was green with jealousy.

Tong was unaware of all this. He felt closer to Xu after her confession, where in the past he had seen her as a cold beauty who kept the world at arm's length and talked only of her work. Even when they had left the factory together they had never walked side by side but one after the other and then parted after a while. Now he knew that this beauty had a throbbing heart, was alive and reachable. He relaxed a little and made small talk as they worked, and after work they continued discussing technical problems as far as East Hu Family Lane.

"Well," laughed Xu, "this is home. Would you like to come in?" She was being polite. She didn't enjoy taking people home to see that husband of hers.

Tong was in a good mood. "Very much! I've never even known where you lived. Now I can see what it's like so I can help you to move when you get your flat." And he followed her up the steps, looking around curiously.

Quite by chance, two busybodies were washing clothes at the well, saw everything and began speaking in subdued voices.

"See that? That's her lover she's bringing home."

"It must be. Didn't you hear him? Coming to help her move, he said."

Zhu, returning from a meeting thirty minutes later, was immediately beckoned over.

"I'd get a move on if I was you," he was told quietly, "if you don't want to miss an important visitor."

Zhu took in the situation at a glance, and as if he had been waiting for this day, quickened his pace and swiftly stole upstairs, where Xu and Tong were sitting in the room. They were smiling. Zhu did not blow up, nor did he shout. He gloated.

"Well, well, so it's you two. Together every day, and you still have so much to say to each other that you have to bring it back here. Isn't that going a little too far?"

Tong hastened to introduce himself. "I'm Tong, Engineer Xu's assistant. We were discussing technical problems."

"Of course. All your problems are solved in principle, but the technicalities remain. What a pity you live in China. American divorces are so much easier."

"What exactly are you driving at?" asked Tong, flustered.

"Need you ask? Don't imagine I don't know what you've been up to, Tong. I'm not someone you can push around." Zhu emanated belligerence, arms akimbo and eyes bulging, while Tong, nonplussed by a fleeting dishonourable thought, stood up in confusion, muttered, "Sorry.... Good night," and hastened away.

The two women laughed at Tong's precipitate flight as if they were now avenged for some wrong Xu had done them.

"Zhu Shiyi," said Xu, trembling with indignation, "the scene you have just made is the climax of a twenty-year farce. We cannot go on this way, or we will both suffer."

"You will, of course, be unable to marry the man you love. It must be agony."

"You can say what you like. I am not going to throw away my whole life with you. You are a scoundrel."

"As opposed to whom? Tong Shaoshan? Will you throw yourself at his feet?"

"That," said Xu, her blood boiling, "is none of your business. I'm a human being, independent and free to love Tong Shaoshan, Li Shaoshan or nothing but my work. In any case I do not love you. You cannot treat a woman like a piece of property, a maid, a doll or something to show off. Those days are gone. A woman is a human being too. She has the right to love and hate. A marriage certificate is not an indenture. I did not sell myself to you. It does not give you title to a slave once it is locked away in your drawer. I will cast off the feudal fetters you have hung on me and fight for my future, my freedom...." Fury lent this woman of the eighties the scholarly eloquence of a feminist tract of the 1919 May 4th Movement.

Little did she know that, far from being silenced by the power of her rhetoric, Zhu had recorded her on the sly.

Now he began to strike. He edited and reorganized the tape into: "I'm free to love Tong Shaoshan. That is none of your business. A marriage certificate is not an indenture. I did not sell myself to you. A woman has the right to love. Those days are gone. I will fight for my freedom...." And he took the recording to the factory, looked up He Tongli and accused Xu of having an affair with Tong Shaoshan.

The Storm Gathers

He Tongli was aging, and while he didn't like what he was seeing, he was more inclined to grumble than to take the trouble to do anything about it. He was waiting to retire. He listened and his brow puckered.

"Take that thing home. You're always mixing work and private life, always whining about your wife and the factory. I'd have thought a man like you would be ashamed to bring a recording here just because he can't keep his wife in order."

Zhu was stunned. It wasn't working.

"But Secretary He, we are talking of decadent bourgeois thinking and grave immorality."

"Okay, skip it. I know the cant better than you do. I always knew she was a dressy little bourgeois tart. You were the one that was dead set on her. Maybe I'm wrong. These days, I can't tell what's bourgeois and what's socialist. What I call bourgeois, the next guy calls socialist, and people I call socialist call me feudal. Listen, when we had the press round asking about the advanced things she'd done, someone told them about the way you took her salary and displayed her clothes. I got called an ultra-Leftist and a bastion of feudalism making life hard for intellectuals. Those are serious names. Do you want to stir up more trouble for me? This thinking, that thinking: these days all I think about is going home and looking after my grandchildren."

"But Secretary He. . . ."

"Don't secretary me. I'm not a Party secretary any more, and I'm director in name only for the time being. Go and see Shen Jinxian. He's deputy secretary. We haven't got a secretary yet."

Shen had been recommended by He for the posts of director and deputy secretary. It was simpler work for one man to hold both, but the high-ups disagreed and said Party and administration should be kept separate; they would appoint one of the middle-aged intellectuals director. They also thought Shen, who had originally been a secretary to the director, didn't have the experience of independent responsibility to be anything more than deputy for the time being. Unhappy about this, Shen had been looking for the chance to shine through some brilliant coup in factory personnel political ideology.

Unlike the unscrupulous He Tongli, Shen was educated, never grumbled and weighed all factors before he acted.

"Leave the tape here," he said when he had heard Zhu out. "We'll think about it." His face was impassive, inscrutable. When Zhu had gone, he listened to it again and marvelled. How could the aging

frozen mermaid do such a thing? Some chit of a girl, yes. A woman in his apartment block had walked out on her husband with all her things after a fight and got a divorce. But not a celebrity like Xu Lisha, who had appeared on television, surely? Was her husband not good enough for her now that she'd come up in the world, like Chen Shimei in the old play who forsook his wife when he became a mandarin? Obviously bourgeois ideas affected women just as badly. Still, why should the mermaid, frozen for decades, suddenly defrost now? Defrosted fish went bad. It was a hard nut to crack. It would look bad ideologically if he ignored backsliding, but what if he went ahead and was accused of smearing her good name? Who could tell what was going on between a man and a woman? He decided on preliminary firsthand investigation. He must be principled, considerate and light-handed enough to keep the family intact, for families were the cells of society, and one split led to another and then another until the resultant cancer gnawed at society. It took some hard thinking.

Investigation meant talking to the people concerned. He couldn't talk to Xu. She wasn't just anybody when the Political Consultative Conference and the Women's Association kept sending cars for her. And the speech she had made to her husband had a point. Hadn't a woman the right to love and to fight for freedom? Imported ideas, but fashionable of late. The old ideas would get him nowhere. He decided to tackle the weaker party first, and summoned Tong to his office.

Tong entered with a smile.

"Did you want me, Secretary Shen?"

"Yes. Please sit down." Shen politely gave Tong a cup of tea. "The fact is, I wanted a word with you."

This heartened Tong not a little, as he had been meaning to talk to Shen about his application to join the Party, and sure enough, that was just the subject that Shen broached.

"We have studied your application and feel that you are well qualified. . . ."

"I have much room for improvement," beamed Tong.

"As do we all. No one is perfect. However, an applicant for Party membership must make great demands on himself. He must be honest and confide utterly in the Party."

"Absolutely," agreed Tong, nodding vigorously as he wondered what he was driving at.

"Is there anything in these rumours of something fishy between you and Engineer Xu?"

"The whole thing was a misunderstanding," began Tong, reddening. "I was walking her home one day, when. . . ."

"Listen to what she says." Shen played the recording.

Tong's heart thumped. He was totally confused, and like the honest man he was, he confided his secret.

"I really had no idea about this.... The other day Engineer Xu told me her life story and about the way things were between her and her husband. For a moment it occurred to me how good it would have been if she had been my wife, but I assure you, Secretary Shen, the thought simply flashed through my mind. I took no action."

"Then how did she find out?"

"I've no idea. I am surprised by what she says. Believe me. I would hide nothing from the Party."

"Think again. Motives breed results. Could you unconsciously have given her any hint?"

Tong could not say for sure whether he had or he hadn't. There was nothing he could recall specifically, but then why had he felt drawn to her and gone to her house? He did not, however, intimate anything of this as he shook his head definitively.

"None whatsoever."

"None? Such communication is never one-sided. Can you imagine no way in which she could have become aware what was going on in your head?"

"Possibly by intersexual electrostatic induction."

Shen burst out laughing. "Electrostatic induction I would not know about. Just let me warn you that you're a married man and your wife's an uppity woman. Xu's a married woman and her husband is a tricky man. I suggest that starting from now you rid your mind of the idea on any action you may have taken. Provided you are firm, she will soon abandon whatever unrequited feelings she still has. Can you guarantee to do that?"

"Absolutely." There remained one question. "Will this affect my joining the Party?"

"That," prevaricated Shen, "depends on you."

After Tong's departure Shen smoked two cigarettes one after the other, just as we have seen people in difficulties do in the movies as they pace their offices. He should stop the questioning, he felt. If he pressed them they might throw down their cards and admit their love for each other, which would leave him another hard nut to crack. Love makes desperados. It would be best for Xu Lisha and the reputation of the factory if he let them cool off until the affair died in the bud.

His mind made up, he decided on three ways to stop it developing.

First, he must replace Tong with a woman. A man shouldn't have a woman secretary, and a woman shouldn't have a male assistant. It was an open invitation, working side by side every day. And he couldn't take Tong at his word, either, what with all this electrostatic induction.

Secondly, Xu must be refused a flat of her own, which would be too convenient for mischief.

Thirdly, he must memo his superiors on the inadvisability of sending Xu abroad in the circumstances, where a refusal to return would have great political repercussions he wouldn't be able to handle.

Yet there would be other repercussions if he was seen as harassing an intellectual by removing her assistant, cancelling her trip and denying her a flat. If anyone wrote to the papers he would have a deal of explaining to do. Shen decided to call a meeting and explain his intentions in strict confidence to a select group, of which He Tongli was sure to be one.

When Shen put the matter before the meeting, He Tongli got straight in with his own grouses:

"I don't know, people these days, a little success goes to their heads. All anybody cares about is talent. Morals don't matter one whit. It's flattery they get instead of education, and it all ends up with bourgeois thinking. What have they learned from capitalism? Love affairs. Xu doesn't love her husband? Well it's a bit of a turn-round, because they've been married for twenty years and have a daughter. And anyway, is love all that important? It just brews blunders. They make me sick, these people, going everywhere in cars the minute they've made a bit of a name for themselves. What's wrong with their legs, eh?"

So now they were on to the subject of cars, which you couldn't say was strictly irrelevant; but digression is the bane of any meeting, for there is always someone to follow the lead.

"I know. Ever since she made a name for herself, she's been in and out of cars. Look at Secretary He. You never see him in a car, and he's no spring chicken. He even rides his bike to meetings in town."

Xu lacked the experience to be wary of using cars, of which China has very few per head of population. A car weaving its way through a crowd is conspicuous and excites envy. If you've really reached the car-riding ranks, you needn't worry. No one has anything against it, or if they have they daren't say so for fear of being labelled a dangerous leveller.

"What she doesn't realize is that we all pulled together to get where

we are today. She's just got no mass viewpoint. She thinks she deserves all the attention."

Xu didn't know that one of the obligations of accomplishment was to keep repeating, "I owe it to everybody. I just did my bit," and then to add, "for what that was worth." Even if she had been opposed by everybody in her project, the most it would have been permissible to say would have been, "Everyone was most helpful with their suggestions."

"She's changed overnight. She doesn't talk to anyone any longer. She just ignores them."

In point of fact she had not changed. She had always been like that. It was just that she didn't realize that fame and officialdom require a change. She should have started making small-talk all the time and appeared easy-going. Without such a change, people thought you had changed. All officially minded people understand this psychology.

"And she certainly likes the limelight. You've only got to see her on the television. Most alluring!"

Nor was this her fault at all. She hadn't asked for a close-up. If anything, she had dressed too fashionably. A woman in a prominent position is expected to be sedate, not attractive, unless she is a film star and a beauty symbol, where plain looks are not a plus.

To curb digression, Shen announced his three decisions and asked for comments. Universal apathy was reached on the real issue. Even He Tongli raised no objection, though he thought the measures too lenient. Grousing he enjoyed; trouble he could do without.

The Sky Is Overcast

Poor Xu Lisha, far from remarking the storm clouds gathering above her, imagined instead that the rain was letting up and that the worst was past. Ever since her speech, Zhu had stopped bothering her and playing tapes in the evening. She could concentrate on her work once more, rambling peacefully within the winsome confines of science. Once she had calmed down she found the speech she had made ridiculous. Fighting for free marriage at her age! Had her marriage been arranged for her? With her own hands she had cast her love into a grave which was now overgrown with weeds, and all she would find if she opened it up was white bones. Provided that Zhu left her alone, she didn't even care about the little flat; she would rather not squeeze other people out of it.

Shen had been adamant about the secrecy of his meeting, and indeed Xu was completely in the dark. She was, however, the only one. Scandals were intriguing work for idle tongues, not state secrets. "I've got something to tell you, as long as you promise not to breathe a word." So it was passed on until the whole factory knew.

Tong's wife, who worked in the factory, had a few reliable informants, one of whom had never liked Xu. She had always thought her too pretty and too proud, and the minute she discovered that behind that honest face lurked a temptress she passed on the news to Tong's wife.

"They've made a proper fool of you."

Far from being a fool, Tong's wife Heying was a shrew, nicknamed Hot Pepper. As if stung by a bee on learning the news, she ran shrieking and howling towards the laboratory.

"Where's that slut Xu Lisha?" she cried. "Pretends she's so honest. It's an outrage! I'll show her up in her true colours, never mind how famous she is!" Curiously, she voiced no concern about Tong Shaoshan's true colours. Men, it seemed, could be forgiven these things.

It was noon break, when the workers were scattered under the trees after lunch. They made towards her, some to stop her, only to be swept aside by her powerful arms, and some to see the fun. Xu was talking to Tong just after lunch, for she had found a number of uncharacteristic mistakes in his data, when the door of the laboratory was suddenly kicked open by a screaming Hot Pepper.

"Xu Lisha, come on out here!"

As startled as if the "cultural revolution" had begun again, Xu hurried to the door. At the sight of her, Hot Pepper lunged forward and grabbed her by the collar.

"You shameless hussy, flirting with my husband! I'll have you for this!"

Shen rushed to the scene as soon as he heard of the unforeseen development.

"Let her go, Heying!" he snapped.

Taken aback by the sight of the Party secretary, Hot Pepper let go and flopped to the ground wailing.

"Don't tell me you're in on this too? Covering up for each other! You've all got it in for me! This is the end!"

Tong took his courage in both hands and came out too.

"There's no need to make a scene, Heying. Get up."

Hot Pepper sprang up and quick as lightning slapped him smartly across the face.

"What was that for? You can't go hitting people. It's against the law," Tong shouted.

"And I suppose adultery isn't! Without so much as a by-your-leave! Well, I've done with you, once and for all. It's a court of law now. Come on." Hot Pepper grabbed hold of Tong, but instead of hauling him off, she fixed her eyes on Xu. "Shameless hussy! Well, I've done with him. You can have him, if that'll make you happy. But you're blind if you want him. There's so many like him about. They're useless, the lot of them. Take him!" And she shoved Tong so hard that he almost fell over.

Xu was pale and speechless. The world seemed to be whirling around her. Shouting like a fishwife, the only effective tactic in such an argument, was beyond her, and the academic approach paled by comparison.

Her silence, the only thing that stopped them coming to blows as would normally have happened, was filled by audience reaction. "See that? She can't say a thing. That's guilt, that is." And the twenty-minute scene travelled at twenty kilometres an hour like the television news.

"Have you heard? That attractive engineer, she's got a lover."

"I knew it! I knew her type would come to no good. You can see to look at her she's no dedicated engineer."

"Not a spark of talent, they tell me. That new drug wasn't her invention. Tong Shaoshan gave her the credit because of her pretty face."

Many interesting stories were told, quite as lively as anything in fiction. I daresay the sin lies with the writers. If you can spin a yarn, why not others?

An Apple with a Spot

Xu's empty fame collapsed overnight. No one invited her to sit on rostrums any more, and no one whisked her off in cars to meetings. She was not cut dead, but she was no longer the model. The apple had a bruise, and why buy blemished fruit?

She was an inexhaustible topic for the people in East Hu Family Lane. The standing committee members of the information centre went to it with gusto, talking about her so much and listening so raptly that they sometimes forgot to wash their rice and vegetables, so that dinner was not ready when their children and grandchildren came home from work or school. Attendance at the well went up at the time in the evening when people get home from work, to see how Xu looked and if they could hear anything from behind the faded red curtain.

For days Xu went about in a daze as if borne aloft in a tornado. From sheer habit she went to work and came home as usual, but her senses were numbed. Then one day her mind cleared, she saw them staring at her with stretched necks from the well and realized that she had come back from the distant horizon.

"Fetching water, I see," she said to the woman whose neck was stretched longest. The woman's head shot back in fright as Xu's voice seemed to float up from the well.

"Er, yes."

The woman regained her complacency when Xu had gone indoors. "Doesn't wait to be spoken to, does she, the cheap baggage?"

But from Zhu she got no peace. His victory was marred by chagrin at the unexpected scandal. Doubts about a wife's infidelity, however ill grounded, cause the husband to lose face, and he suffered particularly from the vulgarity of the gossip around the well. It was worse than being called a follower of the "gang of four". Still, like a duckling with his hand round its neck, Xu was at his sovereign mercy to be beaten or cursed as he would. He didn't beat her, but never a day passed without a curse.

"You've got a nerve, coming home. Get out of here!"

Xu flopped into a chair and glared at him in the realization that she could live with him no longer.

"If you won't get out, you can write me a self-criticism pledging to be a good wife in future."

Resistance rallied in Xu as in a man down but not dead struggling to his feet. She jumped up.

"Why should I be a good wife to you, Zhu Shiyi? Push me too far and I'll turn on you, I warn you."

"I daresay," he laughed coldly, "but public opinion and the law are on my side. We'll see who emerges the victor. You still imagine you amount to something, don't you? You're finished."

"Finished? Not yet. I think I will have a talk with Secretary Shen." She was not going to take it lying down.

"Go ahead. See the municipal Party secretary if you wish, but I doubt if you have the nerve."

Xu stomped downstairs. She must see Shen and get things straightened out. The false accusations of the "cultural revolution" were being corrected. Why should she let her reputation be ruined?

She knew whereabouts Shen lived but not exactly where. It took her quite a few inquiries to find the house, and then she hesitated be-

fore knocking. Was it impolite to disturb people at eight o'clock? She had no choice, though. Manners could be forgotten this once.

Shen greeted her cordially, sat her on the sofa and gave her tea and sweets with profuse apologies.

"I'm terribly sorry, Engineer Xu. I've been wanting to talk to you for days, but there were meetings to attend to. I know how you must be feeling, a person like yourself with these insults flying about. Believe me, I feel weighed down by it too."

This was no more than the truth. He regretted having caused this mess in an attempt to come up with something politically brilliant. These things shouldn't be meddled with. You never knew whether people would laugh it off or make a scene.

Xu was grateful for his sympathy. It was the first time since that day that she had not met with scornful looks or cruel words.

"The only thing is to make the best of it, however bad you feel. It's a trifle compared to your research. Shrews will pick fights. Don't take it to heart. People like Hot Pepper aren't worth it." He did his best to console her, feeling that for all women were easily upset, they were weak enough to be talked round once they had vented their anger.

"I know they're not," sighed Xu. "All I want is to clear my name and get the facts straight, or . . . or I shall be miserable for the rest of my life." Tears streamed down her face.

Shen heaved a deep sigh and pushed a teacup in front of Xu.

"There's no need to be so upset. Drink some tea. Your wishes are justified. I have been thinking the thing over in the last few days, and would have done what I could even if you had not asked me. There has been talk of scientific plagiarism. This is a matter of principle, of right and wrong. I've told the technical department to prepare an exhibition of the raw data and the whole experimental process, which I am sure will scotch that rumour, but what can I do about the other thing, Engineer Xu? The best way to clear your name would be by a newspaper article, but what paper would carry it? Also it might easily become city news."

Xu nodded. Better by far to steer clear of newspapers and television.

"Or we might call a factory meeting for me to announce that it was all wrong, but I wouldn't do that either. Protestations of innocence too often have a contrary effect. Besides, Hot Pepper would be there, and you would look even worse if she made another scene."

Xu shuddered. She had seen it happen.

"The last resort would be the law, but the courts won't accept a case like this. Quarrels and rumours are not crimes punishable by law.

I've thought everything over, Engineer Xu, but I cannot come up with a proper solution. Anything in the world can be explained away except matters of the heart. Best let it be."

Xu was at a loss. Nothing could be done without stirring up trouble and feeding yet more gossip to the neighbours.

Shen pressed his point. "Forget about it for the time being until it simmers down and goes away. Many famous people have had troubles like this. In the end, they dwindle to nothing more than trifling errors. Ideally you should patch things up with your husband. No one can say anything if all's well at home."

"I'm afraid that's impossible," she blurted out at the mention of her husband. "I want a separation. I'm applying for a flat."

"Well, normally it would be no problem," said Shen diffidently, "but right now it could only make for more trouble and more rumours. Would he leave you alone, or would he be more likely to come and see you? And then the law stipulates that housing is the joint property of husband and wife. The housing allotment group wouldn't consent, either. We considered giving you a flat for the sake of your work, but now we'd be helping to break up a family, which would never do. We'll drop the matter for the time being. The waiting list is so long." Despite his beating about the bush, Shen's drift was clear. He was against the splitting of cells and wanted the matter smothered.

Xu saw his point. Zhu might well visit her or even move in with her, and she would have even less space to manoeuvre cooped up with him in a small flat, having to see his horrible face at close quarters every day. The housing group, which had been reluctant in the past, would not give in to her now in any case. She was unaware how vulnerable they were to haggling. Her bad family background had left her with a strange turn of mind that could grapple doggedly with scientific problems but had an inferiority complex when it came to people. Her normally self-effacing and considerate disposition robbed her of the power to fight when things were abnormal. This was precisely the weakness Zhu played on to dominate her.

She gave up the flat. It seemed the best way out was to leave. "In that case, Secretary Shen, let me go abroad earlier and stay away from this horrible life for a year or two." She was naive enough to think that bruised apples went for export.

Shen started inwardly. However, he congratulated himself on having been prepared for this. The only way she was going to stay away was by asking for political asylum. This time he made himself quite clear, for there was no beating about the bush with potentially political matters.

"Ah yes, I was meaning to tell you. Taking into account your age and present situation, the leadership has decided to send a younger person in your place. I hope you understand. You see, the fear is that our current experimentation will be interrupted if you go abroad, quite beside the inconvenience to a woman travelling alone."

It finally dawned on Xu that the storm had broken her wings. She would never fly again. She would go home to that house and trudge up those stairs day after day.

Shen realized what a great blow it was to an intellectual to be deprived of the opportunity to go abroad, but what could he do? He was powerless. He rose from the sofa and paced about the room racking his brains for a way to ease Xu's agony and console her. He could only think of offering her something to eat.

"I say, darling, is there any food around? We're hungry."

"Coming!" his wife called from the other room. "Just a minute."

Xu did not want to wait. Snacks were all she would get here. She rose, took her leave, and walked down the stairs. Shen saw her off, telling her to take things with a good grace and come and talk to him whenever she felt down. He was pleased with himself, telling himself what a success his talk with Xu had been and how reasonably she had understood. Before she left he pointed out to her the quickest way home.

Xu didn't hear him clearly. She felt that all roads were closed to her.

What Spring?

Only one road lay before Xu Lisha, a road she had trodden before — to resume her life of frozen subservience. But it was hard. The road of life bends but never turns back. Mechanical repetition was impossible. For decades Xu had held to her research in pursuit of a vision, a goal. Disappointed in love and family life, she craved respect, fame and social status like a down-trodden person longing to stretch proudly. It was for this that she had taken care of her appearance and ridden in cars with an easy conscience, because she did possess legs. She was human, she had ambition, and in a certain sense it was tenacity that fostered ambition. Only the form and expression differed. Xu had pursued ambition and got what she wanted, but the gains, present and prospective, had disappeared in that moment when the pillar propping her spirit had buckled. She could not start again.

Tong was transferred. He wanted to go, and Xu wanted him to go too. They worked on the same project but had to avoid each other, not least in the canteen, where dozens of pairs of eyes swept them like newfangled scanners. All animals are endowed with sexual attraction; only humans need to resist it.

Tong didn't say much when he left, just a sheepish, "Sorry for everything, Xu Lisha." He was a picture of misery himself.

He was replaced by Gao Lili, under Shen's principle of avoiding risk by assigning subordinates of the same sex.

Gao, who was tall, had been a young worker in the factory who had taught herself and just graduated from university night-school. In high heels, jeans, print blouse and leather jacket, she was as brisk and hearty as a lion-tamer. In a certain light she could be viewed as a danger.

Gao brought spring with her. The laboratory had been as soundless and colourless as an operating theatre, with the doors and windows closed and everything performed quietly. The minute Gao walked in she threw open the windows and, reckless of the trouble, shut them again when there was a draught. She filled the unused flasks with cut flowers, brought in her cassette player and put on a tape of birdsong and plashing brooks that she and her boyfriend had recorded on a trip to Mount Huang.

"My boyfriend," she told Xu without a qualm, "loves me because he likes me around, and I love him because it makes me happy to have him there. You can build a life on that, being happy with each other. Not like one I used to have, who said he was so miserable when I wasn't with him and would I always be in his arms. Get away with it! What a load of trash! It wasn't even true. I'd have been even more disgusted if it had been. Forever in his arms? I'd like to have seen that cheer him up! I mean it's selfish, isn't it? No, I broke it off."

Xu stared with delighted surprise at this girl who was really in love with the man of her choice. How different from herself. She liked her, and felt more energetic when she was around.

The lively Gao kept herself busy all the time to such an extent that Xu had to work harder to keep up, and often as she worked she called out the wrong name:

"Come here, Tong Shaoshan."

"Tong Shaoshan's replacement Gao Lili reporting for duty, ma'am!"

"Oh dear," said Xu, embarrassed. "Old habits die hard."

Gao put her arms around her and kissed her on the brow.

"Auntie Xu, poor old Auntie Xu!"

If Gao enlivened Xu, Zhu persecuted her unbearably, pressing her for a self-criticism daily and in the ugliest of language. Her heart wavered the minute she stepped into the house, wondering how she could suffer through the evening.

Tong fared no better, with Hot Pepper pestering him for a divorce and demanding to know how many times he had slept with Xu. It was a wanton, never-ending game.

"I just don't understand you people, Auntie Xu," said Gao. "Love's supposed to make you happy. Why do you torment yourselves like this? If you've stopped loving each other, get a divorce. Or are you fighting for fun?"

Xu sighed. "You don't understand, Lili. It's not as simple as you think."

"I understand perfectly. Only you and I think differently. I don't let things bother me, and you're worrying about reputation, social standing, feudal morals and plain inborn selfishness and jealousy. Men wanting to own women and women wanting to depend on men. It's got you caught in a net. Rip a hole in it and get out, Auntie Xu. You have the right to. There's no question of hurting a child: your daughter's my age. Zhu's not senile, so you're not leaving him in the lurch. All you'll damage is selfishness, feudalism and male chauvinism, and damn good for you too if you do. Get a divorce."

Xu shook her head. I've considered all that, but all we've ever fought over are trifles, and that just isn't grounds for divorce."

"Then make some. The next time he gets at you, go for him and make sure you both get hurt. Try to commit suicide. That'll get you a decree from the court. If you always humour him and back off, how's the judge going to know you're at the end of your tether? I tell you, getting a divorce is like getting a flat out of the people in this factory. They expect you to make do until you really can't cope any longer. I know you don't want a scandal, but how well do you look now? Do something about it. When winter's here, can spring be far behind, eh?"

"What spring?"

Gao threw her arms around Xu. "Tell me honestly, Auntie Xu, do you love Tong?"

Xu blushed. "I don't know. But I'm happy with him."

Gao clasped her hand. "There you are, then. Happiness: the flame of love! You felt happy with him, and just for a split second he wished you were his wife. I'll fan the flame for you."

"Nonsense!"

"Why not? Zhu and you hate each other, and Hot Pepper wants a divorce. Well, let her divorce him and marry someone tough enough for her. When both of you are divorced, off with you to the frontier. Don't go to a big city where there's devious people and air pollution. You look so young and beautiful, Auntie Xu. Don't give up. If I was a man, I'd love you too. Auntie Xu, you've never known what love is."

In her despair, Xu was persuaded. Why not? Why hang back? I owe no one anything. I have never hurt anyone. It is springtime on the other side of the mountain. All I ever needed was the courage for the climb. Xu's heart was suddenly full of that courage, and the ember of life, banked but not dead within her, was fanned by Gao into a flame. Oh, how wonderful to be two birds soaring over the forests of the frontier!

"Say something, Auntie Xu."

Xu hesitated. "I wonder how he feels?"

"It's easy enough to find out. I'll arrange a meeting. You can talk things over."

Gao went into action with all the adroitness of a lion-tamer. Arriving at Tong's office around noon, she poked her head round the door and, finding him alone, slipped in and closed it behind her.

"Tong, Engineer Xu wants to talk to you."

Tong started. "What about?"

"What do you think? About the way you felt about her."

"Yes, well, there was something there. I'll apologize to her."

"Oh, no you won't. Just tell her what it was. Be a man. But skip the chauvinism, eh?"

"Very well. I'll make a clean breast of it. Only it's rather difficult for us to meet."

"Tonight, half past seven, fifth bench along by the lake. It's usually mine, but you can have it tonight. Don't worry, no one'll see you." Gao had the modern delivery, concise and to the point, not at all like those fifties and sixties girls.

The Shifting Information Centre

Evenings in the park belong to lovers. The clear night sky, the pale lamplight and the outlines of trees and flowers merge into a hazy picture. To the casual glance, no one is there, and only the croaking of frogs and the chirping of insects seem to prepare spring for the advent of summer. A closer inspection, however, reveals couples on

benches, couples on the grass and couples beside the bushes, indeed so many couples that those who have been unable to find seats stand entwined beside the paths, alone with each other in a world of love.

Xu, poor thing, had stumbled into such a world decades too late, bewildered, feverish, with perspiration bedewing her palms but love red-hot in her heart. Late love is not like first love. First love grows easily and carefully, taking its time, but Xu's love was an explosion kindled by the embers of her life, rapid and terrifying in its fervour. It propelled her relentlessly towards the lake.

The fifth bench along nestled in a corner hidden by evergreens from careless adventurers.

Tong, as good as his word, arrived at five minutes to seven. He felt as if he was on a date, but the feeling was far from sweet.

Xu approached him panting, not from running but from the wild thumping of her heart.

"Oh, you're already here."

"Yes, I've been here for a while."

"Thank you for coming. I needed to talk to you."

"You have my full attention."

"I was told you felt about me in a particular way."

"Yes, that is true."

"Does your wife still want a divorce?"

"Yes, still."

"Let me be frank. I feel the same way about you. I can't go on living with my husband. Let's both get divorced, get transferred to another city and build a new life." Brief and to the point. Modern she might not be, but she had neither the time nor the inclination to detail her feelings or mince words. She could only use the workaday language they had always used between themselves.

Tong seemed to have entered a dream-state. It had occurred to him when he had sat down on the bench that in such a place he should be holding a lover in his arms, caught up in conversation about their love. A lover distinctly unlike Hot Pepper. And now here beside him was a beautiful woman telling him that she loved him, the very woman who had once appeared in his dreams. Could it be true? He wondered. But as soon as he had decided that it was really happening he leapt from the bench like the amorous young men in old stories startled out of their wits by the appearance of the fox-fairy in the guise of a seductress.

"No, no, Comrade Xu Lisha! This is quite unrealistic. It will only give us a bad name by suggesting that we were lovers before. I still want to make my way and join the Party. I have not yet

reached your status. Please forgive me. I came here today to beg your forgiveness. Such an idea did once occur to me for an instant, causing much scandal and hurting you. I promise never to make such a mistake again. I'm sorry. We shouldn't stay here long. People might see us. Well, goodbye!"

Like a frightened rabbit, Tong shot into the bushes. So the simpleton could only think of her in his dreams. It was a romantic environment for an apology.

Thunderstruck, Xu felt an empty silence as after a ravaging storm. Her hope vanished, her flame died, her strength was all gone. In the wake of the emptiness came shame, regret and a shudder at her own rashness. Tong might tell people what had happened. Men liked to boast of their conquests. It proved their integrity.

Xu sat paralysed on the bench, not wanting or daring to move. The only sound was of the frogs croaking and jumping into the water. Then the park-keeper rang a bell for people to leave. It was closing time.

She left, with even less idea of where she could go. Her legs dragged her along small lanes and roads to almost everywhere she had ever been, until the lights went out in the houses and the streets looked slick under the streetlamps. All the streets she knew led to East Hu Family Lane. At three in the morning she came to the well. And she couldn't open the door with her key, for Zhu had double-locked it. Zhu was going to make a scene. "Where have you been all night?" he would demand. And he would have cause to make a scene this time.

Not daring to knock, she sat down on the dew-chilled bench by the well and gazed at it, resting her head on her hands. The well was the first thing she had seen when she had come to the lane for the first time. In the morning they would have something new to gossip about. "That Xu Lisha, she slept out last night." Zhu had cause to beat her now. Shen would send for her too to talk to her, not so politely this time. Gao, of course, would say, "Make a new start, Auntie Xu." I haven't got the strength, my girl. Spring belonged to you after all. The early hours were cold in late spring. Xu wrapped her coat around her.

There was a tapping sound. Aunt Ma was approaching the well with the aid of a stick, bending low, her white hair gleaming in the lamplight. She came every morning and every evening as if she still needed to wash rice and clothes. She had lost her grasp of time and sometimes came to the well at three or four in the morning or

at eleven or twelve at night. Seeing someone on the bench, she sat down to talk. Xu moved over.

"Hello, Aunt Ma," she called softly. Aunt Ma remembered her.

"Oh, it's you. What are you pondering about?"

"Nothing."

"That's right. I told you long ago not to go thinking wild thoughts. Toe the line and give no one cause to gossip. You stop there, you must be tired. I've got a few more things to do." In fact all she had to do was walk up and down the lane.

Xu gazed after Aunt Ma, bent double like a shrimp as if she was looking for something on the ground and never finding it.

In the morning one of the gossips came to fetch water and shrieked like a stuck pig.

"Oh, my God! There's someone in the well!"

No one fancied using the well after that, and the opening was nailed up with two tin plates. The information centre of East Hu Family Lane moved east when they installed public water taps and a washing machine. The time-honoured information centre would be even deadlier with modern equipment.

Who would be its victim next time?

Translated by Yu Fanqin

About the Author

Lu Wenfu was born in 1928 in Jiangsu Province. He joined the guerrilla force in 1949, and after the instant defeat of the Kuomintang, went back to Suzhou as a journalist on the New Suzhou Daily. *In 1957 he joined the Jiangsu branch of the Federation of Literary and Art Circles as a professional writer. In 1958 and again in 1964 he was sent to work in factories and villages, and later settled down to write in Suzhou. His first short stories appeared in 1955, among them "Honour" and "A Second Meeting with Zhou Tai". He won national best short story awards for "Dedication" (1978), "Man from a Pedlar's Family" (1980) and "Boundary Wall" (1983) — see* Chinese Literature *No. 1 for 1984 — and the third national best short novel award for "The Gourmet" — see* Chinese Literature *No. 4 for 1985. He is now vice-chairman of the Chinese Writers' Association.*

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Chen Zhaofu and Jiang Zhenming

In Search of Chinese Rock Pictures

Pictures painted or incised on rock by hunters of the palaeolithic period to the tribesmen of modern times are the earliest record of mankind's daily life.

Rock paintings were first discovered in northern Europe in the 17th century, and so many have been found since not only elsewhere in Europe but also in Asia, Africa, America and Australia that it seems that early man throughout the world used rock surfaces as his first "canvas". Apart from in a handful of ancient civilizations, written history goes back only a few centuries, but tens of thousands of years earlier than the first written word, these images afford us our first glimpse into our ancestors' past.

UNESCO suggested in 1981 that a world catalogue of rock pictures be compiled, but in international studies of the subject, China is still a blank.

In point of fact, rock pictures have been known in China at least as early as the fifth century, when they are mentioned by the geographer Li Daoyuan. Modern investigation began with Huang Zhongqin's description of those at Hua'an in Fujian in 1915 and with the Swede Beckmann's survey of Kuluke Mountain in Xinjiang in the late twenties. But it was only in the fifties that discoveries began to be made in large numbers, starting with the area around Huashan in Guangxi, then at Cangyuan in Yunnan in the sixties and in the Inner Mongolian Yinshan range in the seventies. Besides these remarkable finds, rock pictures are known to exist in at least 40 counties spread over 12 provinces, though there are no exact statistics.

Chen Zhaofu and Jiang Zhenming work at the Central College of Nationalities in Beijing.

Chen Zhaofu (right) and Jiang Zhenming (left)

Our own investigation took us 20,000 kilometres through eight provinces. The rigours of the journey — the pictures are mostly in rugged country inaccessible to cars — were amply rewarded when a clamber up a cliff or a trudge through shoals and rapids brought us face to face with scenes of hunting, flock-tending, sacrificial rites, dances and battles as our progenitors practised them in the remotest antiquity, as if the curtain of time had been swept from before our eyes.

We first made our way to the grasslands of Inner Mongolia, where Beckmann made his discoveries, confirmed by Gai Shanlin in 1976, in the Yinshan range and its western extension the Langshan, around the banner towns of Middle and Rear Urad. Subsequent work has revealed here the largest group of rock pictures in the northern grasslands *(colour plate 1)*.

The Yinshan pictures were done over a long period, the earliest being tentatively dated to ten thousand years before the present. One shows an ostrich, a species long extinct in this part of the world.

We visited Dabakou and Tanyaokou in the Langshan. At Tanyaokou, at the foot of the magnificent green mountains, to the east and west of which spread the Red Mountains, are jutting stones like tier upon tier of dilapidated red ramparts, and beneath them are ten picture sites. We were particularly impressed

by a well preserved, life-size representation of a camel with two tall humps and a small tail etched in individual lines, its head held high, staring superciliously ahead and its strength indicated by the small animal under its foot.

Discovered just after the Langshan pictures were those at Ulanqab to the north of the Yinshan. We made our way to Xialekou northeast of Bailing Monastery, where the grasslands extend to the horizon under a blue sky and undulating ridges wind through the wilderness topped by rocks, some standing, some lying. Many of these bear images of animals like fantastic papercuts, some executed realistically, but mostly doubled up, overlapping, sketchily indicated or deformed, most imaginatively conceived. Mixed in with these are scenes of hunting, cattle-tending and dancing, and hoofprints similar to those discovered in Mongolia and Siberia. Scholars have suggested that these are related to the cult of motherhood and female sexuality.

Less well known to the general public than the Yinshan pictures are those of the Alxa (Helan) Mountains that rise above the Yellow River where it flows into Inner Mongolia. The northern Alxa contain a concentration of rock pictures of or resembling the human face. The first was discovered by a shepherd who disturbed the sand covering the lower slopes of Mount Zuozi. A fair number have now been excavated, looking from a distance like blue pools on the hillside. They are large, flat and smooth, and the faces are carved on them in serried lines. Probably many more remain buried beneath the sand.

All the faces are grotesquely distorted, some with an outsize nose, some with ears as big as the face itself, others covered in hair like an ape. Their expressions vary from rage to smiles, and patterns on them indicate either tattooing or the use of masks. The headgear is just as bizarre. One has a branch above it decorated with grass-like plumes — we wondered if perhaps they were meant to be feathers or a sacred halo — while another wears a conical hat and makeup that may be hunting camouflage. The weird images and the fertile imagination of the artists are quite out of the common run, and one is led to presume that the largest pieces served as idols for the worship of celestial and telluric deities (*colour plate 3*).

The faces are also found in the ravines that stretch back into the mountains, where hunting scenes also occur. One group of over 50 animal pictures by Little Xiwo Ditch differs from the human faces in its accurate and graphic representation, showing how closely early man observed the beloved and inexhaustible source of his subsistence. Wild oxen, camels and big-headed sheep are delineated in only a few strokes. Carved on a hilltop towering forty metres over Huihui Ditch at Suyukou is a life-sized ox outlined with three parallel lines, inside which are cut three kids, creating an effect of movement (*colour plate 4*).

Probably the most intriguing concentrations of rock pictures are to be found in Xinjiang. It is said that every pass in the Tianshan around Balikun in eastern Xinjiang conceals such pictures. The largest number is in the county of Altay in the northern Tianshan, where there are evident links with those of the Eurasian steppes. The pictures of spiral-horned deer resemble those discovered in Mongolia.

The central Xinjiang mountain

1. Anthropoid Faces (from Yinshan, Inner Mongolia)

Rock Pictures

2. Human Head (from Hua'an, Fujian)

3. Sun God (from Mount Zhuozi, Inner Mongolia)

4. Ox (from Mount Helan, Ningxia)

5. Animals (from Mount Kuluke, Xinjiang)

6. Buffalos and Herdsmen (from Cangyuan, Yunnan)

7. Battle (from Huashan, Guangxi)

known as Kuruktag was investigated by Beckmann in 1928 and written up in his *Archaeological Study of Xinjiang*. We drove from Lopnur through the Gobi for a day to the village of Xingdi. Three miles south of there on the left bank of the tortuous Xingdi River we came upon clusters of rock pictures at the base of a hundred-metre limestone cliff that towered over a flat stretch of ground overgrown with elms, willows and blossoming wild pomegranates where the river skirts the mountain in a broad curve.

Kuruktag extends fifty metres in either direction, but the most important section pictorially is in the middle. In one picture here a running camelherd waves his hands above his head to rouse one of his charges from its lethargy. In another a mounted herdsman pursues three or four horses and a flock of goats, while the sun sheds its rays over the dense foliage of two trees *(colour plate 5)*. This rare landscape is remarkably well balanced.

Quite different from the rock pictures of the north are the distinctive red-painted ones of the south, most typically those of Yunnan and Guangxi.

Ten sites have been found in Cangyuan in the Awa Mountains on the Burmese border, some with hundreds of representations of men and animals, subjects including hunts, fights, dances, villages, buffaloes and monkeys *(colour plate 6)*. One picture shows a circle of dancers holding one palm upwards and the other at the side, much as local dancers do today. The figures are shown in vertical projection, lying on the ground like a five-petalled flower. Radiocarbon dating puts the Cangyuan pictures at three thousand years old.

Noteworthy among the several rock picture sites in Yunnan is the meticulously done red, white and black painting of two naked tutelary gods on Dawang Cliff in Malipo County.

Guangxi's rock pictures are mainly located in the valleys of the Zuo and its tributary the Ming, particularly at bends in the stream and on cliffs above rapids. At Huashan Mountain on the Ming is a cliff 200 metres long and 40 metres high bearing over a thousand human figures, naked with their arms raised and their legs spread in a primitive dance posture and surrounded by animals, bronze drums, cymbals and the sun *(colour plate 7)*. The taller figures wearing swords are thought to be chieftains. The lively colours and sprightly images convey a distinctive ethnic flavour.

The pictures of this area are variously interpreted as victory celebrations or hunting dances. Certainly the artists who risked their lives scaling the treacherous cliffs had other than purely aesthetic ends in view, and the locations themselves suggest an appeal to the collective spirit of the tribe to ward off floods.

In short, Chinese rock pictures share many of the characteristics of those found elsewhere. The lack of sophistication in composition reflects the simplicity of man's infant imagination, but no matter what their technical limitations, the pictures, whether cut or coloured, achieve a realistic and vigorous vitality that later artists must struggle to recapture but which appeals to us directly over the centuries.

Translated by Song Shouquan

Strategies
of the Warring States

The Strategies of the Warring States (Zhan Guo Ce) *is a record of the events of the Warring States Period (475-221 BC), when the seven most powerful vassals of the King of Zhou proclaimed themselves kings in their own right and their fiefs sovereign kingdoms, relieving their erstwhile liege of his remaining lands around Luoyang in 256 BC. This act ended the Zhou Dynasty, which had reigned since the 11th century BC.*

In 221 BC the kingdom of Qin at last succeeded in defeating all its rivals, and its ruler took the title "First Emperor of Qin", thus inaugurating the imperial system that was to last until 1911.

The Strategies of the Warring States *was compiled by Liu Xiang during the first century BC after the Qin Dynasty had been succeeded by the Han. The material is drawn from contemporary records and arranged anecdotally within sections devoted to each of the kingdoms covered. It is the most important surviving literary source for the history of the period.*

— The Editors

How Su Dai Earned Respect for Gan Mao in Qi

(from the "Strategies of Qin")

Gan Mao, exiled from Qin and on his way to Qi, was crossing the pass when he met Master Su.

"Tell me," he asked, "have you heard the story about the Yangtse virgins?"

"No," replied Master Su.

"Well, one of them," said Gan Mao, "was too poor to get herself candles, so the others got together, talked it over and decided to send her away. Before she left, she said to them, 'Because I have no candles, I am always the first to clean the house and lay out the mats. Why do you begrudge me the extra light on the walls? It would be a happy gift that would do you no harm. I would say you would benefit from it. Why send me away for that?' They talked it over, concluded that she was right and kept her. I myself am crossing the border because I have been hounded out of Qin for my shortcomings. May I clean your house and lay out your mats without fear of being driven away?"

"Certainly," said Master Su. "And if I may, I will make you respected in Qi." With this, he set out westwards and explained matters to the King of Qin.

"Gan Mao," he said, "is a gentleman of extraordinary wisdom respected by many generations when he lived in Qin, and his complete familiarity with the strategic strengths and weaknesses of the terrain around Mount Xiao and the Xi Valley would not be helpful to Qin if he turned Qi against you in alliance with Han and Wei."

"What then do you suggest?" asked the King of Qin.

"Your best course," said Su Dai, "is to invite him back with honourable gifts and a substantial salary. Put him in Scholartree Valley for life, never let him go, and the world can scheme against Qin in vain."

"Very well," said the King, and invited him back from Qi as a prime-ministerial high councillor, which Gan Mao refused and would not go back. This Su Dai misrepresented to King Min of Qi.

"Mao is wise," he said. "Out of gratitude to Your Majesty, he has declined to go back to Qin as a prime-ministerial high councillor,

preferring Your Majesty's service. How will you reward him? He will not remain grateful if you do not keep him, and we shall be hard pressed if Qin puts his wisdom to effect in strengthening its forces."

"Indeed," said the King of Qi, and installed him officially as high councillor.

How Lü Buwei Supported the Crown Prince of Qin

(from the "Strategies of Qin")

Lü Buwei of Puyang met the hostage Prince Yiren of Qin on a business trip to Handan.

"What profit is there in farming?" he asked his father when he returned home.

"Ten per cent."

"How much from jewelry?"

"One hundred per cent."

"And how much from setting a man on a throne?"

"Incalculable."

"The hardest work on a farm cannot clothe you warmly or feed you more than adequately. I propose instead to found a royal line, the fruits of which can descend to posterity."

He went therefore and laid the idea before Prince Yiren of Qin, who was residing at Jiaocheng as a hostage to Zhao.

"Prince Xi," he said, "is in line to inherit the throne and has a mother at court, whereas you yourself, with no mother at court, have been entrusted to an unfathomable country, where at any moment a repudiated agreement could reduce you to dung. I have for your consideration a plan to return you to Qin as its ruler. I am certain that with me as your advocate Qin will send for you."

He then went to Lord Yangquan, the brother of the Queen of Qin.

"Are you aware, my lord," he said, "that you have committed a capital crime? There is not one of your retinue that does not occupy a position of the greatest eminence, while the Crown Prince has no nobles in his own. Your coffers are filled with pearls and jewels, your stables with thoroughbreds and your chambers with beauties. The day will come when the King, who is advanced in years, will reign no more, and your position when the Crown Prince is in charge

will be more precarious than that of a pile of eggs. You will not outlast the hibiscus which fades at dusk. I will tell you a way to avoid all this and have an eternity of riches as securely moored around as Mount Tai in place of the death that menaces you."

Lord Yangquan started from his seat and asked him to do so.

"The King is old," said Buwei, "and the Queen is childless. Prince Xi is due to inherit, in which Shicang will assist him and take power when Prince Xi succeeds to His Majesty's throne, while the Queen will fall from favour. Prince Yiren, a wise and able man cast away in Zhao and with no mother at home, is craning his neck westwards for an opportunity to return. If the Queen were to petition for him to inherit, he would gain a throne and she a son, which neither now has."

"Yes," said Lord Yangquan and went to court to propose this to the Queen, who requested Prince Yiren's return from Zhao. While this was pending, Buwei went to Zhao to put the case there.

"Prince Yiren," he said, "is Qin's favourite son. He has no mother at court, and the Queen wishes to adopt him. Qin will not let one prince prejudice any plan to put down Zhao, so as a hostage he is not worth holding, whereas if he is allowed to return and succeeds to the throne he cannot in good conscience work against Zhao, to which he will be indebted for generosity in sending him home. Gratitude will naturally make him accommodating. The King of Qin is old, and when he goes, possession of Yiren will give you no power to restrain Qin."

Zhao therefore returned Yiren, who on his arrival was dressed by Buwei in the Chu fashion for his audience.

"I am from Chu," said the Queen, pleased with his appearance and appreciating his knowledge, and renamed him Chu on his adoption.

The King wanted him to recite his lessons.

"My youth," said Yiren, "was spent in distant exile, where I never had a tutor. I am not used to reciting what learning I have." The King let this pass, and he remained.

Yiren asked for a private audience.

"Your Majesty has visited Zhao and is known to many of the worthies of that country, who look with hope to the west now that you are back in your own land. They will, I daresay, be resentful if you never once send to ask after them, which will cause closures of the frontier."

The King agreed and thought the plan ingenious, so that when the Queen urged him to elevate Yiren, he summoned his ministers.

"Chu is to be made Crown Prince," he commanded, "for he is the best of our sons."

When Chu became king, Buwei was made prime minister with the title of Marquis of Civil Trust and the revenues of twelve counties in Lantian, while the Queen became Queen Mother Huayang, and the other rulers ceded cities to Qin.

Huizi's Advice to Tianxu

(from the "Strategies of Wei")

"You should," said Huizi to Tianxu, who was highly esteemed by the King of Wei, "cultivate the other courtiers. A poplar tree, you see, will grow if it is planted sideways, upside-down or even bent over, but none will grow if one man uproots all the trees ten men can plant, and that one man can undo the work of ten planting such easily grown trees for the simple reason that planting them is harder than removing them. You have planted yourself by the King, but a perilously large number of people want to remove you."

How Tang Qie Intimidated the King of Qin

(from the "Strategies of Wei")

The King of Qin sent a message to the Lord of Anling saying, "I will give you five hundred *li* of land in exchange for Anling. I hope you are agreeable."

"It is too kind of His Majesty to offer more than he receives," replied the Lord of Anling, "but good as he is, I prefer to keep the same land I inherited."

The King of Qin was displeased, and the Lord of Anling sent Tang Qie to him as his ambassador.

"Why," the King asked Tang Qie, "does the Lord of Anling refuse my offer of five hundred *li* of land for Anling? Qin has wiped out both Han and Wei but not touched Anling, a place of only fifty *li*,

because I revere the Lord of Anling as an elder and would not scheme. I am offering to increase his land tenfold, yet he turns me down. Is it to belittle me?"

"No," said Tang Qie, "that is not the reason. He would not give up his inheritance for a thousand *li*, let alone five hundred."

The King then flew into a passion. "Are you familiar with the anger of the Son of Heaven?" he asked Tang Qie.

"No," replied Tang Qie.

"It strews a million corpses and spills a thousand *li* of blood," said the King.

"And is Your Majesty familiar with the anger of commoners?" asked Tang Qie.

"Yes," said the King. "They do no more than doff their hats and strike their heads barefoot on the ground."

"That," said Tang Qie, "is the anger of menials, not of gentlemen. Zhuan Zhu killed Wang Liao when a comet attacked the moon; Nie Zheng killed Han Gui when a white rainbow pierced the sun; and Yao Li killed Qing Ji when a dark eagle circled over the court. Before these three gentlemen commoners released their pent-up anger omens had burst from heaven. And I will make a fourth. When a gentleman is forced to anger, he strews two corpses and spills five yards of blood, and the world dons mourning. So shall it be today!" He stood up and raised his sword. The King of Qin fell to his knees with a grimace and begged long to be spared.

"Sit, sir," he said. "Surely you go too far. I realize now that the reason Anling has kept its fifty *li* of land while Wei and Han no longer exist is that Anling has a gentleman like you."

How Zheng Xiu Slandered the Beauty of Wei

(from the "Strategies of Chu")

Zheng Xiu, wife of the King of Chu, took great care of a beauty whom the King had received from the King of Wei, knowing how pleased he was with his new consort. She picked out for her the clothes and trinkets she liked best and the apartments and furniture she liked most, taking better care of her than did the King.

"Women serve men with their looks," said the King, "and jealousy is their nature. Because I like the new consort, Zheng Xiu takes greater care of her than I do myself, more as a dutiful child would serve its parents or a loyal minister his lord."

Zheng Xiu learned that the King thought her immune to jealousy.

"His Majesty admires your beauty," she said to the new consort, "all except your nose. You had better cover it up when you see him."

She did so.

"Tell me," the King asked Zheng Xiu, "why does she cover her nose in my presence?"

"I know why she does that," said Zheng Xiu.

"Then tell me, painful as it may be," said the King.

"She is somewhat pained by Your Majesty's odour."

"How outrageous!" said the King. "Let her nose be cut off. That will put a stop to her truculence."

How a Man from Qi Dissuaded the Lord of Jingguo from Fortifying Xue

(from the "Strategies of Qi")

The Lord of Jingguo told his usher not to admit any visitors, as many had tried to persuade him to drop his planned fortification of Xue. One man from Qi made the following request:

"Allow me just three words. Boil me if I say one more."

This gained him an audience. He rushed in, said, "Big sea fish," and then turned to go.

"Stay where you are," said His Lordship.

"I prefer not to trifle with death," said the visitor.

"You shall not," said His Lordship. "Rephrase what you said."

"Have you never heard," he explained, "how fish that are too big to be caught in nets or drawn in on hooks become sport for mole-crickets and ants when they are washed up out of the water? Qi is your water. Stay in it. Why turn to Xue, whose walls, though they tower to the skies, will avail you nothing when you are out of Qi?"

"True," said His Lordship, and stopped fortifying Xue.

How Nie Zheng Killed Han Gui

(from the "Strategies of Han")

Han Gui was Prime Minister of Han, and Yan Sui was the king's favourite, which caused animosity between the two men. Yan Sui, outspoken in his counsel, referred to Han Gui's shortcomings, for which Han Gui abused him at court, whereupon Yan Sui attacked him with drawn sword.

Han Gui escaped with help, but Yan Sui, fearing reprisals, went into exile in search of someone who might revenge him on Han Gui, and on arrival in Qi heard there of one Nie Zheng of Deep Well in the village of Zhi, where he was hiding from his enemies in a butcher's shop. Yan Sui met secretly with Nie Zheng and intimated his respect for him.

"How do you want me to help?" asked Nie Zheng.

"I have scarcely had time to be of any service to you," said Yan Sui, "and mine is such a minor matter that I shall not presume to ask."

He then set out wine to feast Nie Zheng's mother and offered her two thousand four hundred taels of gold to wish her a long life. Nie Zheng's astonishment was only surpassed by his wonderment at such generosity, but as strenuously as he refused, Yan Sui pressed him, though he still declined.

"My mother is old," he explained. "We are exiles, and I work as a dog butcher to afford her good food morning and night. I support her well enough and cannot in conscience accept your gift."

Yan Sui sent the others out so that he could talk to Nie Zheng.

"I have a score to settle," he told him, "and have travelled from court to court until in Qi I was told of your high regard for justice. It was with this in mind that I ventured to offer you the gold, simply to afford your lady mother some scant sustenance and win your favour. It was in no way meant as an obligation."

"The only reason why I live here by the market well in degradation and denial of my aspirations," said Nie Zheng, "is that it allows me the chance to support my mother in her old age. While she lives, I cannot commit myself to another." He would not take the money, despite Yan Sui's vehement protests.

At length Nie Zheng's mother died. When she was buried and he had put off his mourning clothes, he said, "Alas! Here am I, a bumpkin wielding a butcher's knife, yet I give such short shrift to a councillor of princes like Yan Sui who disregards the miles and his horses

to meet me and offers me an enormous sum for my mother's old age without my having done him any appreciable service, which, though I did not accept it, showed profound esteem for me. Who am I to stand silent when a great man in the transport of his wrath takes a poor wretch into his confidence? Now that my mother, the only obstacle to his request, has come to the end of her days, I will offer my services to this man who appreciates me." And with this he went west to Puyang to see Yan Sui.

"I did not commit myself to you," he said, "only because I had a living parent, who is now no more. On whom do you wish to be avenged?" Yan Sui told him the whole story.

"My enemy," he said, "is Han Gui, Prime Minister of Han and uncle of the Lord of Han. He has a host of clansmen and a standing armed guard. None of the men I have sent to kill him has ever succeeded. You, happily, will not be shy of the task. I will give you chariots and horsemen, sturdy riders to lend wings to you."

"It is not far from Wei to Han," said Nie Zheng, "and the assassination of a prime minister who is a kinsman of his lord should not involve too many men. It would lead to mistakes, word would get out, and you would have all of Han against you, which would be dangerous indeed." Accordingly, he refused the troops and set out for Han alone, sword in hand.

It so happened that he arrived there during a meeting at Dongmeng, attended by the King and the Prime Minister with a great multitude of men at arms to guard them. Nie Zheng walked straight on to the dais and stabbed Han Gui, who had run into the arms of Marquis Ai, so that he ran them both through, panicking their entourage, of whom he killed some dozens with loud cries. He then disfigured his face, put out his eyes and died by disembowelling himself.

The men of Han took Nie Zheng's corpse to the market, where despite a posted reward of a thousand taels it long remained unidentified, until at last his sister Ying made inquiries.

"My brother was a great man," she said. "I must not allow his name to perish out of regard for my own person. He would not have wanted that." She went therefore to Han and looked upon him. "How brave!" she cried. "This lofty spirit outdid Pen and Yu and dwarfed Chengjing. Dead in obscurity, bereft of parents, brotherless, he is left to me to praise, whatever it cost me." Then she embraced the corpse with tears and said, "This was my brother Nie Zheng of Deep Well in the village of Zhi." And she killed herself beside his body.

"The deed was not Nie Zheng's alone," men said when the news reached Jin, Chu, Qi and Wei, "but his sister's too, who was a heroine in her own right." And Nie Zheng's name is remembered in after days because of his sister who praised him though she risked being cut to ribbons for her pains.

How the Lord of Zhongshan Got Two Soldiers for a Pot of Gruel

(from the "Strategies of Zhongshan")

The Lord of Zhongshan feasted the notables of his capital, among them Sima Ziqi, who was so angered when the mutton stew did not go round that he took himself off to Chu and persuaded the King of Chu to invade Zhongshan. The Lord of Zhongshan fled and was followed by two men bearing spears.

"Why are you doing this?" he asked, turning to them.

"When our father was dying of hunger," they said, "Your Lordship sent him a pot of gruel to eat, and on his deathbed he told us that when Zhongshan was in need, we must die for her, so we have come to die for Your Lordship."

The Lord of Zhongshan looked up and heaved a deep sigh.

"Expect more," he said, "from a timely gift than from a great one, and more from a heartfelt wrong than from a grave one. I have fled my land over a bowl of mutton stew and got two soldiers for a pot of gruel."

Translated by Simon Johnstone

Little Poems of Floating Clouds

Zong Baihua

Spring and Light

You want to know the secrets of the spring?
Is all you feel as delicately shy
As the soft, fluttering
Wing of the butterfly?
Are all the songs that hover in your soul
Songs that eternally, unfalteringly long,
Outflung
In space, as day and night go by?
Are they as free, as endless as the song
Sung
By the oriole?
And is the breath that from your nostrils flows
As fragrant as the petal-whispered sigh
That breaks so softly from the soul
Of the spring rose?
You want to know the secret things in light?
Have you, when through the woods in swinging streams
The evening sun descended in his flight,
Danced with his beams?
Or have you, when the moon rose from the hill

Zong Baihua, born in 1897 in Jiangsu, is a poet and scholar of aesthetics. He is a professor at Beijing University.

And twilight lingers undecidedly,
Felt that you swing within her icy thrill,
Tremulously?
Or have you, when on the nocturnal sky
The light of stars
Sheds floods of silver, felt your spirit fly
Among the stars?

In the Garden

We walked into the garden
And I pressed
A delicate sad flower
Into her hand.
"This is my heart," I said,
"Take it from me."
She held the flower in her trembling hand
And her pure tears fell over it as falls
The morning dew.
I whispered: "See! My heart!
How full it is of life!"

We

Under the Milky Way we stand, together.
The world of man has been submerged in sleep.
The twin stars high in the sky
Reflect themselves in our hearts.
I hold your hand, in silence,
Looking at the sky —
And a fine tremor that is mystery
Passes through what is deepest in two hearts.

Hearing a Lute

Hearing the sound — sea of a lute,
I bowed my head.
This world, this life,
In all their endlessness,
Flowed past my heart.
A hidden grief within my heart, I listened on,
Then, suddenly I heard a song
That frightened me.
The flower in my hand
Dropped to the ground.
My heart fled in deep darkness
And tears, and tears,
Fell like the rain.

The Moon's Sad Song

Friend sun has left the world of man.
His last ray-greetings on the snowy peaks
Have called me from my sleep in the deep dale.
Still half asleep, I cling to the steep rocks
And rise.
The pillow-pressed red cheek, cloud-heaped black hair:
Betwixt its dangling strands, I peep out to
That far-off world of man.
Beloved world of man, I thought of you so long
And now again you lie before my eyes.
Beloved world of man, why do you seem so cold?
Why do you not outpour yourself in song?
Whereto went all the poets who have sung me?
Why don't I hear the harp strings that have praised me?
I see no lovers holding hands
Where solitary forests span.

Through the bright windows I can't hear
The sobbing song of hands in sleeves.
Those out-stretched cities densely set with walls!
My heart beats fast with fear, tears fill my eyes!
Beloved world of man, have you forgotten me?
The climbing vines upon the wall, they love me still,
They nod their heads, and as the wind goes by,
They seem to drop.
The deep green waters of the lake shine in my heart,
And, glistening as crystals, shed their sheen on me.
The lotus in the pond is overwhelmed with grief;
She closed her eyes, filled with great tears, and sleeps.
The brow of hills enshrouded in grave sorrow-clouds,
Stares at me wordlessly.
The sobbing fountain flows on to the east.
Beloved world of man; I have not seen a single man's face!
My head droops under tears
That made my eyes grow red,
And thus I lean upon the morning clouds.

The Stream of Life

The stream of life in me,
Like cloud waves o'er the sea, eternally
Reflects the endless blueness of the ocean-sky.

The stream of life in me,
Like wavelets on the brook, eternally
Holds the reflection of green hills and verdant trees.

The stream of life in me,
Like sound waves on lute strings, eternally
Suffuses the autumn stars and moonlight through the pines.

The stream of life in me,
A wave from her heart-spring, eternally
Embraces all the thought-tides in her breast.

Little Poem

Upon the tree of life
A flower faded
And fell upon my breast.
I held it softly to my heart,
And as it touched the song within my heart,
It melted in a poem that is flower.

Shore of the Eastern Sea

The floating light
Of moon tonight
Has laid its image in my heart.
And near the sea,
So quietly,
I stand and hear
The melody
High in the astral sphere.

A flower, solitarily,
Lies sleeping at my side.
And I inhale her dream's perfume,
Ah! dreams of moonlight wide.
And as I hold her in my hand
I know she dreams a bridal dream,
While I below the moon's cold gleam
Dream of my homeland.

The Poet

The setting sun before the window,
Across the endless sky, spans through the rain,
A seven-coloured giant rainbow.
The ageless poet weaves
From sorrow-clouds of human life
Great songs that conquer space
And span all ages.

Winter

White, gleaming snow
And dark brown leaves
Laid on the world a heavy covering —
And yet, my friend, in all the cold I know
That in the depth of your warm heartbeat grieves
The bold, bright blossom brow of a new spring.

Shelley

As a lyre suspended from a lofty balcony
Issues forth supernal melody
When the wind blows by;
As the spring birds fly
In the blue cloud-scattered sky,
And having passed,
Their voices last
For long. . . .
Shelley!
Thus have I heard thy song.

To a Statue of Goethe

Your large eyes
Span the universe
And yet betray,
Though dimly,
Your childlike heart.

Morning

The night went by,
The morning rose.
Its blue cold rays
Broke through the gloom
And now impose
Themselves upon my room.
The last dim shades of night
Withdraw to darker nooks before the light.
Reality spreads its great sheet apart.
Space opened up and lies unfurled.
O, this so closely woven world
Again enshrouds my brittle, lonesome heart.

Green Shade

Awake!
Green shade like dream
Enfolds her.
And as she leans against the vine
Its flowers, shaken by the breeze,
Drop on her breast.

She does not heed them.
The birds have picked their way
Right to the border of her skirt.
Her eyes just lightly opened,
Droop again.
How deep her thoughts must be!
The thick green shade
Enfolds her in a net of dreams.

My Heart

My heart
Is like a fountain
In the vale.
It only does relume
Star-light in the blue sky.
It only flows
With lunar gleam.
And sometimes
At the spring's approach
It may sob songs
Of yearning.

Translated by Ernst Schwarz

Zong Baihua

Poetry and I

I came rather unexpectedly to write poetry. I remember writing in one of my letters to Mr Guo Moruo: "Our hearts should not lack the atmosphere of poetry, but there is no necessity to 'make' poems." This induced Mr Guo Moruo to express his views in an exhaustive discussion: he claimed that poems should not be made but "written". I fully agree, of course, with this view. It is just because I did not wish to be fettered by considerations of form that I denied the necessity of "making" poems.

And yet, my later writing of poems came not quite so unexpectedly. I can recollect some of the peculiarities of my childhood feelings that somehow seem to be related to the poems I wrote in later years.

Although I was a playful child, not very assiduous in my studies, I cherished a deep love for the natural beauty of hills and rivers. The closest friends of my childish heart were the white clouds in the sky and the drooping willows near the Fucheng Bridge. I loved to sit alone on a rock near the water and look at the changing shapes of the clouds. I enjoyed the childish fantasies that welled up in my mind. The objects of my solitary play were those numberless shapes of clouds in the shifting winds of the morning and evening hours. Cities offer but little beauty; but in the floating clouds appear islands and sand banks, mountain peaks and lakes. One day I conceived the idea of classifying clouds according to their particular qualities as Han clouds, Tang clouds, lyric clouds, dramatic clouds, and so on, and even thought of writing a guidebook on clouds.

Every Sunday my little companions and I made excursions to the quiet beauty spots in the suburbs of Nanjing — the Hill of Tranquil

Cold, the Leaf Sweeper's Loft, the Rain Blossom Terrace or the Lake of Joy. I still remember two lines in one of the little essays I wrote then:

> Pick stones at the Rain Blossom Terrace.
> At the Leaf Sweeper's Loft seek poetry.

The serene landscape had a great power over my young heart. A deep and distant romantic sentiment made me seek something in the greenness of woods, the red cirrus at sunset and the soft sound of bells of far-off monasteries. An ineffable transcendental thought stirred my soul and made it swell with unquiet emotions. Especially in the depth of night, stretched out in my bed, I loved to listen to the tunes of a distant flute. In such moments I felt the interweaving of an inexpressible feeling of profound grief with a likewise inexpressible feeling of gladness. I almost felt myself grow into one with the gleam of the moon and the luminous mist before my window and, floating betwixt the boughs of trees, follow the sound of the flute.... To me this was the time of extreme happiness.

At the age of thirteen I had already created a world of my own. My family thought me precocious; and yet I had studied very little, and in fact did not like to study. Poetry I had not come across at all. It was only that I loved to conjure up images, that I had my own strange dreams and feelings.

After a severe illness at the age of seventeen, I went, not quite recuperated yet, to Qingdao to continue my studies. After an illness the nerves seem to be especially sensitive. The sea breeze of Qingdao roused my heart to maturity. The world appeared to me so beautiful, life so broad and strong, and the open sea became the symbol of the world and of life.

At this time I loved the sea with the same intensity with which I had loved the clouds. Also the sea abounds in metamorphoses; the sea of moonlit nights, waves under a starry sky, giant billows and foamy crests tossed up in anger, misty sea at dawn, and the immense golden expanse of water dotted with glittering sails. Sometimes, sitting alone on the shore, the soft whisper of waves was almost like human talk, telling me the innermost feelings of their hearts. I really loved the sea; I felt that I understood it, as a man may understand the soul and every faintest movement of the woman he loves.

In the six months I spent in Qingdao, I did not read or write one single poem. But life itself was poetry. This was perhaps the most

Zong Baihua

lyrical time of my life. At this age the heart brims over with permanent spring. In its lucidity lies happiness, and no dust seems to fall on it.

In the summer of the same year I left Qingdao for Shanghai, where I stayed with my maternal grandfather, a poet himself. Every morning I heard him, in a high-pitched voice, reciting poems in the little courtyard. The deep sadness in the cadence of his recitations held a certain spell. I looked secretly at his book — a collection of the Song poet Lu You's works. Later I went to a book store and bought a copy for myself. That was my first acquaintance with lyrical literature. But after I had read only a few poems, I lost all interest. I was then still too young to enjoy Lu You's poetry.

In the autumn I commenced my studies at Tongji University. One of my room-mates was a devout Buddhist. Sitting cross-legged on his bed, he used to chant the Lankavastara Sutra. The modulations of his voice conveyed a feeling of purity and remoteness, a sensation of being lifted out of this world. I was deeply impressed. I liked to lie on my bed and listen, with closed eyes, to the stanzas he chanted. The beauty of the stanzas of the Lankavastara Sutra induced me to

read the scripture myself. The austere and majestic world of Buddhist thought somehow met a latent philosophical strain in my heart. My philosophical studies originated in this incident. Zhuangzi, Kant, Schopenhauer and Goethe appeared in succession as stars in the sky of my mind and left their indelible marks on my spirit and character. "Look at the world with the eyes of Schopenhauer, and take Goethe's spirit as a model of personality" was the motto I chose at that time.

Once I bought a Japanese edition of Wang Wei's and Meng Jiao's poems. Back home I read through it and felt exceedingly pleased. Particularly the tranquil beauty and aloofness of Wang Wei coincided with my predilections of this period. Two of Wang Wei's lines followed me everywhere, especially on my solitary strolls in the fields near the university:

> As I have wandered to the water's end,
> I sit and see the rising of the clouds.

The sphere in which the poetic spirit of Wang Wei, Meng Jiao, Liu Zongyuan and Wei Yingwu moves, is permeated by a quiet harmony and imposing stillness; the place of conventional mannerisms is filled by an innocent delight in nature, and intensity of feeling is expressed in a subdued and mellowed form. I was immensely delighted. The little short poems I wrote later were decidedly under the influence of the four-lined poems of the Tang Dynasty, while there was no influence of Japanese poetry and hardly any from Tagore's lyrics. But some of my friends and I liked to recite Huang Zhongsu's Chinese translation of Tagore's *Gardener*. The sad, sobbing tone in his voice fascinated me and evoked a vague cosmic longing.

I had spent two winter vacations of my high-school time in a little mountain-girded town of great beauty in the east of Zhejiang Province. The graceful and serene mountains surrounding the town looked misty and dream-like. The breath of spring seemed to have risen earlier in a landscape blessed with so much beauty. Wherever the eyes wandered, they were met by a variety of dark and light blue shades, sheen of the lake and shadows of peaks. One almost felt oneself transformed into a diaphanous body. And at that time my youthful heart bathed itself for the first time in feelings of love, as a white lotus, slowly unfolding itself in the morning mist, greeting the newly born sun, silently trembling, opening up. One frightened and yet joyous sigh, and a rosy hue has covered its heart.

Pure and profound love together with quiet beauty of nature have interlaced themselves in my feeling of life as a permanent delicate

rhythm, accompanying my concentrated reflections under the moon and rambling meditations in twilight.

At that time I loved to read poetry; I loved to have my friend listen to me reading poetry. At night, when the town was enveloped in the deep silence, I sat, with knees drawn up, feeling that the poets and I were in complete communion. Two lines of one of my friend's poems may describe my feelings at that time:

> The coloured lamp, the whole town lies in dreams.
> The lucid moon, heart that will never die.

I visited the East Mountain, made famous by the Jin poet and statesman Xie An's sojourn there. On the mountain there are still many sights reminiscent of Xie An: his temple, the Rose Grotto, the Sandal Washing Pond and the Chess Pavilion. I wrote a few poems commemorating my visit to the mountain. This was my first attempt at writing poetry. Although the poems I wrote then are now no more than petrifications of a literature that has ceased to be alive, they may be quoted as illustrations of my trip:

> I climbed the steep path to the East Mount Temple;
> The evening bells rang peace o'er brook and rock.
> Pale vapours pile, mist hung upon the branches,
> And rippling runnels in the slanting sun.
>
> The cypress twins have still retained their greenness;
> The rose before the grotto reddens still.
> Only the hero paled like clouds or waters;
> I mourn before his traces in this age.
>
> Jade tinkle in the spring drops dropping in the brook,
> The mountain covered with tranquillity,
> Like Xie An's footprints on the rain-drenched moss;
> The rustling autumn leaves sound chessboard patter.
>
> The carp spy at the new green from the pond;
> The crows caw at the late sun from old trees.
> I sit, oblivious of the world that holds me,
> In frosty moonshine at the temple window.

And in "Farewell to East Mount" I wrote:

> My feet were loth to leave East Mount for home
> And lingered by the crooked ancient wall,
> Where spring paled on the rainy peaks at eve
> And one bird fluttered in all the wind-chilled trees.

> The homing island boat clasped the cold moon;
> The wild bank ferry chased the fading blossom.
> I turned to glimpse the cloud-sealed battlements
> And raised my cup dully to gloomy hills.

Poems written in the antique styles invariably convey an atmosphere of satiated maturity. As I re-read my poems of that time, I feel that they do not look like creations of a boy in his teens. I hardly ever wrote in that style again. But about twenty years later, when I lived by the Jialing River, I wrote another poem of the classic type:

> From the horizon blows the evening breeze.
> The verdant trees pile dusk upon the peaks.
> The slanting sun drops through a riven cloud
> And paints his cold gleam on the evening stream.
> White herons fly, so stately, leisurely.
> The solitary cloud speeds on its way.
> Where boats are moored, the moon unmoors herself,
> And in her pureness bathe all things in space.

In 1918 and 1919 I began to write philosophical essays, but my heart still belonged to literature; particularly German romantic literature occupied an important place in it. I felt great delight in Goethe's shorter poems. Kang Baiqing and Guo Moruo's creations aroused my interest in the modern type of Chinese poetry. But my only attempt at writing this style of poetry was the poem "Questions for My Fatherland".

In 1920 I went to Germany for studies. My direct contact with the world outside China and my personal acquaintance with other peoples gave a new impetus to my mind and tore it from the tranquillity of meditation into the whirlpool of active life. For three weeks I wandered through the cultural centres of Paris. My profound reverence for the poetic spirit was, at this time, transferred to the life-breathing statues of Rodin.

Only now could I understand the gigantic drama of modern man, the rhythm of city life, and the manifold expressions of power. Suddenly I felt a deep interest in contemporary problems. All pessimism dropped from me and expectations of a still more powerful, more glorious mankind filled my being. But a little later I fell under the spell of the ancient Rhine and the hoary castles flanking its banks. I dreamt anew the dreams of a classic past and its alluring romance. Two years ago I wrote a poem that gives expression to my feelings at that time, the clash of divergent elements in the heart of a modern man:

It's day — I open wide life's window,
The willow branches pat the window frame.
Ridges of roof tops, ranks of chimneys
And windows stare, unnumbered, teeming life.
Movement, creation, illusion and enjoyments;
Films, pictures, speed or change?
Rhythm of life, rhythm of steel machines,
Driving the wheels of society, cosmic rhythm.
White clouds float on the sky;
Man moves in city haste.

It's night — I closed life's window tightly.
In the redness of the lamp within the chamber,
Flutters the shadow of the heart's reflections.
The Parthenon in Athens, castles at the Rhine.
Cold moonlight in the hills, lone boat upon the sea.
It's poetry, dream, cold gloom and memories?
Fine fleecy strands weave into life's illusions.
The world lies now asleep before the window,
But in the chamber harks the waking heart
To secret songs of life,
Blown from afar.

From the height of city dwellings I watched the rushing crowd below, welded together in a solidarity of movement meant to advance the cause of humankind. The sad majesty of human life affrighted me. I felt the infinitesimal value of personal existence, the minuteness of a wavelet in the roaring giant billows of the ocean. And yet, the Weltschmerz in my heart longed for a ray of light to illumine the vagueness of the future, yearned to perceive the secret rhythm of eternity, an intuitive understanding of the quiet harmony of the universe.

In the winter of 1921 I spent a romantic evening in the house of a professor and admirer of Eastern cultures. When I walked home after the dance in the blue reflections of the snow, an ineffable emotion urged me to write poetry. From this day on over a period of one year, I was possessed by a continuous impulse. During my promenades in twilight, my silent meditations under the stars, in the gripping loneliness when perched among the crowd, it was as if I heard an unnameable melody, a melody I could not grasp fully and yet wanted to shout into the world. In the night, when I had put out the light and lay in bed, when the multitude of city noise had given way to peaceful rest,

I trembled with excitement and could not find sleep. In the stillness I felt the breath of the city, spread out before my window, a rhythmical breath, comparable to the soft rippling surface of the ocean at rest. When the moon shone down on this world, exhausted in movement and now at peace again, I could not resist the intrusion of remote thoughts. They brought sorrow and happiness, they seemed to make me understand and yet to blur my power of understanding. In the icy unspeakable desolation of feeling lay a likewise indescribable sensation of loving warmth. I felt as if my heart and distant nature had burrowed together with the vast multitude of mankind a deep subterranean secret corridor that permitted me in the absolute stillness of being to sense directly and intimately the nature of life. Most of the *Little Poems of Floating Clouds* were written in this state of mind. Many times I crawled out of bed, searched for matches in the dark, and having lit the candle, wrote my poems in its flickering light — poems which are not likely to strike a kindred chord in the hearts of contemporary man, but gave me great consolation in those hours of lonesomeness. The two poems "Night" and "Morning" have commemorated such sleepless nights of poetic creation.

But I am not devoted solely to the beauties of night. I have sung the red rising sun as he breaks through the morning clouds. I love light, I love the sea, I love the warmth emanating from human life, the passionate feeling of the masses inspired by the same thought, alive with excitement and power. I am not really a poet; I merely hold that it is the poet's duty to arouse humanity to light, love and warmth. Gorky said of poetry that it does not belong to facts of reality, but facts transcending reality. Goethe claimed that reality ought to be raised to the height of poetry. These are also my views of poetry and reality.

Translated by Ernst Schwarz

Zong Baihua

On Chinese Painting

The study of aesthetics ought to take as its subject the entire world of beauty, including the beauty of the universe, the beauty of human existence and the beauty of art. However, that study traditionally has been inclined towards taking art as a point of departure, even considering art as its only subject. Because the creation of art is a conscious manifestation of mankind's ideal of beauty, we are able to appreciate that which has been considered beautiful by each culture during each historical period. The reason why Western aesthetic theory and Western art historically have reflected each other is because Western aesthetics has taken Western art as its foundation. Hellenic art created such concepts in Western aesthetics as "form", "harmony", "imitation of nature" and "unity within complexity", concepts which remain relevant even today. Modern art since the time of the Renaissance has been concerned with such concepts as the "expression of life" and the "revealing of emotion". In contrast, the heart of Chinese art — painting — has given Chinese painting such concepts as "vivid expression of moods", "control of brush and ink", "abstractness versus concreteness" and "the brilliance of *yang* versus the darkness of *yin*".

In the world of the future, the study of aesthetics should not be limited in subject to the artistic expression of any one time or place; rather, its subject should be a synthesis of the artistic ideals of all cultures from antiquity to modern times. The study of aesthetics can be mastered only through a comprehensive study of the subject, striving to fathom the most universal aesthetic principles while not overlooking the special characteristics and style of each culture and era. This is because the source of beauty and fine arts is the reverberations which arise when the deepest part of the human heart and soul interacts with and is conscious of its physical environment.

Each of the arts has its own particular world view which has at its deepest foundation human feelings. Chinese art and aesthetic theory have a unique, independent spiritual meaning. Therefore, Chinese painters have their own special contribution to make with regard to the future of world aesthetics.

What, then, is the Chinese spirit expressed in Chinese painting? How does it differ from the Western spirit? Reflected in the minds of the ancient Greeks was the cosmos, which was perfect, complete, harmonious, ordered. It was finite and quiescent. The human body represented a small universe within the larger universe. Harmony and order within a human were reflections of the spirit of the universe. The great Greek artists sculpted in stone the human body as a symbol of godhead. Greek philosophers took "harmony" as a basic principle of beauty.

However, since the Renaissance modern man has viewed the universe as infinite space with infinite life. Humans were seen as being engaged in endless striving towards infinity. Western art, then, as typified by Gothic church spires soaring to the skies, was an expression of the human desire to reach infinity. The portraits painted by Rembrandt each have an expression of a lively soul; the background of each painting is a boundless expanse of space. Goethe's *Faust* is motivated by a ceaseless pursuit of his own fate. The distinguishing mark of the spirit of modern Western civilization can be described as "a ceaseless striving towards an infinite universe".

What exactly is the fundamental animus expressed in Chinese painting? My answer is: this animus does not arise out of the reverent imitation of the reality of a world which is viewed as a finite whole, neither does it come out of an agonized state of mind which is the result of a ceaseless striving towards infinity. Rather, what lies at the most fundamental level of Chinese painting is an animus of an integrated fusing, a melting into one, a quiet and deep submerging of the self into the infinity of nature, the infinity of space. The state of enlightenment reached in this submerging of the self is one of quiescence. The universe, whose movements follow the laws of nature, is simultaneously active and inactive; therefore a human who is at one with the spirit of nature is also both active and inactive at the same time. The subjects depicted in Chinese painting, such as mountains and rivers, humans, birds, flowers, insects and fishes, are all imbued with life — the vital energy of a work of art. However, since nature obeys certain laws, which the ancient philosophers Laozi and Zhuangzi referred to as the *Tao*, and since the artist has a tacit understanding with nature, there exists within

the painting a profound level of latent stillness. Even the birds and flowers, insects and fishes in the painting all seem like they are sinking into oblivion in the void of the universe. The artistic conception is spacious, deep, serene.

As for landscape painting, even just one hill or valley painted by Ni Yunlin could not be depicted more simply. The process is like the *Tao*: one reduces it, and reduces it yet again until what is obtained is a diamond-like, inextinguishable essence in the midst of the shining void. Landscape painting expresses an endless stillness, and at the same time it expresses nature's profoundest, most final structure. There is something in this similar to Plato's idea that though heaven and earth be destroyed, the concept of this mountain or those waters is indestructible.

In the traditional Chinese view, the deepest part of the universe is a formless, colourless void. This void, however, is the source of nature, the basis of all action and a ceaseless creative force. Laozi and Zhuangzi called this void "the *Tao*", "Nature" or "the Emptiness"; Confucianists called it "Heaven". The countless aspects and forms of the world arise out of this void and eventually return to it. The blank surface of paper is thus the true medium for Chinese painting. In Western oil painting, however, the canvas is first entirely covered with colour, on which foundation the artist then paints his lifelike vision of reality using the techniques of perspective. The limit of his possible subjects is the finite number of objects in the world. In Chinese painting, the artist places a few human figures or objects on the blank sheet without worrying whether the human figures are in the midst of space, or the space has been created by the presence of the figures. Man and space dissolve into the void, an effect which imbues the work with countless moods. We feel that this limitless world contains only these few people, yet the fact doesn't at all disconcert us. Moreover, one senses strongly that those few humans in the midst of all that space do not themselves feel that there is now world. This is because in Chinese painting the unpainted background does not represent a vacuum in the total artistic concepts of the work, but rather represents the flowing of the universal spirit, the spirit of life. Da Chongguang once said, "Emptiness and fullness spring from each other. In this way the unpainted portions of a painting become a wondrous realm." The space represented by the unpainted areas is exactly the "emptiness" of Laozi and Zhuangzi's concept of the universe. It is the source of the myriad phenomena of the world, the basis of all action. Chinese landscape painting is the most objective; it stands aloof from

the ego-centred standpoint of perspective in order to depict nature's vast stretches of mountains and rivers. When one climbs to a high point to gaze far off to lofty, cloud-enshrouded peaks, limitless space and a turbid expanse of vapours, the entire endless universe is there as a backdrop to those cloud-encircled heights. Chinese painters do not take any actual scene of nature as a model, sitting opposite it and portraying it, a method which invariably creates an antithesis between painting and artist or observer. Chinese painting frequently depicts desolate, seemingly primaeval landscapes with no sign of human presence. The artist is absent, neither is there any sign of observers; it is purely a natural noumenon, a natural vitality. Therefore, while there is *yin* and *yang*, brightness and darkness, nearness and farness and bigness and smallness, it is not the plastic shadow of form created by a fixed point of view such as is seen in Western oil painting. The standpoint and point of departure of Western and Chinese painting in looking at the universe is fundamentally different. Western painting views space as concrete and fathomable, and portrays space by the use of line and light. The brilliant colour of Western oil-based paints gives a glowing vitality to the areas of space in a painting. Chinese colours are simple and lustreless, and in this respect are not the equal of Western paints. However, they make up for this by an emphasis on brushwork techniques. Chinese painting views space as a limitless universe of vast expanses; in the midst of this all things have brightness and darkness, though without shadow. If someone wanted to merge Chinese and Western painting techniques together in a single painting he would most certainly fail, because he would have failed to recognize the differences in their points of view regarding the universe. Both Giuseppe Castiglione, the Italian painter who came to China in the early 18th century, and Tao Lengyue of modern times are examples of artists who tried to combine Chinese and Western painting and failed. (In the Impressionist school, the artist paints his impressions based on an individual subjective standpoint; in the Expressionist school, the artist expresses his subjective fantasies or emotions; a Chinese painter, however, depicts objective, natural life. These contrasting approaches should not be confused.) It is not that in Chinese painting the artist's individuality is never expressed; rather, his soul already has been totally merged into his use of brush and ink. Sometimes the artist may entrust his soul to one or two of the figures in his painting, who sit completely oblivious in the midst of the mountains and rivers. Like the trees, rocks, waters and clouds around them, they are totally integrated with nature.

For the above reasons, the landscape paintings of the Song (960-1279) and Yuan (1271-1368) Dynasties are simultaneously the most realistic yet at the same time the most abstract works — soul and nature are completely integrated. Paintings of flowers and birds are similarly expressed. The lines from William Blake's poem, "To see a world in a grain of sand,/And Heaven in a wild flower", perfectly describe an exquisite Song bird-and-flower painting. A spring day's colour is entrusted to several tiny peach blossoms; two or three waterfowls evoke the limitless vitality of nature. The Chinese painter is not, like Faust, endlessly pursuing his fate; rather he discovers infinity and expresses it in each hill and valley, in each flower and bird. He is detached, but he has not renounced the world. His paintings stress the spirit, but they are also realistic. Vividness of mood is his ideal, yet his paintings are full of quiescence. In other words, the Chinese painter both transcends nature and is extremely close to it. The German art critic O. Fischer has said that Chinese painting is the world's most soulful art. At the same time, it is nature itself. Expressing this subtle art are the most abstract and most flexible of all artistic tools — brush and ink. The technique of brush and ink is ineffably ingenious. It is a secret possessed by Chinese painters and elaborated on in countless theories of painting over the last thousand or so years.

Translated by Daniel Cole

Hibiscus and Mandarin Ducks by Lü Ji (Ming Dynasty)

Meng Shi

Lü Ji and His "Hibiscus and Mandarin Ducks"

Lü Ji, a native of Ningbo in Zhejiang, established his fame by his flower-and-bird paintings rather than his landscapes or figure paintings, though he was a master in them all. During the Hong Zhi Period (1488-1505) of the Ming Dynasty, when he served as a ceremonial official in the palace by imperial appointment, the imperial painting academy was thriving. Intelligent, energetic, and benefiting from the agreeable environment of various schools, he worked hard and painted prolifically. Originally his flower-and-bird painting followed the technique of Bin Jingzhao (?-c. 1429), then imitated Tang and Song masters until he achieved a remarkable and distinctive technique. Although comparable Ming painters had attached much importance to inking, his works are distinguished by a meticulousness characteristic of the Song academic style. His assiduity is attested by the quantity of his work extant in China and abroad after five hundred years.

Hibiscus and Mandarin Ducks is a typical court painting, representative of his style. The subjects are pine trees, magpies, mandarin ducks, wild ducks, hibiscus and a tawny daylily, which symbolize auspiciousness, longevity and happiness, qualities enduringly favoured by rulers. Although orthodox subjects, they are attractive in Lü Ji's wonderful arrangement: the pair of mandarin ducks stand out in the composition, sporting on the water which occupies the central part of the painting, their colourful plumage shining in the sun. In front are gnarled trunks, a river bank and a tawny daylily, while blooming red

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and white hibiscus peep from a rockery, charmingly delicate. Three magpies twitter on a twig hanging down from above. The foreground of lilies by the water and the far slope give a serene yet lively harmony. This arrangement follows the doctrine of "gold corners and silver sides" propounded by the Song Dynasty painter Ma Yuan, but is more substantial. Several minor intersections of different objects increase the depth. Pine trunks slant out beyond the picture, echoed by gnarled twigs that droop down. Behind them is a masterly arrangement in a limited space of the daylily, rocks and hibiscus with a pair of mandarin ducks and wild ducks. Dense as it is, it seems open due to the backdrop of the lake and bank in the distance. The whole composition is just a touch out of the ordinary.

Lü Ji was a master of modelling. Legend has it that "chicks gathered cheeping around a hen he had painted on a wall". He achieved a striking artistic effect by blending earlier techniques with the method of sketching from life. His birds, flying, twittering, scattered or in groups, whether in action or at rest, are all elegantly proportioned, faithful both to life and to the brush techniques of traditional Chinese painting. For birds, he abandoned the academic orthodoxy of the Song Dynasty, which stressed colours at the expense of inking. Instead, he applied different brush strokes to different parts of birds: lines, dots, slivered strokes and colour. For instance, the wings of the magpies and mandarin ducks here are made natural by dotting and slivering, while their bodies are given a slick, substantial treatment by a rather different dotting and colouring technique. The strongly-coloured mandarin ducks are line-drawn and coloured so as to sparkle cleanly as if fresh out of the water. Beaks, feet and eyes are elaborately rendered so as to be characteristic of the particular species.

He departs from precedent with flowers too. Unlike Song academicians, who laid such emphasis on detailed and delicate rendering of both sides of a leaf, he preferred to convey an atmosphere via qualitative impressions. His other subjects, be they cliffs, old trees, river banks or dancing brooks, all borrow boldly from the brushwork, grandeur and profundity of contemporary landscape painting. He was in fact one of the first to combine landscape and flower-and-bird painting.

The colours in this painting are carefully chosen. The basic umber matches the cool malachite, grass green, mineral yellow and azure which give the mandarin ducks and magpies their gay colours. The hibiscus are white except for three red ones at one side, which echo the red beaks and claws of the magpies and the bills of the mandarin

ducks without displacing the main subjects. The whole arrangement of the colours breaks the dullness of the dominant umber to lend life and charm to the work.

Hibiscus and Mandarin Ducks, in colours on silk, 174 cm by 94 cm, is in the collection of the Rongbaozhai Studio in Beijing.

Translated by Li Guoqing

Zhong Jingwen

Folklore and Classical Literature

The question of the relationship between folklore and classical literature has not been widely researched in China. This is due to two factors: on the one hand, after the establishment of the People's Republic of China, the study of folklore received unfair treatment, being regarded as a bourgeois discipline, and it never received the attention it deserved. With the exception of folk literature, for a time all research in folklore was practically terminated. On the other hand, due to the influence of foreign study methods on the research of classical literature in China during a considerable period, analysis was based primarily on literary criteria, and tended towards literary criticism of individual pieces by writers. Such an unvarying method of research resulted in a certain narrowing of scholars' fields of vision and ossification in their ways of thinking. Satisfied as they were with a one-dimensional presentation of works of ancient literature, these scholars naturally could not make use of materials and references from other branches of the humanities such as history, religious studies, ethnology, cultural anthropology, psychology and other disciplines in a unified, interdisciplinary approach to literary research from a higher standpoint.

However, the phenomenon of literature is very complex, especially that of classical literature, which is a reflection of the social life of people in ancient times and their thoughts and feelings. The content of classical literature is extremely rich and touches on many subjects; it cannot be adequately treated through an approach based only on literary theory. For example, the study of the "Nine Songs" and "Questioning Heaven" from the classical anthology *Chu Ci* alone requires extensive knowledge in many areas of the humanities.

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The linking of folklore with classical literature is merely one aspect of a unified approach to the study of classical literature. The linking of the two disciplines is based on the fact that they both belong to the humanities; both concern themselves with cultural phenomena. Human society is an organic whole, and this fact alone determines that these two disciplines can and even must link up. "Stones from other mountains can be used to polish this piece of jade": this proverb, originally indicating a man's self-enrichment through the cultivation of knowledge from varied sources, is equally applicable to the indisputable benefits that can accrue from the use of the methods and theory of folklore to enrich the research of classical literature.

In the following three sections, three aspects of the connection between folklore and classical literature will be explored.

1. The Position Occupied by Folk Literature in the Study of Classical Literature

Most people are not accustomed to regarding the study of classical literature and that of folklore as neighbouring disciplines; this is because the subjects, scope and methods of research in the two disciplines are quite different. However, they are not unconnected. The most direct and readily apparent connection between them is in the area of folk literature, which is a manifestation of the spiritual culture of the labouring people and which constitutes an important component part of folklore. As the oral literature of the labouring people, it possesses the general characteristics of literary art and is therefore naturally linked with classical literature. It serves as a transitional, intermediary, sometimes even overlapping area between folklore and classical literature. In order to elucidate the effect of folk literature on classical literature, we must first discuss the scope of research of the two individual disciplines.

A. The Relationship of the Scope of Folklore to Folk Literature

Folklore is a branch of the humanities concerned with the study of folk customs and other phenomena. The scope and concepts covered early in the history of the discipline were relatively narrow; for example, the early study of folklore in England was limited largely to

Zhong Jingwen

folksongs, stories and some ancient customs. However, with the passage of time the scope of the study of folklore has become ever broader. Today it includes practically all aspects of cultural and social life. Concretely speaking, these include such folkloric phenomena as labour organizations among people in the past, activities connected with festivals (such as the eating of glutinous rice wrapped in leaves and the holding of dragon boat races on the Double Fifth Festival, and the eating of moon cakes at the Mid-Autumn Festival), village organizations, the clan system, social interaction, popular entertainment, folk arts and crafts, all kinds of folk religious activities (including divination and sorcery, etc.), and in fact any activity involving some kind of behaviour dictated by custom with corresponding psychological activity. For instance, let us take the traditional folk art New Year's picture "Rat Takes a Wife", which reflects the wish of the labouring people in ancient times to eradicate rats. In the upper right-hand corner of some versions of "Rat Takes a Wife", an enormous cat was later added; this reflects a historical process of psychological transformation from fear and respect of the rat to control and subdual of it. Folk phenomena are everywhere in human society. Anywhere there is social life there are customs and hence material for folkloric research.

In the development of the discipline of folklore, the collection and research of folk literature has held an important position; the inclusion of folk literature within the scope of folklore is traditional.

Folk literature and material culture, social organization, folk science, religion, beliefs and all kinds of other social phenomena are very different from one another; how can they all be included in the study of folklore? It is because the term "folklore" indicates the collective, traditional cultural phenomena of the broad masses of people. The most important distinguishing characteristic of these social phenomena is that they are collective; they are not created at will by individuals. Even if originally they were instituted by a single person or a small group of people, only through the approval of and repeated enaction by the collective group can they become customs. The next characteristic, related closely to the collectivity, is that these phenomena are not of an individual character but are standardized or based on a model. Thirdly, they are passed down through time and are traditional; also, they spread over a certain land area and are connected with certain localities. These three characteristics distinguish folk phenomena from other phenomena as well as distinguishing folk literature from literature by individual writers, making folk literature an important part of folkloric research. To sum up, folk literature is a model-based, traditional language art created collectively by the masses, and because of these characteristics it naturally belongs within the scope of folkloric research.

B. The Relationship of the Scope of Classical Literature to Folk Literature

Classical literature is associated with a certain time and standard; in other words, it includes only model works by ancient authors. However, this restriction is not absolute and unchanging; it merely provides a historical framework. Many of the *guofeng*, or songs of the vassal city-states, and the *xiaoya*, or lesser festive songs, in the *Book of Songs*, China's earliest anthology of poetry, were originally folk songs, but because they were supposed to have been edited by Confucius, they became holy scriptures in the eyes of Han Dynasty Confucian scholars. In this way the folk song beginning "Merrily the ospreys cry" came to be interpreted as a paean to the virtue of an imperial concubine. Similarly, five- and seven-character *lüshi** or *jueju*** poems, regarded during the Tang Dynasty as ordinary contemporary poetry are now fully regarded as classical literature. From this it is apparent that the scope of the study of classical literature itself undergoes a process of historical development. As we know, during feudal times the term "classical literature" comprised only the two categories of poetry and prose; fiction and drama were looked upon as "lesser pursuits" and were considered unworthy of inclusion in distinguished libraries. From the late Qing Dynasty until the May 4th Movement of 1919, under the influence of definitions used in Western literature, the scope of literature was broadened to include poems, fiction, drama and some prose works. After the May 4th

* A poem of eight lines, each containing five or seven characters.
** A poem of four lines, each containing five or seven characters.

Movement, ordinary folk literature was recognized in its own right, and even ancient popular and folk songs and folk tales that had been recorded came to be regarded as classical literature. Current histories of literature generally classify the *Book* of *Songs*, the *Chu Ci*, the works of the pre-Qing philosophers, the *Records of the Grand Historian*, *yuefu* ballads (both original folk versions and imitations) and popular literature of the Tang, Song, Yuan, Ming and Qing Dynasties all as classical literature. So the current concept of classical literature actually includes the works of scholars of the upper strata, urban literature (fiction and plays) and the oral literature of the labouring people (stories, folk songs, folk tales, proverbs, etc.). Urban (popular) literature and folk literature have therefore become materials in the study of both classical literature and historical folklore.

The relationship between classical literature and folk literature does not end here. Not only has so-called classical literature directly assimilated certain works of folk literature; it has also been greatly influenced in genre, subject matter, thought and emotion, form and construction and rhetorical devices by folk literature. Let us first discuss genre. In the past, many Chinese literary genres, especially rhymed ones, sprang from folk literature. Lu Xun, Guo Moruo and Hu Shi* all referred to this borrowing. This is not restricted to a particular people or area but is common to the development of world literature in every locale. Literary works are as a rule limited to poetry, prose and drama. Poetry sprang from primitive songs; prose and fiction from myths, legends and folk tales; and drama from ancient religious and theurgic rituals and primitive dances. This process of development also applies to China. Ancient Chinese books contain fragmented traces of primitive songs, such as the "Song for Stringed Instruments", which despite being only eight characters in length describes the entire process of primitive hunting. Its language is terse, neat and rhymed, and it aptly reflects the quality and form of the most ancient poems and songs. Fiction exhibits this development too; for instance, the early story collection *The Forest of Laughter* is basically a record of jokes popular at the time it was written. Many *zhiguai* (stories of the supernatural) written during the Wei, Jin and Six Dynasties period are not the individual artistic creations of their authors but are actually no more than records of contemporary folk stories and legends with a few of the author's viewpoints thrown in. Although strictly speaking China's dramatic literature did not begin to appear until the Song and Yuan Dynasties and was fully developed

* Renowned literary historian of the 20th century.

only in the Ming and Qing, records of such expressions as "the prancing movements of birds and beasts", "the phoenix attends the rite" and "a hundred beasts lead the dance" in very ancient Chinese works reflect primitive dances imitative of animals performed by the denizens of ancient China. Moreover, the Han Dynasty "Music of Xingtian", which was accompanied by a gladiatorial-type performance with spears and shields, and the "Goring Dance", which depicted the armed conflict between the legendary Yellow Emperor and the barbarian chieftain Chi You, had their origins in primitive society. This shows that the dance and music which were important elements in the creation of Chinese drama had existed for a very long time beforehand. In the Tang Dynasty, such early types of drama as *canjun*, *tayaoniang* and *damianwu* appeared; all three of these had sprung from the soil of folk literature. Thus we see that Chinese drama, like other literary genres, had its origins in folk literature.

Next let us examine subject matter. In works of classical literature much material from folk literature can be found. Although the *chuanqi* (prose romances) of the Tang and Song Dynasties were written by individuals, more or less identical originals can be found in folk tales. The anonymous "The White Monkey", Shen Jiji's "The Story of the Pillow", Li Gongzuo's "Ancient Legends from Mountains and Rivers", Li Chaowei's "The Dragon King's Daughter" and others are all examples of this phenomenon. Even such major works as *The Romance of the Three Kingdoms*, *Outlaws of the Marsh* and *Journey to the West* contain stories that were originally folk tales. Later certain storytellers, or in some cases members of literary societies, gathered and edited books of storytellers' stories; eventually Luo Guanzhong, Shi Naian, Wu Cheng'en and other writers arranged the originals of these stories into the shape they have today. Similar examples abound in dramatic literature. The basic plot of Guan Hanqing's *Snow in Mid-summer* was quite obviously taken from the story "The Filial Girl of Donghai", which had been recorded in the previous era. *Zhang Sheng Boils the Sea*, a *zaju* drama of the Yuan Dynasty, had its origins in folk tales about the boiling of the sea. Again, *Qiannü's Spirit Leaves Her Body*, a Yuan Dynasty *zaju* written by Zheng Dehui, was based on a Tang story, "The Wandering Soul", written by Chen Xuanyou. At the end of his story, Chen Xuanyou had written: "I, Xuanyou, often heard this tale when I was young. There were many versions of it, and some people said it wasn't true. At the end of the Da Li period (around AD 780), I encountered Zhang Zhonggui, the magistrate of Laiwu County, and he gave me a very detailed version of the story. This was because

Zhang Yi was his paternal great uncle and had told Zhonggui the story in great detail, so he was able to remember it." It is obvious that this story was originally a folk tale which could be found in "many versions" orally. It is only because Chen Xuanyou heard the story from Zhang Zhonggui, the grandnephew of Zhang Yi, who styled himself the protagonist of the story, that he was convinced it was true. Actually *Qiannü's Spirit Leaves Her Body* reflects a common folk belief: in ancient times, because people did not understand the phenomenon of life in the body, they believed that the soul could leave the body and wander about, especially when a person was dreaming. This concept of "the spirit slipping away" is found among many peoples of the world. *Qiannü's Spirit Leaves Her Body* is a reflection of precisely this kind of belief, although the author did manage to insert some progressive, anti-feudal ideology into the play, making it into an even bolder fantasy of freedom which is more beautiful and succeeds better at moving the observer. (Actually, stories about relationships between the sexes in which the characters' souls leave their bodies had already appeared under the pens of writers in the Six Dynasties, which lasted from AD 420 to 589.)

Thirdly, let us examine thought and emotion. In general, the influence of folk literature on classical literature in this respect is also easily observable. Admittedly, most literature by individual authors written in the old class society reflected the consciousness and interests of the ruling classes, and as a whole was the antithesis of folk literature. However, the relationships between social classes in social life do not manifest themselves exclusively as opposition and struggle; often they are relationships of connection and even intermingling. Because society is a unified community, between classes we find not only opposing class relationships but also relations of ethnicity, social and clan relationships and other kinds of relationships. We cannot emphasize the opposition and struggle between classes while overlooking other kinds of social relationships and their effects. In reality, classical literature, especially the works of those outstanding authors who sympathized with the labouring people, all absorbed to a greater or lesser degree the progressive ideological influence of the broad masses of people and of folk literature. This tendency is especially clear in some of the *yuefu* ballads written in imitation of ancient models. For instance, according to an attestation in *Comments on Ancient and Modern Things* by Cui Bao, the poem "My Husband, Don't Cross the River", composed to fit the harp tune "Sound of the Harp", was originally a folk song: "My Husband, don't cross the river!/But he went to cross the river./He died in the river;/O my husband, your fate is bitter!" The story in the song is extremely simple, but its cry of hopeless anguish reflects the lives of people of the lower classes in ancient times, and so it spread widely among the people and was preserved for a long time. At the same time, the hopelessness reflected in the song moved those intellectuals of ancient times who sympathized with the plight of the people. Poets who wrote poems based on this one ranged from Liu Xiaowei of the Liang Dynasty (AD 502-557) to Li Bai, Li He, Wang Jian and Wen Tingyun of the Tang Dynasty (AD 618-907). These imitations were a conscious recreation of the model, and while the metric form developed from the simple four characters per line to five and even seven per line, their basic content was no different from that of the model. Part of Li Bai's poem goes:

> The bystanders were indifferent, but his wife restrained him:
> "My husband, don't cross the river!" But no words would sway him.
> A tiger may be wrestled; there's no way to tame a river.
> My husband was drowned and drifted to the edge of the ocean.
> There swam a great whale with snowy mountains for teeth;
> My husband, ah! my husband — his bones were dashed between them.
> Though mourned by the harp, he will nevermore return.

Li Bai's compassion for the hapless drowned man fills the poem. The poet used this story once again in the third poem of his "Hengjiang *Ci*" series: "What is it causes you to wish to cross today? With wind and waves this high you surely cannot make your way." The language here is even more vivid than that of the original.

Finally, we have the question of choice of form and rhetorical devices. In this area folk literature has provided many materials and referential experience for classical literature. For example, the "Bamboo Branch Ballad" of Liu Yuxi was created using forms intrinsic to folk songs. In Book Three of the section "Songs of Recent Times" in his *Anthology of Yuefu Ballads*, Guo Maoqian says: " 'Bamboo Branch' originated in eastern Sichuan Province. In the Zhen Yuan period (AD 785-805) of the Tang Dynasty, Liu Yuxi was in Yuanxiang (present-day Hunan Province). Finding the popular songs there vulgar, he wrote a new series of *ci* poems, 'Bamboo Branch', based on the 'Nine Songs' of Qu Yuan, and taught the village children to sing them. These became popular around the time between the Zhen Yuan and Yuan He (AD 806-821) periods." Research has shown that the actual roots of "Bamboo Branch" lay in folk songs of the

Tujia nationality. Although his poems were in four lines of seven characters each, other features of the poems such as rhyme-scheme and content were completely different from the seven-character *jueju* poems being written by the literati of his time; moreover, his poems have rich folk characteristics and local flavour. As for the use of rhetorical devices taken from folk literature, not a few allusions are made in classical poetry, for instance, to folk literature. For example, "When the cricket chirps, it gives the lazy woman a fright," originally a folk adage, became under the pens of the literati a description of the autumnal thoughts of the woman who is longing for her husband. Other folk tales such as "The Foolish Old Man Moves the Mountain", "Jing Wei Fills the Sea", "The Nightingale Cries Tears of Blood", "Han Ping and His Wife Change into Butterflies" and other examples too numerous to mention were all often employed in works of classical literature.

The above examples show that in folk literature's role as a component of folklore, not only have certain of its parts already directly become part of classical literature and its subjects of study, but it has also had a tremendous influence on classical literature in the areas of genre, subject matter, thought and emotion, form and construction and rhetorical devices. This phenomenon in the history of literature most certainly deserves careful inquiry.

2. Folk Phenomena as Reflected in Works of Classical Literature

If what has been described up to this point might be said to be the special relationships between folk literature and classical literature, then what will be described in this section can be called the general relationships between them. The extent to which folk literature can link up with classical literature is determined by the relationship of people's social life to social customs. Wherever there are groups of people there is social life and hence social customs. The special characteristic of literature is that it uses images to reflect people's social life, including their thoughts and feelings. Because social customs and habits and the thoughts and feelings connected with them are universal in human life, in order truly to reflect people's lives through the use of images one must employ concrete examples. Once one abandons the customs that are so closely related to people's lives, one's writing necessarily becomes abstract. For example, Lu Xun's story "The New-Year Sacrifice" reflects the attitudes of Xianglin's wife towards life and death, and his "Medicine" refers to the folk belief that eating steamed buns dipped in human blood can cure tuberculosis. If an author is not familiar with concrete local customs then his writing will not be realistic. In the introduction to his *La Comédie Humaine*, Balzac outlined three aspects of his work, one of which was "the study of customs"; his motivation was precisely a search for this realism.

Chinese classical literature comprises a vast number of works which richly reflect folk phenomena. For example, the *Book of Songs* to a great extent reflects the primitive folklore of the labouring people of early China. The line from the *Shang Odes* that says "Heaven sent a dark bird which descended and established the house of Shang", if interpreted literally, would be anathema to traditional Confucianists, so they always found a way to twist its meaning; but regarded as an ordinary superstition it seems rather shallow. In actuality it reflects a sort of mythical consciousness from the matriarchal period or from totem worship. Tales of this kind still exist among the ethnic minorities in China. For example, the Lisu nationality of Yunnan Province regard the tiger, sheep, bee, rat, monkey, bear and other animals as their clan ancestors. When one connects it with folk beliefs like these, the line about the dark bird and others like it become easier to understand.

The *Chu Ci* also reflects in many places the social customs of ancient southern China; such descriptions as that in the "Nine Songs" of the scene at a sacrificial ceremony and in the "Li Sao" of a sorcerer being asked to perform divination represent valuable materials for the study of historical folklore. Some people believe that "Recalling the Soul" refers to the recalling of the soul of a dead person, but actually it refers to the calling of a soul that has temporarily left the body; it has nothing to do with the soul after death. Even in recent times this custom existed in southern China. When a child became ill, a family member would take the child's clothing in hand and walk along the street or out in the fields, calling the child's name in the belief that if he could succeed in summoning the child's departed spirit back to its body the illness would be cured. Apparently this superstitious ritual has existed for thousands of years. In the section on "Recalling the Soul" in his *Collected Annotations on the Chu Ci*, Zhu Xi wrote: " 'Recalling the Soul' was written by Song Yu. In ancient times when someone died, someone would be sent to climb the roof with the dead person's upper garment in hand and to face north shouting, 'Hey! So-and-so! Come back!' When he had called the dead person three times while holding up the garment, he

would climb down and cover the body with it. This ritual was called 'Return'.... In the southern part of Chu (now southern Hunan), the ritual was sometimes employed for living people as well; this is why Song Yu, feeling sorry that Qu Yuan had been exiled unjustly and fearing his spirit would be scattered and would never return, assumed the authority of the god and used the scriptures of the spirit mediums to call it back." This is a classic example of the use of folklore in the research of classical literature. Although Zhu Xi was a member of the feudal scholar-official class, he had the ability to use materials taken from the study of contemporary folk customs to annotate works of classical literature; this was an extremely rare trait in those of his class (he made similar admirable efforts in his commentary on the *Book of Songs*).

Because they themselves are either folk literature or are closely modelled on folk literature, the poems in the *Book of Songs* and the *Chu Ci* perhaps do not suffice to illustrate the influence of folk phenomena on all of classical literature. However, in the works of most ordinary classical writers one can also find a large number of folk phenomena. The goddess of Sorcerer Mountain in Song Yu's "Prose Poem on the Goddess of Gaotang", the customs of the minority nationalities of northern China as recorded in Admonitions for the Family by Yan Zhui, the folk customs of sworn brotherhood and unofficial titles in *Outlaws of the Marsh*, the drawing of lots, the flying of kites to dispel bad luck and the eating of crabs on the Double Ninth Festival as recorded in *A Dream of Red Mansions* and many other examples from classical literature all reflect the presence of folk phenomena in classical literary creation. Not only do these enrich the images in the works in question, they also provide us with valuable material for the study of folklore.

If we expand our vision beyond the narrow definition of classical literature, we will discover that the classics, the dynastic histories, the works of the philosophers, writings by various scholars and other various important literary documents — all of which one could broadly define as literature — also contain an abundance of material for the study of folklore. *Huainanzi* contains many references to such goddesses as Mifei (the goddess of the Luo River), the Weaving Maid, Qingnu (a sky goddess), Nüyi, the Queen Mother of the West and the female spirit of Ursa Major, and also refers to such features of everyday life in Han times as the high favour accorded dog meat, the ban on slaughtering kine, the hairstyles of the various ethnic groups, the dread ghosts were supposed to have of peach branches, crows and earthworms, and various methods of sealing vows of membership

in societies, such as tattooing and smearing the blood of a sacrifice on the lips. The *Spring and Autumn Annals of Lü Buwei*, written during the Qin Dynasty (221-206 BC), contains references to the custom of thanking the host of a banquet on the day after, the arrangement of funeral processions, the Qiang people's custom of cremation and so forth. This book is an extremely rich and valuable cultural relic which can be studied from many angles of both folklore and classical literature.

3. How to Apply the Theory and Method of the Study of Folklore in Studying Classical Literature

Classical literature may be studied from many angles, for instance literary criticism, aesthetics, sociology, linguistics, history, psychology, etc. Similarly, it may be studied from the angle of folklore. This last type of research is quite popular in some countries (Japan, for example) and has achieved some quite pleasing results. Every new angle of study provides a new point of view, enriching, deepening and broadening general understanding of the subject at hand.

It is inevitable that classical literature borrows some methods and theories from the study of folklore; this is determined by the nature of the material studied. Furthermore there are two main reasons why it is necessary for those studying classical literature at the present time to employ these methods and theories: 1) The study of classical literature concerns itself with works of ancient literature. With the passage of time, these works have been, so to speak, fossilized, taking on their present role as documentative material. Strictly speaking, therefore, the study of classical literature is a historical science. The study of folklore, on the other hand, is different; along with its sister scientific disciplines of anthropology, ethnology and sociology it is a recently created branch of learning. The material addressed in the above disciplines is the cultural phenomena of contemporary society. Their focus of attention is not the past but the present. Because of this, they tend to emphasize on-the-spot surveying and investigation in order to obtain firsthand material. Therefore, these new disciplines have a certain positivist significance and are related more closely than other disciplines to modern social life. 2) Precisely because the study of folklore, anthropology, ethnology and sociology is closely related to modern society, modern scientific methods and results are often applied earlier in these disciplines than in others. For example, structuralism was widely popularized through its appli-

cation to anthropological research by the French anthropologist Lévi-Strauss. In these disciplines, method has a special significance; improvement of investigative and research methods usually implies an important breakthrough in theory. The study of classical literature is not like this. Since its object of study is already established, it is easy for its research methods to become solidified as well. This is precisely the reason why the textual criticism and research methods employed during the Qianlong and Jiaqing reigns (1736-1821) of the Qing Dynasty are still of some practical value. Because of the above two reasons, and even more because the study of classical literature in China has tended to follow a single model of research, it is very important that the study of classical literature borrow theory and methods from the study of folklore and other disciplines.

There are many points of theory and practice in the study of folklore, and it is difficult to provide a full set of examples in a small space, but here are a few important ones:

1) The study of folklore emphasizes on-the-spot investigation. This method is not the exclusive property of the discipline, but its use in the research of folklore is relatively widespread and frequent. To read ten thousand books and travel ten thousand *li* is the ideal of the Chinese intellectual. When he was writing *Records of the Grand Historian*, Sima Qian made wide investigations. Only later, when the study of classical literature became increasingly ossified, did this kind of method fall into disuse. However, on-the-spot investigation can often fill in gaps left by textual collation. Kojiro Yoshikawa, a Japanese scholar specializing in research on the Chinese Tang Dynasty poet Du Fu, obtained much material by making an investigation along the routes Du Fu took on his travels during his lifetime. In recent years, some Chinese scholars have made similar investigations along paths travelled by Li Bai, looking into many popular stories about the poet as well as cultural remains. Analyzing the material they gathered, they cleared up quite a few questions which had previously gone unanswered. If such methods were used more often, it would give new impetus and scope to the study of classical literature.

2) The study of folklore emphasizes the study of types and comparison between them, because traditionality and typification are two of the basic features of folk phenomena. However, the study of classical literature has for a long time been dominated by character analysis in which a unity is assumed between the personality of the character and the qualities he represents. The application of this kind of analysis makes certain questions in the research of classical literature difficult to explain adequately. For instance, the images of characters in ancient myths, stories, and such pieces of popular literature as *Outlaws of the Marsh* and *Journey to the West* are more readily explained using the theory of types from the study of folklore than by using traditional character analysis. Again, in the tale "Peach Blossom Spring", we have a pattern of "a story that takes place outside of time"; this is repeated in other stories such as "Wang Zhi Watches Chess" and "Liu Ruan in the Tiantai Mountains".* The analysis of such works of a single "type" may be of help in understanding the origin of the material and the author's intention with regard to carrying on popular literary traditions.

3) The research of folklore emphasizes locality. Many phenomena in classical literature would become clearer through the application of methods used in the study of folklore which deal with localities. For instance, when a famous literary school appears in a certain locality at a certain period (such as the Jiangxi School of Poetry, the Ten Poets of Southern Fujian and the Three Masters of the Lower Yangtse), it is usually connected with the economic conditions, cultural foundation and social customs of that locality and period. If unified locality-specific research were undertaken on such literary schools, it might reveal certain laws governing the appearance, flourishing and disappearance of literary communities.

The benefits to the study of classical literature that can accrue from the borrowing of research methods used in the study of folklore are numerous. Aside from the points mentioned above, the use of both ancient and recent writings on folk customs to collate and discuss certain phenomena and problems appearing in classical literature would most certainly prove of key importance; however, in order to avoid excessive length, I will not go into this more fully.

Translated by Stephen Fleming

* Two stories of the Rip van Winkle genre.

Qiu Xiaolong

The Days of the Third American-Chinese Writers' Conference

"Toward Continuing Dialogu e"

In the full splendour of May, California witnessed the Third American-Chinese Writers' Conference. After the conferences of 1982 and 1984, the writers of the two countries once more came to sit together in discussion of all they were interested in.

The Chinese Writers' Delegation arrived in Los Angeles on May 1, headed by Tang Dachen and Deng Youmei. This was a young delegation, and among its members were Zhang Jie, Li Cunbao, Shu Ting, Zu Wei, Sun Jianzhong, Zhong Jieying, Ke Yunlu, Fan Baoci and myself. As soon as we entered the waiting room we saw Dr Rees, the conference coordinator, and Mr Locks, a Master of Chinese literature at the University of California and the escort for our delegation. As old and new friends greeted each other and embraced, I took a look at my watch. It was past midnight. We entered another day in friendly arms.

Early next day, the American writers arrived from various parts of the country. These were all familiar names; with Norman Cousins and Harrison Salisbury as the leaders, there were William Gass, Kenneth Koch, Carolyn Kizer, Ann Stanford, Jerome Lawrence, Robert Lee and other well-known writers. Our host was very considerate. In was arranged that writers from both countries should stay in the same hotel so that they could have more chance of communication.

Painstaking preparations had been made for the meeting, the central topic on the conference agenda being "Common Concerns and Aspirations: The Continuing Dialogue Between US and Chinese Writers".

"A Championship Conference"

The conference began on May 6 at the University of California, Los Angeles. The meeting hall held a motley crowd before we entered. The American Chairman Norman Cousins made the opening speech. He was gratified in retrospect at the literary exchanges American and Chinese writers had enjoyed and visualized great hopes for the future. The Chinese Chairman Tang Dachen hailed the spring of writers' communication by quoting from the imagist poet H.D. Their passionate speeches roused the whole audience.

Soon the writers entered into substantial discussions. The first subject that appealed to all was how to further the translation and introduction of contemporary literature between the two countries. We were both aware of the fact that while there was considerable achievement in the translation and study of American literature by the Chinese, American understanding of Chinese literature was far from enough. Discussion of the causes of this was heated. Some ascribed it to publishers' mercenary motives, and some referred to the influence of European-centred culture. Zhang Jie told her American colleagues how popular her novels were in West Germany and concluded, "So long as we advertise well, we can break new ground in the introduction of Chinese literature." Cousins suggested some concrete steps. Writers, as well as publishers should be mobilized into propaganda work, he said: "In this way we can do the job well."

The next day we went over to Malibu Beach, the famous seaside resort, where the conference was continued in an elegant villa. Outside the French window, the golden beach was shining in the sunlight, waves rolling up in a great roar and then receding in the murmur of countless droplets. As glistening white petrels circled high in the air, our conference also reached a climax.

The evening before, Dr Rees had given us a list of "possible topics of discussion", and from more than ten, we had chosen two for today's session. The first to be discussed was that of poetry translation.

Carolyn Kizer, who won the 1985 Pulitzer Prize for poetry, was the first to speak. She wrote idiosyncratically, sometimes simply getting inspiration from classical Chinese poetry. She had been

translating Shu Ting's poems by doing a poetic rendering of a preliminary translation. With such processing and polishing Shu Ting's poems read very smoothly in English and were certainly more readable than ordinary translations. She pointed out that poetry as a special genre needs ideally a translation that involves a poet polishing the literal translation, which means re-creation to a certain degree, because poetry must be read as poetry.

Sitting across from her, Kenneth Koch expressed a different view. To his mind, since poetry is the product of a specific language system, the translation should first of all be loyal to the original. It would not be advisable for a poet who did not understand the language to do the polishing.

Tang Dacheng also said that as a reader of foreign poems he expected from a translation a more direct, more vivid grasp of the different poetic and cultural structure behind it. It would be a pity if a translator sacrificed the original characteristics of syntax, structure and even sensibility for the sake of smoothness. "In a sense poetry is untranslatable, but also most tempting to the translator. That is just the way it is!"

Then it came to my turn. I said that poetry faces a challenge, even a threat from the development of other literary genres. Modern poetry is an ontological art of language, and a poet has to dig deep into the potential of the language, to work for a new unification of the ways in which people think and feel. Only, therefore, if the translator of poetry is himself a poet can he pay enough attention to all the subtle language factors to fulfil the task.

Discussion was so heated that the novelists as well as the poets asked for more time.

A most dramatic scene occurred in the discussion of the second subject, "popular and serious literature", chaired by the well-known novelist William Gass, who as a philosopher as well as a writer philosophically condemned popular literature that "occupies the otherwise empty consciousness" with vulgar contents. No sooner had he finished his speech than Carolyn See, a novelist, took over the microphone to refute him. According to her, people are encouraged by the content of popular literature to make progress and win happiness in life. If a story with a happy ending is vulgar, can "only works that treat life as totally dark and absurd be called serious? It is nothing but snobbery in literature". Zhong Jieying also pointed out that popular literature commands a large number of readers and its importance should not be written off.

Wanda Coleman, a black poet, emphasized the close relation be-

tween popular literature and real life. To her mind, it was utterly pointless to be concerned with metaphysical ideas in one's writing. I had been sitting beside Gass. Having the same interest in philosophy and modernist literature, I felt I had to say something for him. I took the floor. "According to one theory of logical positivism, misunderstanding arises from misunderstanding of the words used. Actually popular literature — as condemned by Mr Gass — might be defined as a kind of daydream that makes people satisfied with false visions, unlike serious literature, which makes the reader think, sometimes painfully, but nonetheless gives real insight into problems. A new world begins where a book ends. 'Oh to go up with the wind! I'm only afraid at the jade pavilion high, where I tremble with cold.' Serious literature might be compared to such a high place, where one cannot always stay, but which is worth climbing to for the view."

Zu Wei viewed the problem in a new light, saying that while messages in popular literature are often on a single level, more messages might be conveyed on several levels in serious literature. The number of speakers was much greater than we had expected. When the session was over, we still kept arguing among ourselves. Lawrence walked over to Gass and me, saying, "I totally agree with your ideas."

The third day's session was more elaborately arranged. As the first item, Chinese and American writers spoke about their recent work.

Then we organized ourselves into several small groups according to literary genre. Kizer pulled Shu Ting away to practice her theory of translation. Koch, Wang Xingdi and I formed a small group to discuss "how to teach children to write poetry".

In the evening we were invited to dinner in the playwright Jerome Lawrence's home, a beautiful house on a hillside by the sea. We could view the Pacific Ocean and the whole of Los Angeles at sunset from the balcony. Lawrence proudly pointed at the address on his card. "Here. Next time you come, just stay here."

Among the white-clad waitresses, Lawrence was conspicuous in a blue coat, walking about, talking cordially with his guests. He was planning to stage Chinese dramas; he was going to China once more; he was teaching Chinese students to write plays; and he hoped there would be more exchanges of Chinese and American drama. Then he proposed we all perform. He took the lead by giving a dramatic speech, "Our works will last. We can change the world with our force." At his invitation, Shu Ting recited some of her poems, Wanda Coleman sang the blues; and the versatile Deng Youmei gave a Beijing opera soliloquy. To crown it all, Zhong Jieying enacted a dumb show. The whole house rang with laughter.

Salisbury, glass in hand, made an exuberant speech. "This short conference has come to an end, but what we have done will remain in people's minds. I have attended many Russian and American writers' conferences as well as the first two Chinese and American writers' conferences, and this one has been the most successful, because we have had the deepest discussion. It should win the championship."

"Deeper Understanding"

After two days in New Orleans, we arrived in New York. On May 13, there was another exchange between American and Chinese writers sponsored by Washington University. Many writers in New York attended the meeting, and among them were Arthur Miller and Allen Ginsberg.

Miller was quite a familiar figure for us, his *Death of a Salesman* having had a great success on the Chinese stage. To our surprise, he spoke at great length about Chinese dramatic verse of the Yuan Dynasty (1271-1368), obviously having made a study of it. At once the austere old man endeared himself to us yet more.

Then came Ginsberg's turn. Two years before, he had been to China for the Second Writers' Conference, after which he had gone to some universities and given lectures which had been popular with the students. Today he looked a bit thinner but in high spirits. He wore an elegant coat. His gold-rimmed glasses made him appear a great scholar, and a scholar he was, teaching poetry at several universities. From his manner, one could hardly imagine he had been a leader of "the beat generation" in the fifties, still less that it was he who had written "Howl". However, he soon proved himself to be still a "protest poet". First of all he protested that there were too few poets in our delegation. In fact Shu Ting left earlier than the rest of us. (Of course, as a poet myself, I could understand how he felt.) Then he said there had been only an abridged Chinese version of "Howl". "Is this due to censorship in China?" I told him that I happened to have read the complete version of "Howl" in our *Poetry Press*. He took up another topic. He wanted to invite some young Chinese poets to the States. He and his friends would provide for the trip, not necessarily through the Chinese Writers' Association, though he hoped it would help. Deng Youmei promptly concurred: "You can be assured of our support, Mr Ginsberg." Ginsberg was all smiles now, as he made a final "demand" that our delegation would have lunch at his home. The next day to his home we went, and everyone of us brought away a recording of his poetry reading and his collected poems.

It seems quite natural to me that a writer may misunderstand another country. So long as we come and sit together, we will understand each other through theses, questions and answers, and our friendship will grow. When the meeting was over, Ginsberg showed me a poem he had written in China. It contained these two lines: "Two thoughts have risen together in dream therefore/Two worlds will be one if I wake and write." He told me he had got the idea from a poem by Bai Juyi. I could not tell which.

On our way back from Columbia University, Ginsberg, Zhang Jie, Fan Baoci and I rode in a taxi. When the black driver learned we were a Chinese writers' delegation, his face lit up. Though he belonged to a class different from that of Ginsberg, he exhibited the same concern over all that had happened in China. He told us he had seen the trial of the "gang of four" on TV. At the same time he also asked us a lot of questions, ideological as well as literary, some of which were among the problems we had been solving. When he heard our frank answers, he grinned from ear to ear, together with Ginsberg. In front of the hotel he took his leave of us: "Visit here more. We ought to understand each other better."

Yosemite

On the evening of May 18, we arrived in San Francisco. Early next morning we drove to Yosemite, a national park in the central Sierra of eastern California.

"Yosemite," Locks told us, "is an Indian word meaning 'brown bear'. It is a valley of surpassing beauty evolved over millions of years, especially in the glacial period. Once inhabited by Indians, now it has become a monument to nature."

Locks and the other Americans had been talking to us about Yosemite all the way. Rees, busy as he was with school affairs, had accompanied us. When we drove into the spectacular valley, we were almost breathless with wonder. Never had we thought that awaiting us was such a lofty scene.

The towering peaks glistened white in the sunlight. Traces of the ice age were visible on the massed precipices; lush meadows undulated green to the vast horizon. Everywhere we could see huge trees that would take several people to encircle. Deer leaped about among the bushes, unafraid of the strangers. Most magnificent was the waterfall, cascading more than 2,000 feet down, splashing into a white mist. It was enthralling.

We had walked for only a few minutes when we saw a brass plate inscribed "John Muir lived here". Rees told us Muir was a well-known naturalist in the 19th century. A fighter for the protection of nature all his life, he was the first to appeal for the creation of Yosemite National Park, until in 1890 the Yosemite National Park Bill was at last passed by Congress.

Awaiting us there were the Snyders. This poet, well known for his celebration of nature, had come from his home five hundred miles away to meet us here. "See, I meet you here as if I were receiving you at home. The same mountains, the same water, the same clouds!"

We had met in China two years before. Today Garry Snyder seemed to be in high spirits, while his wife Marsa stood smiling beside him. Marsa, a Japanese, had studied dance. Slender and small of stature, her hair was already streaked with white. "At our home there is no electricity, nor modern facilities. When winter comes, Garry goes into the mountains to gather firewood." Her voice was tinged with pride. It brought to my mind the years they had spent together "getting back to nature". I asked her, "Are you used to the life now?" Looking at Snyder, she nodded with a smile.

Such dedication! There is indeed more than one way to look at modern industrial civilization and its problems. Since the days of

Rousseau the return to nature has been a dream to some intellectuals. The tradition goes back to Thoreau in American literature, and Snyder has done it. Perhaps he has gone a little too far, but he is sincere — in his poems as well as in his wife's eyes.

And to Snyder's mind, this tradition is close to Chinese classical culture. He has translated some classical Chinese poets, especially Han Shan, into English. As he gazed at the grand waterfall, he recited, "The rushing torrent cascades down three thousand feet." Now his words too became a torrent, about Tao Yuanming, Su Dongpo, Logos and Zen. He talked about Zen with Deng Youmei, who had been writing a novelette on Huineng, the founder of the Zen school. Snyder was exuberant to find a kindred spirit. It was quite a random harvest.

In the evening, I was reminded of Shangri-La. Yosemite had prepared another wonder for us. The local theatre would present the play *Conversation with a Tramp* for us, with the well-known actor Lee Stetson playing John Muir. At first we guessed it might be a one-act play, but it turned out to be a real conversation between "Muir" and us, the Chinese guests sitting round him, as if the old man had survived for a century in the valley to talk to us about what he had found when he first arrived and how he had worked for the creation of Yosemite National Park. He even answered our questions.

Outside, Half Dome seemed to be incarnated, moving nearer to listen to the old man's story, with only occasional night birds' cries breaking the silence. We too had entered into our roles. Time flew away in the conversation between the past and the present. It pained us to take our leave, and Zhong Jieying solemnly made the invitation. "Mr Muir, in China there are still some who hack at random in nature reserves. I wish you would come talk with them too."

"Muir" grasped Zhong Jieying's hand, too excited for words. Indeed what was there to say at such a moment?

"See You at the Next Conference"

During these busy and pleasant days, Wendy Locks had been always with us. Now she was preparing souvenirs for us — a saucer with the design of the Golden Gate Bridge for each one of us. "This is only a small token of my personal feelings. As you write in the future, perhaps you will think of the place."

A small token, a small symbol indeed. Then what would we really carry away, and what would we really leave behind? Understanding

and friendship. Deeper and dearer. There would, I thought, also be a new horizon in our future writing, a common horizon where there would be the Maple Bridge as well as the Golden Gate Bridge — and above all a bridge to communicate our ideals.

Before the conference I had prepared some material about American literature in China. However, at the conference our writers so frequently mentioned Melville, Twain, Pound, Bellow and the others that I felt it unnecessary to cite these dry figures. Some fine artistry had been assimilated into our work. Once more Koch's delighted amazement appeared in my mind's eye. It was during one of the working lunches when he got hold of a poem of mine. He jumped up in surprise. "Do you know, I can see Stevens and Eliot in your poem." And vice versa. In the poems of Kizer, Snyder and some other American poets, we also heard Li Bai and Han Shan's voices.

We had already made great progress in exchange between American and Chinese writers, and we would go further, I thought, on this road because our conference would be held year after year, so that in this way we would march ahead hand in hand.

On the evening of May 25, we arrived at the airport. It was a tearful parting for Locks. Every one of us had much to say, but for the moment we were almost speechless.

Yes, at the end of an exhilarating conference, the only sentence I could think of was — see you at the next conference.

See you at the next conference, my friends.

Publishing News

A Hundred Flowers Essays (series)

Tianjin Hundred Flowers Literary and Art Publishing House

Over forty collections have been published since the beginning of this series, covering older writers like Ba Jin, Bingxin and Ye Shengtao, as well as their juniors. In recent years, essays from Hongkong, Taiwan and abroad have been included, such as *Clouds and Smoke on the Way,* a collection of essays by Chen Tianlan, who recently returned from Taiwan, *A Branch of Natural Flowers* by Chen Ruoxi, a Canadian Chinese writer, and *The Sound of Waves from a Thousand Islets* by Huang Chun'an, an overseas Chinese writer in the Philippines.

One character of the series is the broadness of its themes. Many of the books are travel notes, such as *Random Notes from Japan* by Lin Lin, *Melody of Vienna* by Mu Qing and *Reflections of the Heart from India* by Ji Xianlin, showing intimate contact and deep friendship between Chinese writers and foreigners. But most reflect modern life, such as *Visit to Yunnan* by Feng Mu, *Under the Lilac* by Huang Qiuyun and *Autumn Water* by Yuan Ying.

Four Generations Under One Roof

Lao She
Tianjin Hundred Flowers Literary and Art Publishing House

The complete edition of *Four Generations Under One Roof* is to come out after forty years. The novel, the author's most painstaking work and the one that took him the longest to finish, depicts how the residents of Beijing suffered during the Japanese invasion from 1937. It contains 100 chapters in three parts, the first two of which were published before Liberation in 1949 and the third finished while Lao She lectured in America and translated into English in 1951 in New York. The novel was published in Chinese only to the 87th chapter, for the rest of the manuscripts were lost during the "cultural revolution". As a result, there has been no complete edition in China. In 1982, joint efforts by the author's family and researchers at home and abroad located the last part (chapters 88-100) in English, which has been translated back into Chinese to complete the Chinese edition.

Tibetan Literary History

Sichuan Nationalities Publishing House

Tibetan literature has a long history and contains many fine works, such as *King Gesar* and *Milarepa,* not only well known in Tibet but also translated into many languages. This book tells chronologically, systematically and comprehensively the history of Tibetan literature from remote antiquity to 1949, up to the founding of New China, concentrating on some seventy influential works and forty important writers, scientifically analysing the relationship between literature and religion, citing other cultures and the mutual influences of different literatures and evaluating the Tibetan classics from a literary and historical point of view.

Selection of Qing Dynasty Poetry

Hunan Literary Publishing House

The selection, compiled and annotated by Ding Li, an associate professor of the Chinese Music Conservatory and a poetry critic for thirty years, contains 957 poems by 365 poets in three volumes totalling 500,000 words. This makes it the most comprehensive and diverse such work on the period. The selection shows in outline the development of Qing Dynasty poetry and its great achievements in thought and artistry. Many of the works are in folk-song style.

Feng Menglong's Poems and Other Writings

Fujian Straits Literary and Art Publishing House

Stories to Awaken Men, Stories to Enlighten Men and *Stories to Warn Men* are three popular collections of stories by the celebrated Ming Dynasty novelist Feng Menglong (1574-1646), whose poems are less well known. *Feng Menglong's Poems and Other Writings* collects, for the first time, 140 of his prefaces, postscripts, book introductions, stone inscriptions, theses, criticisms and 24 poems, as well as 13 articles and 8 poems concerning his works.

"Sanqu" of the Qing Dynasty

Qilu Book Corporation

This book contains 3,214 *xiaoling* lyrics and 1,166 *taoshu* cycles by 342 poets, including those born in the Qing Dynasty (1644-1911) but writing during the Republican period (1911-1949). It is a comprehensive collection modelled on *Complete Collection of "Sanqu" of the Yuan Dynasty* and took 42 years to compile.

Photo Reprint of "Collection of the Schools"

Shanghai Classical Books Publishing House

Compiled by the Shanghai Methodical Sinology Book Corporation, this collection contains classics of twenty schools of the Zhou and Qin Dynasties (1066-206 BC) and ten schools of the Han and Wei Dynasties (206 BC — AD 265), photomechanically printed in eight volumes from the World Book Company's December 1935 edition.

Collection of Pu Songling's Works

Shanghai Classical Books Publishing House

This reprint of the Zhonghua Book Company's *Collected Works of Pu Songling* contains his poems, stories, essays and non-literary works, showing his life and experiences.

"The Twenty-five Histories" in Reduced Format

Shanghai Classical Books Publishing House

This vast series of official dynastic histories — in 3,749 parts — records Chinese history over thousands of years from the legendary Yellow Emperor to the last dynasty, the Qing, covering politics, economics, war, astronomy, geography, science, technology, literature and art.

The series is printed in 12 volumes, sixteen *mo,* hardback.

Collected Works of Gorky

People's Literature Publishing House

This twenty-volume, 8,000,000-word collection, the biggest in China of a single foreign writer, has been completed on the fiftieth anniversary of Gorky's death.

It contains his fiction and poetry translated into Chinese, including 200 short stories previously unpublished in China.

Cultural News

China Literary Fund Set Up

The China Literary Fund was set up in Beijing last June with well-known Chinese writer Ba Jin as president and vice-premier Wan Li as honorary president.

The fund, collected from all walks of life and abroad, will be mainly used for training young talent, developing cultural exchange with foreign countries and funding literary awards.

International Symposium on "A Dream of Red Mansions" in Harbin

The largest symposium on Red Mansions Studies since the founding of New China was held last June in Harbin for seven days by Harbin Normal University and the University of Wisconsin and attended by over 120 scholars from China, America, Japan, Canada, France, Singapore, Australia, Thailand, the Soviet Union and Hongkong. Over a hundred theses were received. Scholars discussed the 18th-century novel's editions, publishing history, philosophy, historical background, influence and artistic achievement, and the author Cao Xueqin's family and language. During the meeting an exhibition and an artistic festival on *A Dream of Red Mansions* were held.

Symposium on Ding Ling in Hunan

A symposium on Ding Ling's sixty years of writing was held in June in Changsha, Hunan. Over ninety specialists and scholars from all over China discussed Ding Ling's position in the history of modern Chinese literature and her unique literary thought. The symposium received 40 theses including ones specially written for the meeting by foreign scholars.

Symposium on Ming and Qing Novels

This symposium was held last June in Shenyang for five days by the Liaoning Provincial Spring Breeze Literary Publishing House and attended by over 50 scholars from China and abroad. Thirty theses were read, including several by American scholars.

Chinese writers and researchers and French researcher Chen Qinghao expounded the tradition of the ancient Chinese novel, its aesthetic value, the relationship between novels in vernacular and in classical Chinese and the position and influence of the ancient Chinese novel abroad.

"World of Chinese" Published

This 300,000-word bimonthly magazine will mainly publish novels, essays, reportage, poems, drama, letters, articles on writers and artists, songs and art works by Chinese abroad.

Successful Interpretation of Tang Dynasty Music for the *Zheng**

After two years of painstaking work, Ye Dong, a teacher at the Shanghai Conservatory of Music and a researcher in classical music, has successfully interpreted Tang Dynasty scores for the *zheng*, having done likewise five years ago for the *Dunhuang Scores for the "Pipa"*** and two years ago for the *Scores for the Five-stringed "Pipa"*. Twenty-five Tang poems have now been paired up with scores of the same titles.

Tibetan Religious Art Exhibition in Beijing

Last summer an exhibition of Tibetan tankas was held in Beijing for the first time.

Tankas are Lamaist religious pictures in a variety of mediums. The rarest exhibit was *Resting Avalokitesvara* set with 29,026 pearls, 1,997 coral beads and 185 turquoises as well as rubies and emeralds, once belonging to a medieval Tibetan queen.

This exhibition included more than 100 tankas from the 10th to the early 20th century.

First Lacquer Painting Exhibition in Beijing

An exhibition in the National Art Gallery in Beijing brought together over 700 lacquer paintings by over 500 artists and delighted visitors with their colour, delicacy and profundity.

Modern Chinese lacquer painting goes back a few decades. Several layers of lacquer are applied on a base and then worked by overlaying, carving and polishing.

Culture 5,000 Years Old Unearthed in Liaoning

The history of Chinese civilization has been pushed back a thousand years with the discovery of the 5,000-year-old site of Niuheliang in Liaoning with its large sacrificial altar, goddess temple and tombs which, archaeologists say, belonged to an embryonic state.

Objects recovered there since May, 1979 include nude female pottery figurines typical of primitive matriarchal society, a sculpted and coloured head of a goddess, jade animals and sacrificial pottery. Many are amazingly delicate. The site covers 50 square kilometres.

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* *A zither with a movable bridge for each of its 23 strings.*
** *A flat lute.*

本 期 目 录

Panda Books

(Forthcoming Titles)

The Vixen

by Mao Dun

A collection of twenty-one stories and essays by the well-known novelist Mao Dun, author of *Midnight* and one of the foremost masters of modern Chinese fiction, who was also the late minister of culture. Mao Dun's revelation of the vicissitudes in the lives of the down-trodden people of the old days is skilfully wrought and touching.

Poetry and Prose of the Ming and Qing

The Ming and Qing represented a high tide in Chinese literary creation. Many writers, such as Liu Ji, Gui Youguang, Tang Xianzu and Yuan Hongdao produced numerous masterpieces in different styles, reflecting a diversity of thought and feeling. This collection contains parables, drama, legends, biography, stories of the supernatural and poetry.

How Mr Pan Weathered the Storm

by Ye Shengtao

Ye Shengtao is an influential writer, educator and publisher. His short stories of the 20s and 30s are chiefly notable for their portrayal of growing sense of the inadequacy of contemporary social conditions both in the towns and cities and in the countryside.

中国文学

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