

CHINESE LITERATURE

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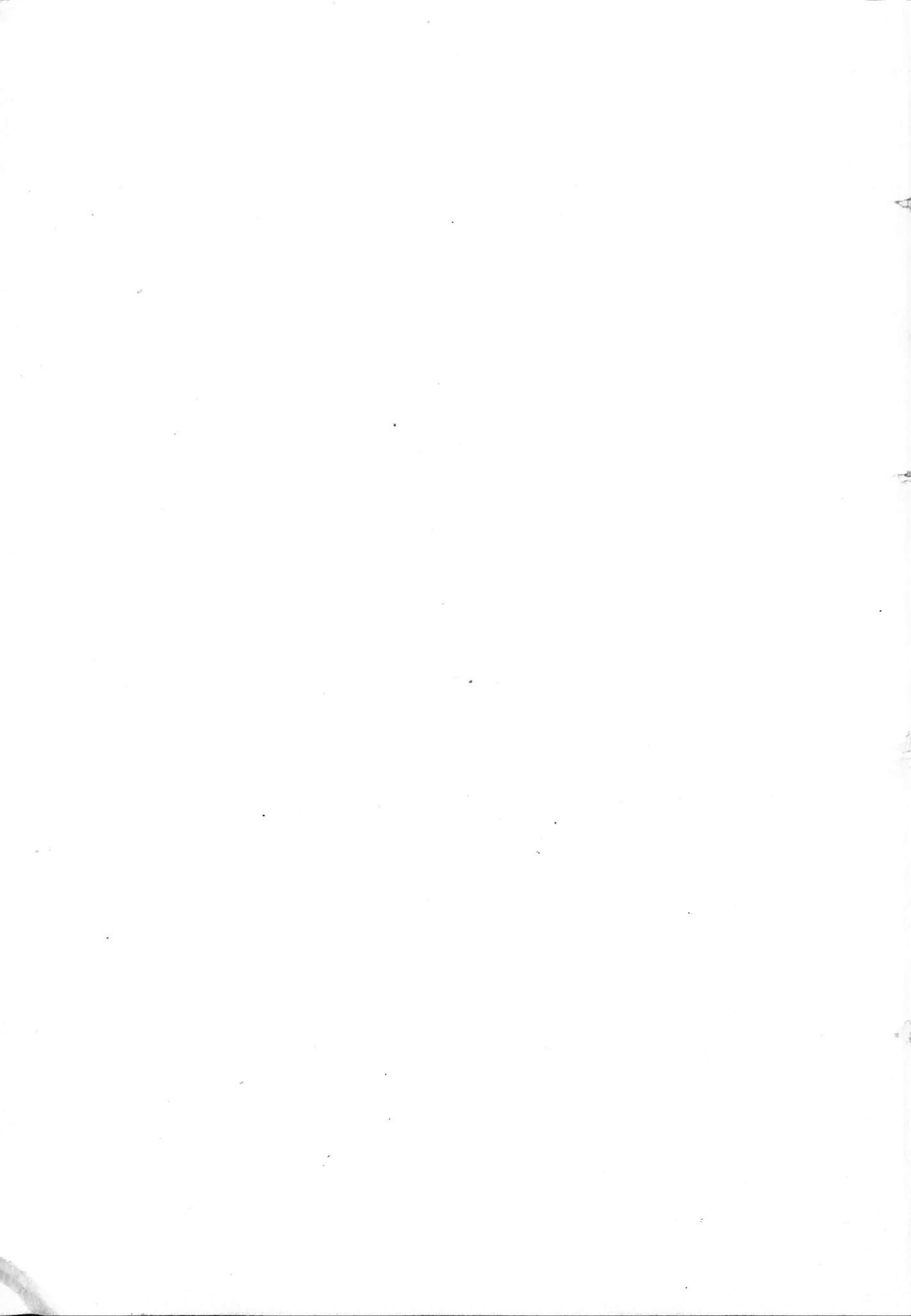
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Chu Yuan: Great Patriotic Poet

by Kuo Mo-jo

June 15th this year (the 5th day of the 5th moon by the lunar calendar) is the 2,230th anniversary of the death of Chu Yuan, great patriotic poet and statesman of China. Chu Yuan was a dignitary of the kingdom of Ch'u during the Warring States period, but he steadfastly opposed the corrupt government of the king of Ch'u and stood up staunchly for his own honourable policy. His immortal "Li Sao"—a poem so eminently of the people—is an impassioned expression of his patriotism. Chu Yuan is one of the four cultural giants the World Peace Council has called on all peoples to commemorate this September.

Chu Yuan is one of the great poets produced by the Chinese people. Passionate love for his people and his country, for truth and justice, pervades his poetry.

He was born 2,292 years ago, in 340 B.C., during the Warring States period in the kingdom of Ch'u, and belonged to the same clan as the king of Ch'u. The Chu clan were descended from Chu Hsia, son of King Wu of Ch'u of the early Spring-and-Autumn period (the 7th century B.C.). Chu was Chu Hsia's fief. But in one of his poems Chu Yuan says that he was poor. This was because, according to the law of Ch'u, feudal princes' fiefs were granted them only for two generations, after which they reverted to the crown. Hence, although Chu Yuan was related to the king of Ch'u, he was in actual fact just like any other common citizen of the realm.

Because of this, he knew all the people's difficulties. He saw all the disasters that befell them, and often sighed and shed tears for them. Later, when he fell from favour and was banished from court, he considered several times whether he should go to some other kingdom—this was a common practice among intellectuals of the Warring States period—but when he thought of his countrymen's sufferings he could not bring himself to go. He seems to have had a special sympathy for the peasantry. In *The Soothsayer* Chu Yuan asks the diviner:

*Shall I still drive the plough and wield the hoe,
Or to the great to curry favour go?*

He raised eight alternative questions like this, the first alternative always indicating what he had done or wanted to do. If *The Soothsayer* can be believed, Chu Yuan must have been willing to till the fields, but unwilling to call on the princes of different states to beg for some official post.

Sympathy and love for the people were fundamental qualities with Chu Yuan. And because of this he was able to win the sympathy of the people, and his poems, which are filled with life, started a revolution in Chinese poetry and have exercised a great and lasting influence on the development of Chinese literature. This is why the Chinese people are commemorating him more than 2,000 years after his death.

According to the official Han history, Chu Yuan left only twenty-five poems. By great good fortune none of these has been lost. They comprise the eleven *Odes*, nine *Elegies*, *Li Sao*, *Riddles*, *Requiem*, *The Soothsayer* and *The Fisherman*. Wang Yi of the later Han dynasty ascribed *Requiem* to Sung Yu, and included the doubtful poem *Wandering* as one of the twenty-five. But, judging by Ssuma Chien's biography of Chu Yuan and the internal evidence of the poem, we may claim that *Requiem* is undoubtedly Chu Yuan's work, while *Wandering* may well be the first draft of the poem *Ta Jen Fu* by Ssuma Hsiang-ju. *The Soothsayer* and *The Fisherman* (especially the latter) are generally believed not to have been written by Chu Yuan. However, the rhymes are those of the Chin dynasty, and I believe they must be the work of Sung Yu, Tang Lo, Ching Tso or some other of Chu Yuan's followers, who sympathized with the poet and was familiar with his life and thought. Hence these two poems, although probably not by Chu Yuan himself, afford valuable material for our study of the poet.

It is clear from those poems which are undoubtedly Chu Yuan's that his poetry is characterized by its close affinity to the people. The first thing to note is that he used the folk-song form, greatly enlarging its scope.

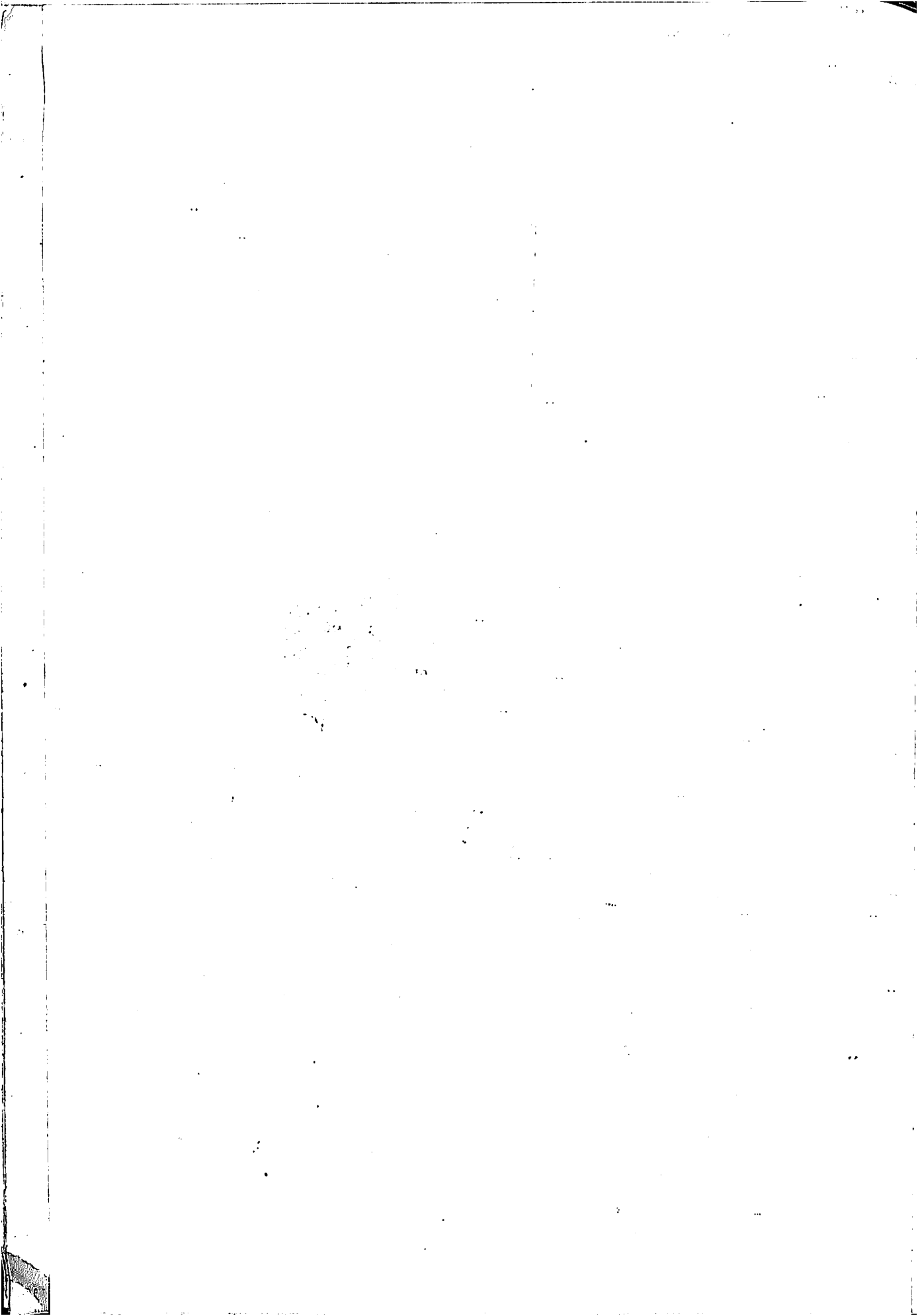
Before Chu Yuan, the aristocratic poetry of ancient China of the *Book of Songs* and the rhymed inscriptions on bronzes after the Spring-and-Autumn period, whether belonging to the north or the south, all used the four-character-line and had little in common with the language of the people. But although Chu Yuan still makes large use of the four-character-line in *Riddles*, *Requiem* and the *Ode to the Orange*, in his other poems he breaks away from this style completely.

A great use of local dialect and colloquialisms is a striking characteristic of Chu Yuan's poetry, of which one could give many examples. The best instance is the repeated use of the character "hsi," a character which often appears in ancient folk songs, occurring frequently in the folk-song section of the *Book of Songs*. This character



Portrait of Chu Yuan

Painted by an unknown artist in the early 17th century



was formerly pronounced "ah," and when we read it like this the true folk quality of his poems is apparent.

Chu Yuan created a new form in ancient Chinese poetry, a new form exactly in keeping with his love and sympathy for the people. Hence the form and content of his work are ideally integrated.

Chu Yuan was not only a poet who loved the people, he was also a far-sighted statesman. Since he was a native of Ch'u, he loved his motherland. But his love for his country extended beyond Ch'u.

Let us look at his *Riddles*. The majority of the 170-odd questions posed describe the whole history of China, mentioning in comparative detail events during the Yu, Hsia, Shang and Chou dynasties. Only a few lines refer to the kingdom of Ch'u. Or let us look at *Li Sao*. In that poem he also praises Yao, Shun, Yu, Tang, Kao Yao, Yi Yin, Wu Ting, Fu Yueh, King Wen of Chou and Duke Huan of Chi. Nowhere, however, does he allude to the early kings of Ch'u. From this his wide vision is clear. Chu Yuan loved not only Ch'u but all China.

Although ancient Chinese society appears to have been united before the Spring-and-Autumn period, the territory then inhabited was small, and was actually occupied by a collection of clans (known as the "myriad states") loosely linked together. Even while these clans were allied, and much more so after their alliance was broken, each had its own government and developed more or less independently of the rest. However, it is important to realize that their language and customs developed along fundamentally the same line. During a long period of independent development of these different groups, Chinese territory was gradually extended, until by the end of the Spring-and-Autumn period there was a widespread, urgent desire for unity. The many clans of the Shang and Chou dynasties had amalgamated to form twelve states in the Spring-and-Autumn period and seven states in the Warring States period. The path of historical development was clearly approaching unification of the country. This was the common desire of the Chinese peoples, almost without exception, which is reflected in the various schools of thought from the Chou to the Chin dynasty.

Naturally, Chu Yuan was aware of this trend and general desire. This gave rise to his hope that the kingdom of Ch'u might unite all China.

Forward and back I hastened in my quest,

Followed the former kings and took no rest. (Li Sao)

He was all impatience to help the king of Ch'u to follow the example of Yu, Tang, Wen and Wu in unifying China.

Let us see to what extent the kingdom of Ch'u at that time was in a position to unify China. For this was not simply wishful thinking on the part of Chu Yuan.

The kingdom of Ch'u had originally been an ally of the royal house of Shang, and after the fall of Shang, during the several hundred years of the Chou dynasty, it developed independently in the south. By the time of the Warring States, the Yangtse River valley, Han River valley and Huai River valley had all become incorporated in Ch'u; and it comprised in addition parts of present-day Shensi, Honan and Shantung. Ch'u pioneers had played a great part in opening up South China. So of the seven kingdoms of the Warring States period, Ch'u's territory was the largest, and its military strength was considerable.

Just over forty years before Chu Yuan was born, King Tao of Ch'u, acting on the advice of Wu Chi, had carried out a great reform. "He clarified and codified the laws, did away with superfluous official posts and abolished the titles of distant nobles, saved money to train soldiers and strengthen the army...." (Life of Wu Chi from the *Shih Chi*.) This is very similar to the action of Duke Hsiao of Chin twenty years later, when he adopted the policy of Shang Yang. Wu Chi and Shang Yang were both legalists from the kingdom of Wei. Their policy and methods were the same, the same too their aims and procedure. But shortly after, King Tao died (381 B.C.), and the reactionary nobles of Ch'u had Wu Chi killed. Shang Yang also came to a sad end, the only difference being that he remained in power for over twenty years, while Wu Chi was in power only for two years. After Wu Chi's death, however, over seventy families of the reactionaries who had killed him were wiped out as a punishment. So evidently his teaching still lived on in Ch'u. Chu Yuan grew up under the influence of the reforms of Wu Chi, Shang Yang and others. Thanks to his ability he won the confidence of King Huai of Ch'u and was made Left Minister, second only to the prime minister, taking part in the administration of the state and the formulation of foreign policy. His actions as a statesman show that he had been strongly influenced by legalist thought. In his poem *Recalling the Past*, he says:

*In days goneby when, trusted by the king,
The calendar he bid me to restore,
I taught the people in the ancient ways,
And codified new clauses of the law.*

This was obviously in accordance with legalist reforms, and in the phrase "ancient ways" he may include Wu Chi's teaching. Elsewhere in this poem he advocates respect for truth and opposes the reckless rule that disregards the law. These are basic proposals of the legalists.

But Chu Yuan's sovereign, King Huai, could not compare with King Tao of Ch'u or Duke Hsiao of Chin under whom Wu Chi and Shang Yang served; and so the poet came to a bitter end. King Huai of Ch'u delighted in empty show, he was shallow, without fixed views of his own,

yet had an exceedingly high opinion of himself. Easily convinced by the slander of reactionary nobles he began to treat Chu Yuan coldly. Then, surrounded by reactionaries, this king who enjoyed only pleasure and display made many enemies by acting blindly and irresponsibly, and was easily deceived and easily provoked. So he went from defeat to defeat, like the spendthrift son of a great house. All that Ch'u had built up during the last few centuries was virtually squandered by him. Finally he was tricked into going to Chin, where he died a prisoner after three years' captivity.

King Huai's successor, King Chin Hsiang, was even more incompetent. During his reign Chu Yuan suffered greater persecution and was banished from court. In the twenty-first year of Chin Hsiang's reign (278 B.C.), General Pai Chi of Chin led troops southward to storm the capital of Ch'u, setting the country to the fire and the sword and razing to the ground the sepulchres of generations of the kings of Ch'u. The enemy penetrated deep into the country, and took Tungting, Wutu and Chiangnan. The princes and ministers of Ch'u fled northeast to Chencheng, where they settled for a short time; but the kingdom was virtually destroyed.

This was more than a patriot like Chu Yuan could bear. This accounts for the anguish of his later poems, his grief, rage and despair. During his flight after the fall of the capital, he wrote a poem called *Leaving the Capital* to express his bitterness. He was then sixty-two. He fled southwards, but it happened that his line of flight coincided with General Pai Chi's advance. Wherever he went, Pai Chi pursued. So he was driven, in the same year that the capital fell, to commit suicide in the Milo River in Hunan.

Chu Yuan died, in effect, for his country. Clearly he is a tragic figure in an age of tragedy.

Chu Yuan's genius developed in many directions.

Depth of feeling and a wealth of imagination were his, coupled with an intense love for Nature. He loved and praised the orange tree. He loved all fragrant plants and tried to cultivate them. He loved the scenery of the south, feeling himself one with it. In accordance with popular beliefs he personified streams and hills and other natural objects, investing them with an infinite charm. In his poems Wu Mountain has its nymph, the Hsiang River its goddess, while sun and clouds all have their male or female deities; and these spirits are often made to fall deeply in love with each other or with human beings.

When he personifies forces of Nature—especially the heavenly bodies—he sometimes bends them to his will, to draw his chariot or form his retinue or guard. Thus he could leave the dusty earth to soar in the air—sometimes he flew to the gate of paradise, ascended to the roof of the

world or sped to the western rim of heaven, in pursuit of his Elysium and the ideal prince who would rule for the good of the people. In his poem he uses a "beautiful damsel" to symbolize the ideal prince. But neither in heaven nor in the nether world can he find the Elysium or the "beauty" he seeks.

Although he accepted the popular beliefs, Chu Yuan did not actually believe in spirits. He doubted or even hated what was felt to be supernatural. In the *Riddles* we find:

*Idly mortals' fates are spelt,
Life and death are idly dealt.
The duke was made the barons' head,
But an assassin struck him dead.*

Here he is sympathizing with the unjust lot of Duke Huan of Chi, and to all effects denying that there is such a thing as divine justice. In *Requiem* we find a description of paradise, but paradise appears to have been just like hell, and not a place where the soul could dwell at peace. In *Li Sao* when the poet flies to the gate of paradise he calls the porter to open up, but the porter just leans against the gate staring at him, and refuses to let him in. He obviously felt that people in paradise were as snobbish and corrupt as those in palaces on earth.

The first section of the *Riddles*, which relates to questions of astronomy, deserves our consideration. The poet asks: What was it like before heaven and earth were made? Who made the skies? Why the division into twelve zodiacs? How is it the sun, moon and stars don't fall from the sky? How far does the sun travel in one day? Where does it hide at night? Why does the moon wax and wane?—These questions are extremely realistic. They prove that Chu Yuan did not usually weave a poetic web of fantasy over the natural universe, but sometimes probed into truth like a scientist.

Questions relating to astronomy were common in Chu Yuan's age. Chuang Tzu's *On Evolution* opens with the questions: Does the sky move? Does the earth stay still? Do the sun and moon race each other? Who holds them up? Who pulls the strings? Who plays with them in sport?

Another story from Chuang Tzu's *On the Universe* describes a strange man called Huang Liao who lived in the south, who asked: "Why doesn't the world drop, and what causes wind and rain, thunder and lightning?" Then Hwei Shih, a scholar of the north and leader of the logicians of the Warring States period, who was for a time prime minister of Wei, "answered without rhetoric and without premeditation, and spoke on all these subjects." This goes to show that scholars of Chu Yuan's time were much interested in the movement and make up of the heavenly bodies. And, in this, Chu Yuan was undoubtedly influenced by his age.

Chu Yuan lived in the Golden Age of ancient Chinese literature. Outstanding thinkers, statesmen, writers and scientists (in astronomy, mathematics, calendar science, etc.) were appearing to form a galaxy of genius. Chu Yuan's genius and position made it easy for him to absorb the ideas of the various schools of thought, so that his development was many-sided. Undoubtedly, however, his greatest contribution by far was in poetry.

Although only some two dozen of his poems have been preserved, the contents are incomparably rich. There is the calm, simple *Ode to the Orange*, the fresh, dainty *Odes*, strange, splendid *Requiem* and the magnificent, extraordinary *Riddles*; while most of *Li Sao* and the *Elegies* are wrathfully tragic as thunder and lightning, noble with a grief that runs wild. Few poets in Chinese or world literature can rival him in his sincerity, imaginative power and evocative use of words, or in the lyrical qualities and diversity of forms of his poems.

Chu Yuan was an outstanding poetic genius. But, over and above this, the fundamental reason for his great achievement was his great love for the people and for his country, for truth and justice, and his ability to penetrate deeply into life and nature. His whole life was an immortal and magnificent epic.

LI SAO

by CHU YUAN

LI SAO (The Lament) is not only one of the most remarkable works of Chu Yuan, it ranks as one of the greatest poems in Chinese or world poetry. It was probably written during the period when the poet had been exiled by his king, and was living south of the Yangtze River.

This long lyrical poem describes the search and disillusionment of a soul in agony, riding on dragons and serpents from heaven to earth. By means of rich imagery and skillful similes, it expresses love of one's country and the sadness of separation. It touches upon various historical themes intermingled with legends and myths, and depicts, directly or indirectly, the social conditions of that time and the complex destinies of the city states of ancient China. The conflict between the individual and the ruling group is repeatedly described, while at the same time the poet affirms his determination to fight for justice. This passionate desire to save his country, and this love for the people, account for the poem's splendour and immortality.

*A prince am I of ancestry renowned,
Illustrious name my royal sire hath found.
When Sirius did in spring its light display,
A child was born, and Tiger marked the day.
When first upon my face my lord's eye glanced,
For me auspicious names he straight advanced,
Denoting that in me Heaven's marks divine
Should with the virtues of the earth combine.
With lavished innate qualities indued,
By art and skill my talents I renewed;
Angelic herbs and sweet selneas too,
And orchids late that by the water grew,
I wove for ornament; till creeping time,
Like water flowing, stole away my prime.
Magnolias of the glade I plucked at dawn,
At eve beside the stream took winter-thorn.
Without delay the sun and moon sped fast,
In swift succession spring and autumn passed;*

*The fallen flowers lay scattered on the ground,
The dusk might fall before my dream was found.
Had I not loved my prime and spurned the vile,
Why should I not have changed my former style?
My chariot drawn by steeds of race divine
I urged; to guide the king my sole design.*

*Three ancient kings there were so pure and true
That round them every fragrant flower grew;
Cassia and pepper of the mountain-side
With melilotus white in clusters vied.
Two monarchs then, who high renown received,
Followed the kingly way, their goal achieved.
Two princes proud by lust their reign abused,
Sought easier path, and their own steps confused.
The faction for illicit pleasure longed;
Dreadful their way where hidden perils thronged.
Danger against myself could not appal,
But feared I lest my sovereign's sceptre fall.*

*Forward and back I hastened in my quest,
Followed the former kings, and took no rest.
The prince my true integrity defamed,
Gave ear to slander, high his anger flamed;
Integrity I knew could not avail,
Yet still endured; my lord I would not fail.
Celestial spheres my witness be on high,
I strove but for His Sacred Majesty.
'Twas first to me he gave his plighted word,
But soon repenting other counsel heard.
For me departure could arouse no pain;
I grieved to see his royal purpose vain.*

*Nine fields of orchids at one time I grew,
For melilot a hundred acres too,
And fifty acres for the azalea bright,
The rumex fragrant and the lichen white.
I longed to see them yielding blossoms rare,
And thought in season due the spoil to share.
I did not grieve to see them die away,
But grieved because midst weeds they did decay.*

*Insatiable in lust and greediness,
The faction strove, and tired not of excess;
Themselves condoning, others they'd decry,
And steep their hearts in envious jealousy.*

*Insatiably they seized what they desired,
It was not that to which my heart aspired.
As old age unrelenting hurried near,
Lest my fair name should fail was all my fear.
Dew from magnolia leaves I drank at dawn,
At eve for food were aster petals borne;
And loving thus the simple and the fair,
How should I for my sallow features care?
With gathered vines I strung valeria white,
And mixed with blue wistaria petals bright,
And melilotus matched with cassia sweet,
With ivy green and tendrils long to meet.
Life I adapted to the ancient way,
Leaving the manners of the present day;
Thus unconforming to the modern age,
The path I followed of a bygone sage.*

*Long did I sigh and wipe away my tears,
To see my people bowed by griefs and fears.
Though I my gifts enhanced and curbed my pride,
At morn they'd mock me, would at eve deride;
First cursed that I angelica should wear,
Then cursed me for my melilotus fair.
But since my heart did love such purity,
I'd not regret a thousand deaths to die.*

*I marvel at the folly of the king,
So heedless of his people's suffering.
They envied me my mothlike eyebrows fine,
And so my name his damsels did malign.
Truly to craft alone their praise they paid,
The square in measuring they disobeyed;
The use of common rules they held debased;
With confidence their crooked lines they traced.*

*In sadness plunged and sunk in deepest gloom,
Alone I drove on to my dreary doom.*

*In exile rather would I meet my end,
Than to the baseness of their ways descend.
Remote the eagle spurns the common range,
Nor deigns since time began its way to change;
A circle fits not with a square design;
Their different ways could not be merged with mine.
Yet still my heart I checked and curbed my pride,
Their blame endured and their reproach beside.
To die for righteousness alone I sought,
For this was what the ancient sages taught.*

*I failed my former errors to discern;
I tarried long, but now I would return.
My steeds I wheeled back to their former way,
Lest all too long down the wrong path I stray.
On orchid-covered bank I loosed my steed,
And let him gallop by the flow'ry mead
At will. Rejected now and in disgrace,
I would retire to cultivate my grace.
With cress leaves green my simple gown I made,
With lilies white my rustic garb did braid.
Why should I grieve to go unrecognised,
Since in my heart fragrance was truly prized?
My headdress then high-pinnacled I raised,
Lengthened my pendants, where bright jewels blazed.
Others may smirch their fragrance and bright hues,
My innocence is proof against abuse.
Oft I looked back, gazed to the distance still,
Longed in the wilderness to roam at will.
Splendid my ornaments together vied,
With all the fragrance of the flowers beside;
All men had pleasures in their various ways,
My pleasure was to cultivate my grace.
I would not change, though they my body rend;
How could my heart be wrested from its end?*

*My handmaid fair, with countenance demure,
Entreated me allegiance to abjure:
"A hero perished in the plain ill-starred,
Where pigmies stayed their plumage to discard.
Why lovest thou thy grace and purity,
Alone dost hold thy splendid virtue high?"*

*Lentils and weeds the prince's chamber fill:
Why holdest thou aloof with stubborn will?
Thou canst not one by one the crowd persuade,
And who the purpose of our heart hath weighed?
Faction and strife the world hath ever loved;
Heeding me not, why standest thou removed?"*

*I sought th'ancestral voice to ease my woe.
Alas, how one so proud could sink so low!
To barbarous south I went across the stream;
Before the ancient I began my theme:
"With odes divine there came a monarch's son,
Whose revels unrestrained were never done;
In antics wild, to coming perils blind,
He fought his brother, and his sway declined.
The royal archer, in his wanton chase
For foxes huge, his kingdom did disgrace.
Such wantonness predicts no happy end;
His queen was stolen by his loyal friend.
The traitor's son, clad in prodigious might,
In incest sinned and cared not what was right.
He revelled all his days, forgetting all;
His head at last in treachery did fall.
And then the prince, who counsels disobeyed,
Did court disaster, and his kingdom fade.
A prince his sage in burning cauldrons tossed;
His glorious dynasty ere long was lost.*

*"But stern and pious was their ancient sire,
And his successor too did faith inspire;
Exalted were the wise, the able used,
The rule was kept and never was abused.
The august Heaven, with unbiassed grace,
All men discerns, and helps the virtuous race;
Sagacious princes through their virtuous deed
The earth inherit, and their reigns succeed.
The past I probed, the future so to scan,
And found these rules that guide the life of man:
A man unjust in deed who would engage?
Whom should men take as guide except the sage?
In mortal dangers death I have defied,
Yet could look back, and cast regret aside.*

*Who strove, their tool's defects accounting nought,
Like ancient sages were to cauldrons brought."
Thus I despaired, my face with sad tears marred,
Mourning with bitterness my years ill-starred;
And melilotus leaves I took to stem
The tears that streamed down to my garment's hem.
Soiling my gown, to plead my case I kneeled;
Th'ancestral voice the path to me revealed.*

*Swift jade-green dragons, birds with plumage gold,
I harnessed to the whirlwind, and behold,
At daybreak from the land of plane-trees grey,
I came to Paradise ere close of day.
I wished within the sacred grove to stay,
The sun had dropped, and darkness wrapped the way;
The driver of the sun I bade to stay,
Ere with the setting rays we haste away.
The way was long, and wrapped in gloom did seem,
As I urged on to seek my vanished dream.*

*The dragons quenched their thirst beside the lake
Where bathed the sun, whilst I upon the brake
Fastened my reins; a golden bough I sought
To brush the sun, and tarried there in sport.
The pale moon's charioteer I then bade lead,
The master of the winds swiftly succeed;
Before, the royal blue bird cleared the way;
The lord of thunder urged me to delay.
I bade the phoenix scan the heaven wide;
But vainly day and night its course it tried;
The gathering whirlwinds drove it from my sight,
Rushing with lowering clouds to check my flight;
Sifting and merging in the firmament,
Above, below, in various hues they went.*

*The gate-keeper of heaven I bade give place,
But leaning on his door he scanned my face;
The day grew dark, and now was nearly spent;
Idly my orchids into wreaths I bent.
The virtuous and the vile in darkness merged;
They veiled my virtue, by their envy urged.*

*At dawn the waters white I left behind;
My steed stayed by the portals of the wind;
Yet, gazing back, a bitter grief I felt
That in the lofty crag no damsel dwelt.*

*I wandered eastward to the palace green,
And pendants sought where jasper boughs were seen,
And vowed that they, before their splendour fade,
As gift should go to grace the loveliest maid.
The lord of clouds I then bade mount the sky
To seek the stream where once the nymph did lie;
As pledge I gave my belt of splendid sheen,
My councillor appointed go-between.
Fleeting and wilful like capricious cloud,
Her obstinacy swift no change allowed.
At dusk retired she to the crag withdrawn,
Her hair beside the stream she washed at dawn.
Exulting in her beauty and her pride,
Pleasure she worshipped, and no whim denied;
So fair of form, so careless of all grace,
I turned to take another in her place.*

*To earth's extremities I sought my bride,
And urged my train through all the heaven wide.
Upon a lofty crag of jasper green
The beauteous princess of the west was seen.
The falcon then I bade entreat the maid,
But he, demurring, would my course dissuade;
The turtle-dove cooed soft and off did fly,
But I mistrusted his frivolity.
Like whelp in doubt, like timid fox in fear,
I wished to go, but wandered ever near.
With nuptial gifts the phoenix swiftly went;
I feared the prince had won her ere I sent.
I longed to travel far, yet with no bourn,
I could but wander aimless and forlorn.
Before the young king was in marriage bound,
The royal sisters twain might still be found;
My plea was weak, my mission was but frail;
I knew that my demand could not avail.*

*The world is dark, and envious of my grace;
They veil my virtue and the evil praise.*

*Thy chamber dark lies in recesses deep,
Sagacious prince, risest thou not from sleep?
My zeal unknown the prince would not descry;
How could I bear this harsh eternity?*

*With mistletoe and herbs of magic worth,
I urged the witch the future to show forth.
"If two attain perfection they must meet,
But who is there that would thy virtue greet?
Far the nine continents their realm display;
Why here to seek thy bride dost thou delay?
Away!" she cried. "Set craven doubt aside,
If beauty's sought, there's none hath with thee vied.
What place is there where orchids flower not fair?
Why is thy native land thy single care?*

*"Now darkly lies the world in twilight's glow,
Who doth your defects and your virtue know?
Evil and good herein are reconciled;
The crowd alone hath nought but is defiled.
With stinking mugwort girt upon their waist,
They curse the others for their orchids chaste;
Ignorant thus in choice of fragrance rare,
Rich ornaments how could they fitly wear?
With mud and filth they fill their pendent bag;
Cursing the pepper sweet, they brawl and brag."
Although the witches counsel I held good,
In foxlike indecision still I stood.
At night the wizard great made his descent,
And meeting him spiced rice I did present.
The angels came, shading with wings the sky;
From mountains wild the deities drew nigh.
With regal splendour shone the solemn sight,
And thus the wizard spake with omens bright:*

*"Take office high or low as days afford,
If one there be that could with thee accord;
Like ancient kings austere who sought their mate,
Finding the one who should fulfill their fate.
Now if thy heart doth cherish grace within,
What need is there to choose a go-between?"*

*A convict toiled on rocks to expiate
His crime; his sovereign gave him great estate.
A butcher with his knife made roundelay;
His king chanced there and happy proved the day.
A prince who heard a cowherd chanting late
Raised him to be a councillor of state.
Before old age o'ertake thee on thy way,
Life still is young; to profit turn thy day.
Spring is but brief, when cuckoos start to sing,
And flowers will fade that once did spread and spring."*

*On high my jasper pendent proudly gleamed,
Hid by the crowd with leaves that thickly teemed;
Untiring they relentless means employed;
I feared it would through envy be destroyed.
This gaudy age so fickle proved its will,
That to what purpose did I linger still?
E'en orchids changed, their fragrance quickly lost,
And midst the weeds angelicas were tossed.
How could these herbs, so fair in former day,
Their hue have changed, and turned to mugworts grey?
The reason for their fall, not far to seek,
Was that to tend their grace their will proved weak.*

*I thought upon the orchids I might lean;
No flowers appeared, but long bare leaves were seen;
Their grace abandoned, vulgar taste to please,
Content with lesser flowers to dwell at ease.
To boasts and flattery the pepper turned;
To fill the pendent bag the dogwood yearned;
Thus only upon higher stations bent,
How could they long retain their former scent?
Since they pursued the fashion of the time,
Small wonder they decayed e'en in their prime.
Viewing the orchids' and the peppers' plight
Why blame the rumex and selinea white?*

*My jasper pendent rare I was beguiled
To leave, and to this depth then sank defiled.
It blossomed still and never ceased to grow;
Like water did its lovely fragrance flow:
Pleasure I took to wear this bough in sport,*

*As roaming wild the damsel fair I sought,
Thus in my prime, with ornaments bedecked,
I roved the earth and heaven to inspect.*

*With omens bright the seer revealed the way,
I then appointed an auspicious day.
As victuals rare some jasper twigs I bore,
And some prepared, provision rich to store;
Then winged horses to my chariot brought
My carriage bright with jade and ivory wrought.*

*How might two hearts at variance accord?
I roamed till peace be to my mind restored.
The pillar of the earth I stayed beside;
The way was long, and winding far and wide.
In twilight glowed the clouds with wondrous sheen,
And chirping flew the birds of jasper green.
I went at dawn high heaven's ford to leave;
To earth's extremity I came at eve.
On phoenix wings the dragon pennons lay;
With plumage bright they flew to lead the way.
I crossed the quicksand with its treach'rous flood,
Beside the burning river, red as blood;
To bridge the stream my dragons huge I bade,
Invoked the Emperor of the West to aid.*

*The way was long, precipitous in view;
I bade my train a different path pursue.
There where the heaven fell we turned a space,
And marked the western sea as meeting-place.
A thousand chariots gathered in my train,
With axles full abreast we drove amain;
Eight horses drew the carriages behind;
The pennons shook like serpents in the wind.
I lowered flags, and from my whip refrained;
My train of towering chariots I restrained.
I sang the odes. I trod a sacred dance,
In revels wild my last hour to enhance.
Ascending where celestial heaven blazed,
On native earth for the last time we gazed;
My slaves were sad, my steeds all neighed in grief,
And, gazing back, the earth they would not leave.*

Epilogue

*Since in that kingdom all my virtue spurn,
Why should I for the royal city yearn?
Wide though the world, no wisdom can be found.
I'll seek the stream where once the sage was drowned.*

The Reform and Development of Chinese Opera

*Concluding speech given on Nov. 14, 1952
at the closing session of the First National
Festival of Classical and Folk Drama
held in Peking*

by Chou Yang

At the present National Festival of Classical and Folk Drama, in which twenty-three types of opera popular in various parts of the country have been represented, nearly a hundred different operas have been staged. Such a large-scale festival of national drama is the first of its kind in Chinese history. It has made clear that our rich dramatic heritage needs to be re-evaluated and developed on a new basis. Before us is a veritable ocean of art. Although the various types of opera obviously influenced each other in certain ways in the course of their development, they were on the whole cut off from each other, or deliberately ignored each other, and only now is the situation beginning to change. Only now are the various types of opera throughout the country beginning to learn from each other and develop together in free and friendly competition. The guiding principle laid down by Chairman Mao Tse-tung—"Let all the flowers bloom together, and derive the new from the old"—has most accurately defined the relations of the various types of opera and set the goal of common endeavour for all. The present festival has provided the various types of opera with an excellent opportunity to learn from each other, and will certainly exercise a great influence on the future development of Chinese drama.

The present festival has not only displayed our great dramatic heritage of past centuries, but has also shown the new achievements of dramatic reform carried out under the People's Government. Prizes have been awarded to good operas and good performances in order to encourage reform in dramatic arts. These awards show what we approve and what we oppose. We oppose conservatism as well as rash reforms. We stand for correct reforms. We advocate the reform and development of our national drama in accordance with the needs of the people, determined to do away with that part of the dramatic heritage which is reactionary, poisonous and harmful to the people and to preserve and develop that part which is progressive, healthy and beneficial to the people. Instead of recklessly throwing away and destroying our national traditions, we should

respect and treasure them. We encourage technical brilliance in artistic creation, because it is the result of long and hard work on the part of the artistes to represent life truthfully. But we are opposed to technique which is formalistic, affected, lifeless.

We are learning from our great heritage, learning from excellent technique and from the sound experiences of dramatic reform—this is the chief function of the present festival, and what gives it significance.

A bright future lies before those types of opera which know how to learn, how to absorb the merits of others, and which dare to improve and create; but those which are shackled by their own conventions and thus fail to meet the needs of the people are doomed to failure.

The success of this festival and the importance attached to it by the people and the nation are no reason for complacency, but, on the contrary, greatly increase the responsibility that each dramatic worker bears to the nation and the people. Since opera is an art in close touch with hundreds and thousands of people, what then should it do to bring itself in line with the large-scale economic and cultural construction which is now under way, so as to exercise a greater influence in educating the people and remaking society? It should help the nation in giving the people the right kind of education—imbuing the people with patriotic sentiments and ideas of democracy and socialism, spreading the new spirit of society, raising the moral tone and enriching the spiritual life of the people. Failing in these tasks, it can occupy no position of honour in the new life of the people.

Since new China came into being, dramatic workers all over the country have made great efforts at dramatic reform in order to adapt the opera to the needs of the people. That the work of dramatic reform has been fruitful is evidenced in the fine acting and staging of a number of excellent operas at the present festival. Particularly worthy of mention is the high degree of initiative and patriotism which the broadest section of dramatic artistes have evinced for the past three years in dramatic reform and in socio-political activities of various kinds, and the whole-hearted support which they have given to the Communist Party and the People's Government. All this is quite understandable, for in the old society ruled by the reactionaries, artistes were subjected to constant persecution and insults, their art meeting with nothing but contempt and distortion. The life of many an actor and actress was written in blood and tears. Therefore, to dramatic artistes, the victory of the Chinese People's Revolution meant primarily their own emancipation. In the new state, instead of being looked down on they are respected, and their art is no longer despised or trampled under foot but appreciated. The progress which the rank and file of artistes have made in many fields shows that they have by concrete actions lived up to the expectations and high regard of the people.

It is not to be denied, however, that dramatic artistes are still beset with many difficulties. Since the opera is a product of the old society, we



YU FEI-AN: The Return of Spring



cannot expect it to be entirely free from feudal dregs; but what is important is that the new life of the people demands a new opera. To adapt opera better and more fully to the new society, we must have the right kind of reform and more creative work. In the old society, most artistes were deprived of the right to education with the result that many of them had a low cultural and artistic level and were more or less polluted by the old ideology and old habits. Therefore, dramatic artistes have to make great efforts to re-educate themselves and raise their standards so that they may at last become new people's artistes with a new ideology and a new working style, and the necessary cultural and artistic level.

The responsibility of the Party and the government is primarily to help these artistes to rid themselves of the old ideology and the old working style and replace them by a new ideology and a new working style; to help them attain to a higher level politically, culturally and artistically; to lead them to an understanding of the basic situation and policy of the nation; to urge them to get into closer contact with the life of the people and understand what the people need; and finally to encourage them to carry out dramatic reform in close collaboration with the new literary workers. Many Party and government cadres responsible for cultural work in various regions have taken the right attitude towards dramatic artistes and dramatic reform, but there are also quite a few whose attitude is wrong and offhand. Instead of trying to form close, comradely, and co-operative relations with the artistes in the work of dramatic reform, these cadres have assumed the attitude of the overlord and bureaucrat. Instead of showing respect for the technique of the artistes, they despise it and consider it "backward," "something to be eliminated." They see in the artistes only the undesirable vestiges of the old society, blinding themselves to the progress these artistes have made and to the fact that they are trying hard to rid themselves of these undesirable vestiges. In the work of dramatic reform, they have not done what they should have done—arousing the spirit of initiative and creativeness of the artistes and relying upon them to carry out the reform, but on the contrary they pride themselves on their own ability and do everything themselves without consulting the artistes; and there are even some cadres who treat the artistes as they were treated by the feudal lords in the past. The origin of such wrong attitudes as these can be traced to their contempt for the national artistic heritage, their contempt for the people's traditions and their contempt for the people's taste. Until these wrong attitudes are corrected, it will be impossible for us to lead the dramatic workers to serve the nation and the people better.

Chinese opera not only has a long history and a rich content, it has always kept in close touch with the broad masses of the people and has been greatly loved by them. Handed down to us by the working people or the people's writers and artists in the past, our dramatic heritage is

imbued with a realistic spirit and strongly stamped with the people's character. Though this heritage was utilized and distorted by the feudal rulers in all kinds of ways, opera is a form of art which possesses to a relatively high degree a mass character and a democratic foundation, its transmission from age to age being largely determined by its popularity with the people, and this popularity was not something that the feudal rulers could dictate. The people observe the real life of the world around them with their own eyes and, from their own experience in life, bring their imagination and judgment to bear on the historical and legendary tales handed down to them, creating characters they can admire and love. The people are quite clear about their likes and dislikes. In contradistinction to the feudal rulers, the sympathy of the people is always on the side of the oppressed, the insulted, the weak and the good, while hatred and scorn are expressed for the wicked oppressors and exploiters who trample the common folk underfoot. The brave and good who fought for freedom and happiness against the forces of oppression are sung by the people. They love the selfless characters who have the courage of their convictions, and detest the cowardly and selfish who can be bought. The people are real patriots. They sing the praises of the national heroes who fought in defence of their motherland and hate the traitors who turned against their fellow-countrymen. That is why the people are so fond of such characters in Chinese drama as Yueh Fei,¹ the generals of the Yang family,² and Hsueh Jen-kuei,³ and so dislike Chin Kuei, Pan Hung and Chang Shih-kuei (whether the real Pan and Chang were true villains or not is irrelevant); why they are so fond of the heroes of *Water Margin* and so dislike Kao Chiu and Hsimen Ching;⁴ why they sympathize so much with White Snake and Green Snake and loathe Monk Fa Hai.⁵ This shows clearly that Chinese opera, despite an admixture of feudal dregs, has never been deprived of the popular character and spirit of realism indigenous to it.

1 Famous Sung Dynasty general condemned to death through the treachery of the courtier Chin Kuei.

2 Famous Sung Dynasty generals in popular legend, betrayed by Pan Hung and died fighting against superior enemy forces.

3 Famous Tang Dynasty general plotted against by Chang Shih-kuei in his early fighting career, but came out victorious in the end.

4 Villainous characters in the well-known Yuan Dynasty novel *Water Margin*.

5 White Snake, Green Snake and Fa Hai are leading characters in *The Tale of the White Snake*, a folk story that dates back to the Tang Dynasty (618-907). White Snake transforms herself into a beautiful girl and Green Snake, also taking a human form, serves as her maid. They fight stubbornly against the monk Fa Hai, who tries every treacherous means to break up the happy marriage between White Snake and a young man. In the end White Snake is overpowered and imprisoned under the Leifeng Pagoda, which stood on a hill by the West Lake of Hangchow. When the pagoda collapsed in 1924 due to lack of repairs, superstitious people believe that Green Snake had defeated Fa Hai and released White Snake.

Since Chinese opera has given expression to the life of the people, to their thoughts and feelings, their hopes and wishes, and since its form is a popular one, the people have always loved it. In Chinese opera, we are impressed not only with the strong force of realism, but also with the strong moral force of the people. Chinese opera has been a mirror of the Chinese character and has in turn had a certain influence on the development of the national character and national psychology. The heroes and characters in the opera have influenced the minds of many a generation of Chinese people. However, in speaking of the positive influence of the opera, we must also realize that it has a negative influence which is in no way typical of our national character. On the one hand, the opera has reflected the will and desire of the people in their quest for freedom under the feudal regime, portraying their courage, industry, wisdom and goodness; on the other, we must not forget that the feudal rulers utilized the opera as far as they could to make the people resigned and submissive, so that all their virtues might serve to maintain and consolidate the interests of the feudal regime. The people are industrious, but the feudal rulers took advantage of their industry to work them to death. The people are brave, but the feudal rulers took advantage of their courage to induce them to risk their lives in defence of their regime. In the opera popular elements, like grass under a stone, stubbornly find an indirect means of coming to the surface; thus popular and feudal elements are often interwoven in puzzling confusion. A number of operas expose the irreconcilable contradiction between the people and the feudal system, but failing to find the right way out of the contradiction, often resort to a compromise to resolve it. *The Butterfly Cup*¹ is just such an opera, though a highly dramatic one. The first part is filled with just resistance to evil and warm sympathy for the working people, but it ends with a cleverly devised love story in which the foe is turned into the lover and the struggle ends in amity. At this festival the revision of the Shansi opera *The Butterfly Cup* and the Shensi opera *An Excursion to Turtle Hill*—which forms the first part of the former play—although not yet perfect, was necessary and profitable.

Outstanding among Chinese operas are *Liang Shan-po and Chu Ying-tai*² and *The White Snake*, both being genuine masterpieces of the people.

¹ An old fisherman sells fish to a general's son, but when he asks for payment, is beaten to death. Tien Yu-chuan, trying to intervene, accidentally kills the general's son and escapes arrest only with the aid of the fisherman's daughter. The young people fall in love and the girl receives the Butterfly Cup as an engagement gift. Later, Tien, under a false name, saves the general's life and the latter, in gratitude, marries his daughter to him. When the identity of the son-in-law is revealed, he is pardoned and permitted to marry the fisherman's daughter. In the revised version the fisherman's daughter, however, refuses to marry him on account of his adherence to the enemy.

² Chu Ying-tai, who is supposed to remain indoors doing needlework, disguises herself as a boy and goes to stay in a school. She falls in love with Liang Shan-po, her school-mate, who never suspects that she is a girl. After she is recalled home,

In the present festival, the Yueh (*Shaohsing*) opera *Liang Shan-po and Chu Ying-tai*, the Szechuan opera *In the Shade of the Willow Tree* which is another name for *Liang Shan-po and Chu Ying-tai*, *The White Snake* in the form of Peking opera and of Yueh opera, have all won various measures of success as regards both libretto and production. These operas bring out in strong relief the indomitable will of the Chinese people, particularly of Chinese women, in pursuit of freedom and happiness, and their courageous spirit of self-sacrifice. They dared to stand up against ruthless oppressors far stronger than they, with no sign of wavering or compromise, unflinching to the end. We may even say, they conquered death with love. Of course, their victory was gained only in the world of imagination. How could two lovers turn into a pair of butterflies fluttering side by side? How could a woman crushed under the weight of Leifeng Pagoda come to life again? But there is truth in these fancies, for they gave the most realistic expression to the irrepressible desire of the people for freedom. Is it not precisely such fancies that have inspired generation after generation of men to struggle stubbornly against the shackles of the feudal marriage system? Has Leifeng Pagoda not crumbled after all? The collapse of the pagoda with its symbolic significance drew an impassioned essay from the pen of Lu Hsun.

In this connection, I wish to give a brief explanation of the distinction between tales of superstition and tales from mythology and legend. Both are products of the imagination, and both reflect our forbears' primitive view of the world and their belief in supernatural powers. But they signify two different things. Not every tale in which some supernatural force figures should be condemned as superstition. A great many folk stories assume a positive attitude towards the world and are impregnated with the people's character, whereas superstition is always negative and generally serves the interests of the ruling class. This distinction is most clearly seen in their respective treatment of "fate." Folk stories often depict men as unyielding before fate and finally triumphing over it in the world of imagination; but superstition, on the contrary, preaches fatalism and retribution, thus leading people to believe that everything is pre-determined and that man can only resign himself to fate. From the differences in their view of fate, it naturally follows that they have different ideas of the gods. In folk stories, men dare to hurl defiance at the gods, as for instance when Monkey rebels against the Heavenly King¹

Liang finds out the truth and hurries to her home to ask for her hand. But it is too late. Her father has already betrothed her to a local tyrant. Liang dies broken-hearted. As Chu Ying-tai goes to her undesired wedding, she passes Liang's grave. A sudden storm splits open the tomb and the girl leaps into it before it closes again. Then the two lovers change into butterflies fluttering side by side in the sunshine.

¹Monkey is the hero of the famous novel *Monkey*. He can change himself into many forms and is highly skilled in fighting. The Heavenly King, unable to cope with this strong opponent, resorts to appeasement and grants Monkey's claim to the title

or the Cowherd and the Weaving Maid defy the authority of the Queen of Heaven.¹ Superstition, on the other hand, claims that men are playthings of the gods whose slaves and victims they must be. Consequently, mythology always encourages man to break away from his enslavement and seek after the life of a real man while superstition aims at making him a willing slave glorying in his bondage. This is why we oppose superstitious stories, but approve of folk stories.

We can see that the realism of Chinese opera is in some ways unique. Into the truthful picture of the harsh reality of feudal society depicted in Chinese opera is interwoven a passionate desire for a happy life in the future and strong confidence in it. Here realism and romanticism combine and, by means of the economy and exaggeration peculiar to Chinese opera, attain a high level of art. This is seen not only in the great tragedies like *The White Snake* and *Liang Shan-po and Chu Ying-tai*, but also in comedies like *Autumn River*² and *Footsteps in the Snow*³ in Szechuan opera and *Ko Ma*⁴ in Hupeh opera. The wit, humor and passion of the people are admirably blended in these comedies.

It is no accident that Chinese drama has attained such a degree of realism. Beginning from its golden age—the Yuan Dynasty (1280-1367)—down to the present, Chinese drama has had a history of about seven hundred years during which it has been constantly supplemented, revised, and enriched by the creative work of the people. The existing types of Chinese opera have all been developed from the plays of the people. Although Peking opera once entered the court, it retained its popular foundation, and has always maintained close contact with the people. It is common knowledge that in the process of its formation and development during the middle of the Ching Dynasty (1644-1911), Peking opera drew

of "The Saint Who Rivals Heaven in Greatness," while actually giving him the job of watching the peach orchard. Monkey eventually discovers the trick and runs riot in heaven.

¹ According to one version of this folk story, Weaving Maid (Vega in the constellation Lyra), who weaves clouds in the sky, gets married to Cowherd (Altair in the constellation Aquila) on earth and bears two children. When the Queen of Heaven hears of this, she comes to take the girl back to heaven. Cowherd, carrying his children, gives chase to them, but is stopped by the Silver River (Milky Way) created by the Queen. The young couple keep crying on the opposite banks of the river and the Queen finally has to let them meet once every year on the 7th of the 7th moon. On this day, magpies form a bridge across the river to facilitate the reunion.

² An old boatman sympathizes with the secret love of a nun for a young student. He rows her to join her lover, but not before the girl is nearly frantic with anxiety.

³ A poor scholar suspects the fidelity of his wife when he sees footsteps in the snow near his home—a cave in the desolate wilds. This agony, added to his hunger, is too much for him, and he reproaches her bitterly. His wife, after some deliberate delay, tells him that the footsteps belong to her mother's servants who have come with provisions for them.

⁴ Ma To, who has suddenly become rich, intends to break his daughter's engagement to a poor student. Ko Ma, servant of Ma To and cousin of the student, uses various ingenious means to help the young man secure his love.

upon several types of local drama of that period, such as Anhwei and Shensi opera, and absorbed the essence of Kunshan opera. In content, language and music, however, it is closer to the people than Kunshan opera, and that is why it replaced the latter to dominate the stage for many years, completing an important reform in the history of modern Chinese drama. In both music and acting, Peking opera surpasses all other types of local drama: it can reflect historical themes more comprehensively and give a many-sided portrayal of a variety of characters in different stations in life. Improvement in quality, however, was achieved under the limitations of the feudal society, and this resulted in a tendency for the opera to divorce itself from the people, giving rise to formalism in certain respects. This was not the case with the various types of local folk drama which were richer in popular sentiment, and closer to the life and language of the people, and consequently they have a more vivid and lively content and a fresher and freer form.

For the past several years, many types of local opera, particularly the Yueh and Tangshan opera, have introduced many new innovations that deserve our attention. It is only natural that many of them have won great applause from the broad masses in the present festival. Peking opera should once again assimilate the nourishment it needs from the various types of local opera, thus invigorating itself and breaking through the barriers which hamper its development to attain a new, higher level in the service of the people. Like the other forms of folk art, local opera in its various forms, particularly the simple varieties of folk opera, is noted for its naturalness, but it is not free from monotony and crudity and must strive to improve itself.

In feudal China, dramatic art reached its climax with the development of Peking opera, and then entered on a period of relative stagnation, unable to make any further advance. Although Peking opera continued to produce many talented actors, they blazed no new trail. In spite of the fact that local popular opera continued to grow and develop, the greater part of it was left to run its course. For this state of stagnation, there were social causes. The feudal ruling class helped to develop Peking opera from various types of local opera, but did not give anything really positive to it. Owing to the fact that it was even more backward culturally than politically and was affected by feudal and compradore ideology, the bourgeoisie never exercised any independent or positive influence on the development of Chinese dramatic arts. What is worse, it caused certain types of opera to lose their national traditions and fall under the evil influences of commercial and compradore circles, turning art into a sort of commodity which seeks after novelty and caters to the vulgar taste of the petty bourgeoisie, leading it down the road to ruin. The Kwangtung opera, for instance, has been travelling this dangerous path. So far as music is concerned, it has made some creative contributions, and has also introduced some daring

innovations in stagecraft; but its artistic tendency as a whole is far from healthy. The authors write their librettos carelessly, sensational plots being their chief concern. In every Kwangtung opera, at least six main characters appear simultaneously on the stage and vie with one another in the strangeness of their costumes. This is no art; in fact, it is the negation of art. Many artistes in the Kwangtung opera are talented, creative and patriotic. They should undertake to do away with the past bad practices and try to breathe into the Kwangtung opera a new healthy life in keeping with the needs of the people and the development of art.

The Chinese working class is heir to all the cultural heritage (including the dramatic heritage) bequeathed to us by past generations. However, owing to the fact that the Chinese People's Revolution was for a long time carried forward under rigorous conditions of war, it was impossible for us to bring together and reassess this heritage in a comprehensive and systematic manner, and to develop it on a new basis. Our work in the past was chiefly concerned with the utilization of simple forms of our national arts such as the *yangko* dance which could immediately reflect the realities of life to serve as a weapon in the struggle. But, now that the people have become the masters of the nation, they should shoulder the responsibility of reforming and developing the dramatic arts. Only under the guidance of the advanced ideology of the working class can Chinese opera find the path to real reform and development, and enter on a new lease of life and a greater future.

In his work *On New Democracy*, Comrade Mao Tse-tung correctly points out: "We must give the processes by which our ancient culture developed a thorough going over, get rid of its feudal dregs and absorb its democratic essence. Only so can we develop our new national culture and increase our self confidence as a nation. We must not, however, take over everything uncritically. We must distinguish between all the rotten things of the old feudal ruling class and the fine old people's culture—those things, that is, which are to some extent democratic and revolutionary." Chinese opera belongs basically to the people's culture. Therefore, we communists must treat this heritage in a careful and serious way, approving neither the offhand manner of belittling our heritage and freely making alterations in it, nor the conservative attitude of refusing to take a critical view of our heritage and to make any reforms at all. Some of our dramatic workers have made free alterations in the librettos of our old operas and modified the characters and the historical reality of the operas on the basis of inadequate knowledge or even of personal taste. These people are not improving upon our traditions but destroying them; they are ignorant of the fact that the dramatic heritage is the creation of the working people of all ages and the spiritual wealth of the nation. To scorn tradition is to scorn the people and to have no love for the motherland. This is intolerable and should be regarded as

the most harmful tendency in our dramatic reform work, which requires immediate correction.

Our dramatic heritage reflects the people's life of the past, but the people's new life, too, demands new dramatic compositions to represent it. The problem of using various forms of opera to give expression to the new life of the people appropriately, and not in a stiff, unnatural way, has therefore become the immediate task of dramatic workers—a serious creative task requiring a long time for its completion. The broad masses are thirsting for dramatic compositions about the new life of the people and, consequently, the various local dramatic troupes that produced such operas have almost invariably won great applause. The Tangshan and Shanghai operas and numerous other types of local drama have shown themselves quite capable of thus picturing the new life, and therefore we are glad to see that prizes have been awarded to the Tangshan opera *The Little Son-in-law* and the Shanghai opera *Arhat Coin*. Beyond doubt, the librettos and theatrical performances of both these should be considered a success. Both of them paint a faithful picture of the irrational marriage practices that still exist in the new villages, but there is no longer any trace of the tragedies of marriage so often delineated in old operas. Instead, we see the complete triumph of the new and progressive over the old and backward. On the other hand, however, neither of these two works can be said to be free from defects in creative method. In *The Little Son-in-law*, the first part, which depicts the heroine Hsiang Tsao and the circles in which she moves as so progressive, makes the second part in which she is forced into marriage with a mere child hardly credible. The composition lacks unity and truthfulness in the delineation of characters and social surroundings. In *Arhat Coin*, there are many vivid descriptions of characters and environment, but the treatment of the changes that take place in the characters as the story progresses seems affected and unconvincing. Two other operas may be mentioned: the Shanghai opera *A Woman Teacher* and the *Chu-yi* opera¹ *New Ways for Doing New Things* are both good in so far as they deal with new persons and the new life of the rural districts. Yet, owing to serious defects in script-writing, neither has succeeded in doing justice to its theme, despite the great endeavour of the actors to make the performance a brilliant one. *A Woman Teacher* is loose in dramatic development because the playwright, instead of concentrating his energies on the representation of the noble spirit of the woman teacher in her educational work, has described her as someone busying herself with production tasks and numerous social activities. He has merely catalogued a number of

¹ *Chu-yi* opera is recently developed from various types of folk song prevalent in Peking and Tientsin. With its lively, healthy and varied style of singing it has been quite successful in representing modern life.

problems of rural life without giving a true picture of that life today. In many places it is the playwright who is talking instead of the characters speaking for themselves. *New Ways for Doing New Things* too wanders away from its theme to give superfluous details on production activities, giving the impression that the sole purpose of the new kind of marriage is to increase production. The personal traits of the characters and their dialogue are abstract and unreal. All these shortcomings in works depicting village life are due to the failure to probe into and expose the complex class contradictions in rural districts and the way in which they manifest themselves in the life, thoughts and customs of the people.

The criticism I have just made is by no means intended to create the impression that all the operas that have been presented in the festival are bad and worthless. On the contrary, I should say that they are all on the right lines, and that quite a number of them are good works of art and worthy of praise. And I should say, too, that their success or failure calls for serious attention and deserves to be carefully summed up. With what hopeful enthusiasm the people are looking forward to the appearance of every new dramatic creation! We want better plays. Realism demands of our dramatists truthful and not fancied representations of life; it requires of them the creation of flesh-and-blood characters. This is exactly what our new dramatists should learn from our excellent tradition—how to throw into relief the many contradictions in the central characters and events so as to give them full expression.

If we want our drama to represent the new life of the people, we must also give careful consideration to the contradictions that may arise between the existing forms of the various types of opera and the new content they are called upon to represent. Consequently, it becomes necessary to reform the various types of opera on their existing basis. As the first step towards this end, we should sort out and preserve all that is excellent or comparatively good in the old dramatic repertoire by weeding out the feudal elements from its content and developing its popular character. Improvements must also be made in the various art forms, be it in music or acting, to enrich and enhance their power of portraying reality. Then, in accordance with the different development of the various types of opera, those that are most suitable for the representation of modern life should be given full opportunity to develop themselves along this line; while others that are, so far, merely appropriate for the representation of historical and legendary themes should be guided step by step to portray modern life but not be required to do so immediately at the expense of their original merits and characteristic flavour. Undue haste and harsh handling are undoubtedly harmful.

The various types of Chinese opera, particularly Peking opera, are mostly suitable for historical themes, and so it is incumbent on us to create new historical plays from a new and correct viewpoint.

We Chinese people have an unbounded interest in the history of our own country and in the illustrious feats and achievements of our forefathers, and particularly in that part of our revolutionary history which covers the last hundred years. Our new drama should observe and judge historical events and personages from the working-class point of view. It should help the people to differentiate those historical figures who have aided the progress of history and stood by the people, from those who have impeded this progress and oppressed and exploited the people. All too often the people's own history was distorted and given a wrong twist in the old drama. Comrade Mao Tse-tung has pointed out clearly: "The true creators of history are the people, but on the old stage it was the gentry and their wives, sons and daughters who ruled, while the people were regarded as mere scum of society." Thus, the mission of new creations in historical drama is to restore to history its true character and to show that the people are the real masters in history. Moreover, history, as reflected in former dramatic compositions, consists for the most part of tales of emperors, kings, their generals and ministers, and is mostly concerned with the past, or sometimes even with ancient times. Of the hundred years from the Opium War to the present, in which the greatest changes in Chinese history have taken place, scarcely any trace can be found. It is quite evident, therefore, that creative efforts in the field of historical drama should henceforth draw subject matter and material from modern history. Whether it is a question of giving expression to modern or ancient life, the highest principle in art is truthfulness. Historical truth brooks no distortion, concealment or whitewashing. However, those who oppose historical fidelity, like Comrade Yang Shao-hsuan, seem quite incapable of understanding this fundamental principle. They are of the opinion that, for the realization of subjective revolutionary propaganda purposes, they may falsify and fabricate history at will without any regard for objective historical truth. They fail to grasp the fact that to view history and to write about it in the light of modern working-class ideology is totally different from painting historical characters as actually possessing modern working-class ideology.

Heroes in history deserve our praise. But it must not be forgotten that none of them was free from the limitations imposed upon him by the conditions of the age in which he lived. Hence, no comparison can be made between their progressiveness and greatness and that of the advanced persons of our present-day working class. But the anti-historicists go to all lengths to give the heroes of the past the likenesses of the heroes of our day. And, in no few instances, they even paint as heroes people who are no heroes at all.

In order to learn from the errors committed in history, we may criticize the mistakes made by historical personages. However, in making such a criticism, it is important that we take into consideration the

concrete historical conditions amidst which the figures in question lived, and not the conditions of the present. But the anti-historicists almost always use our present standards to judge people of the old days, put undeserved blame upon their heads and even compel them to criticize themselves. This is another example of the all too common tendency to "modernize" and "idealize" historical characters.

We respect myths, because we find mirrored in them both the naive views our forbears had of the world and their visions of a happy life in the future. Nevertheless, the anti-historicists are stubbornly determined to turn legends into reflections of present-day struggles. And so, for the simple reason that the dove is the symbol of the peace for which the people of the whole present-day world are struggling, doves have taken the place of magpies forming the bridge in *The Cowherd and the Weaving Maid*. One playwright has gone even further: he makes the magpies symbolize peace; the old ox that ploughs the field stands for a tractor; and Truman, airplanes and tanks are all crammed onto the stage.

The main trouble with anti-historicism is that, instead of endeavouring to arm the people with truth, it makes them believe in lies and absurd fabrications. Instead of leading the people forward, it pulls them backward. Instead of fostering new ideas of patriotism among the people, it engenders narrow nationalism.

We condemn distortions of history in the old drama, at the same time we oppose the new anti-historicists who distort history in the name of Marxism. This is an ideological struggle we must wage for the creation of new historical drama.

The task of writing new scripts to depict either modern life or history is one for true authors and poets. Great is our age, rich our history. We need more men like Kuan Han-ching, Ma Chih-yuan and Wang Shih-fu¹ to usher in the new age of drama we are so eagerly anticipating.

The chief problem in reforming drama is script-writing, because it is the basis of all dramatic activities. However, in so far as the creation of the new opera is concerned, music plays an equally decisive role.

There are many different forms of Chinese opera, most of them the products of long historical development. Consequently, while each possesses national traits common to all, it has at the same time distinct regional characteristics owing to the differences in local dialects and folk music. Each different type of opera should, in accordance with its own special features and needs, absorb the merits of the other types in order to enrich itself and advance to a higher level.

New music workers should take an active part in dramatic reform. They should make a serious study of the music of Peking opera and other types of opera, and, in the light of European classical music, particularly

¹Kuan Han-ching, Ma Chih-yuan and Wang Shih-fu were outstanding dramatists of the Yuan Dynasty.

that of the advanced experiences of contemporary Soviet music, make proper improvements in musical instruments, musical composition, and styles of singing so as to impart greater vigour to Chinese opera in its representation of the new life and to pave the way for the interflow between Chinese operatic music and music the world over. This is a creative task which certainly cannot be accomplished overnight or by the efforts of a few. First of all, new music workers should help the musicians of the various types of opera to study music and improve their music.

Chinese operatic music, when the history of the various types of opera is considered as a whole, is quite rich. But its power of expression, in certain types of opera, particularly its power of representing the new life, is poor and inadequate. Numerous actors of renown in Chinese opera, especially in Peking opera, have contributed to vocal art many distinctive and original features. Wei Liang-fu, the creator of Kunshan opera, is undoubtedly one of the greatest contributors to the development of operatic music and, especially, of vocal art. Many stage musicians have also done much to raise the standard of their performance and to improve their instruments. Taken as a whole, however, Chinese operatic music has undergone no radical renovation. The position of stage musicians has not been sufficiently respected, nor has their function been developed. Hence, it has not yet been possible for them to play an important part in promoting dramatic reform. Their forces, which are indispensable to the reform and development of operatic art, should be mobilized and every assistance given them to raise their artistic level.

A new type of opera represented by *The White-haired Girl* has come into existence in present-day China to take its place beside Peking opera and the various other types of local opera. This new type of opera was created after the Yanan Forum on Literature and Art by new musicians, who, in order to represent the life and struggle of the working people, used folk songs and folk operatic music as a basis, at the same time profiting from the advanced experiences of foreign music. This new type of opera is still young and immature, but because it answers the people's need for new dramatic content and consists, in part, of quite successful musical compositions, it has been warmly welcomed by the masses. It deserves recognition as a new form of national opera, a form which should be encouraged, supported and developed. However, this new type of opera has not yet entered into the rich legacy of national drama which is the prerequisite to the brilliant development of this new type of opera in the future. At present its influence upon the broad masses of people is far less than that of the original types of Chinese opera. Meantime the latter are being gradually reformed and, consequently, some of them differ basically very little from the new opera in representing the new life. Hence, new opera workers should devote themselves to the study of the existing types of Chinese opera so as to free themselves resolutely

and thoroughly from that erroneous tendency of looking down upon the national dramatic heritage. We should realize that to talk about creating the new opera apart from the basis of national dramatic music will only lead us to the absurdity of repudiating our own national traditions. Our new musicians should take an active part in the task of reforming and developing our national dramatic arts. Only after they have gained experience in regenerating our heritage of national dramatic arts will we have a true and firm foundation for the creation of the new opera. Otherwise, it is built on the sand and has no future.

Chinese histrionic art is outstanding; the fact that the traditional Chinese plays and operas consist of three distinct kinds of art—singing, dancing and acting combined—makes it all the more remarkable. Chinese drama, and particularly Peking opera, knows a long line of talented performers from Cheng Chang-keng to Mei Lan-fang, who have created numerous different characters on the stage. Their acting forms one of the most important and precious parts of our dramatic heritage, which we should treasure and develop as it deserves. On the other hand, it includes backward, formalistic and naturalistic elements which are a hindrance to the drama and ought to be gradually reformed. There are also certain features of the Chinese stage that distort life and injure art; these should be gradually and continuously reformed. But, in the course of reform, every detail should be carefully considered and repeatedly put to the test. The use of curtains for the concealment of the work of the property-man, for instance, although a mere detail, on account of its close relation to the performance requires much study and experiment to be made satisfactory. The “face designs,”¹ too, must be properly reformed and not simply abolished. The first and principal step, however, is to reform the designs that disgrace the working people and the minority nationalities, or are horrible or superstitious. Other reforms, such as those concerning the scenery and costuming, require careful designing and planning by stage artists. In reforming both production and play-acting, we should oppose on the one hand impatience and all harsh measures and, on the other, all conservative refusal to reform.

Only by comprehensive but gradual reform of the various types of drama can we succeed in our aim to “let all the flowers bloom together, and derive the new from the old.”

Finally, for the successful completion of dramatic reform work, the guidance of the Party and the government, both in ideology and art, should be strengthened in the theatre. This is the crux of the matter. I am convinced that our dramatic arts will advance by long strides after this festival. Along with the rising tide of unprecedented development in China's economy and culture will come a glorious age of drama. Let our hearts and efforts be united to hasten its arrival!

¹i.e., colored designs painted on the actors' faces, denoting their characters.

The White-haired Girl

(An Opera)

by Ting Yi and Ho Ching-chih

CHARACTERS

YANG *tenant of Landlord Huang, aged over fifty.*
HSI-ERH *Yang's daughter, aged seventeen.*
AUNTY WANG *Yang's neighbour, a peasant woman of over fifty.*
TA-CHUN *Aunty Wang's son, about twenty.*
UNCLE CHAO *Yang's old friend, a tenant peasant of about fifty.*
LI *a peasant, over forty.*
TA-SO *a young peasant.*
HUANG *a landlord in his thirties.*
MRS. HUANG *Landlord Huang's mother, over fifty.*
MU *the Huang family steward, in his thirties.*
AUNTY CHANG *a servant in the Huang family, in her forties.*
TA-SHENG *a servant in the Huang family, in his twenties.*
TWO THUGS EMPLOYED BY THE HUANG FAMILY.
THE DISTRICT HEAD.
HU-TZU *a young peasant.*
FOUR PEASANTS.
FOUR PEASANT WOMEN.
CROWD.

ACT I

TIME *Winter, 1935.*

PLACE *Yangko Village in Hopei. There is a plain before the village, and hills behind.*

SCENE I *New Year's Eve in the home of the tenant peasant Yang.*

SCENE II *A room beside the reception hall of the Huang house that same evening.*

The entrance to the Huang house.

SCENE III *The road to the village, that same evening.
Yang's home.*

SCENE IV *In front of Yang's home the next day.*

ACT II

SCENE I *Mrs. Huang's Buddhist shrine on New Year's morning.*

SCENE II *In front of Auntie Wang's house, a month later.
In front of Uncle Chao's house.*

SCENE III *An evening several days later in the Huang house.
Mrs. Huang's bedroom.*

*The entrance to Landlord Huang's study.
Landlord Huang's study.*

SCENE IV *The next morning in the Huang house.
Landlord Huang's study.*

ACT III

SCENE I *Mrs. Huang's bedroom, seven months later.
Auntie Chang's room.
The courtyard.*

SCENE II *Mrs. Huang's room, the same day.*

SCENE III *Outside the back gate of the Huang house that evening.
Outside the village, on the river bank beside the mountain.*

ACT IV

SCENE I *A year later, after the beginning of the War of Resistance, on the hillside overlooking the river.*

SCENE II *The next day, under a big tree at one end of the village.*

ACT V

SCENE I *A year later, under the big tree at one end of the village.*

SCENE II *The same evening, in the Goddess' Temple.*

A mountain path.

In the cave.

SCENE III *The next morning, in front of the Huang family's ancestral hall.*

ACT I

TIME *Winter, 1935.*

PLACE *Yangko Village in Hopei. There is a plain in front of the village, and hills behind.*

SCENE I

It is New Year's Eve, and heavy snow is falling.

HSI-ERH, daughter of the tenant peasant YANG, comes on through the snowstorm carrying maize flour.

HSI-ERH (*sings*):

*The north wind blows, the snow flakes whirl,
A flurry of snow brings in New Year.
Dad's been hiding a week because of his debt,
Though it's New Year's Eve, he's still not back.
Aunty's given me maize flour, and I'm waiting
For Dad to come home and spend New Year.*

(Pushing open the door, she goes in. It is a humble room, containing a stove with a kitchen-god beside it and firewood and pots stacked in one corner. On the stove stands an oil lamp.)

HSI-ERH Now it's New Year's Eve, everybody's steaming maize cakes and dumplings, burning incense and pasting up door-gods for New Year. Dad has been away for a week, and still isn't back. We've nothing in the house for New Year. (*Pauses.*) There are only Dad and I at home: my mother died when I was three. My father cultivates one acre of land belonging to rich Landlord Huang. Dad works in the fields with me at his heels, in the wind and in the rain. . . . Every year we're behind with our rent, so just before New Year he always leaves home to escape being dunned. (*Anxiously.*) Now it's New Year's Eve, and getting quite dark—why isn't he back yet? Oh, I went to Aunty's house just now, and she gave me some maize flour which I'm going to mix with bean cake to make cakes for Dad to eat when he comes back. (*She fetches water, mixes the dough and starts making cakes.*)

(The wind blows open the door. HSI-ERH runs over, but finds no one there.)

HSI-ERH Oh, it's the wind that blew open the door. *(Sings):*

*Wind whirls the snow against our door,
Wind batters the door till it flies wide open.
I'm waiting for Dad to come back home,
And step inside the room again!*

When Dad left, he took beancurd to sell. If he's sold the beancurd and brings back two pounds of flour, we could even eat dumplings. *(Sings):*

*I feel so restless waiting for Dad,
But when he comes home I'll be happy.
He'll bring some white flour back with him,
And we'll have a really happy New Year!*

(She continues making cakes.)

(Enter YANG covered with snow. He has his pedlar's pole and kit for carrying beancurd, and over his shoulders the cloth used to cover the beancurd. He staggers along.)

YANG *(sings):*

*Three miles through a snowstorm I've come home,
After hiding a week from the duns.
As long as I can get by this time,
I don't mind putting up with hunger and cold.*

(After looking round apprehensively he knocks at the door.) Hsi-erh!
Open the door!

(HSI-ERH, overjoyed, opens the door.)

HSI-ERH You're back, Dad!

YANG Yes. *(He signs to her not to talk so loudly.)*

HSI-ERH *(brushing the snow from her father's clothes)* It's snowing very hard outside, Dad! Look how thickly you're covered!

YANG While I was away, Hsi-erh, did the landlord send anyone to press for payment?

HSI-ERH On the 25th, Steward Mu came.

YANG *(taken aback)* Oh? He came? What did he say?

HSI-ERH When he found you were away he left again.

YANG And then?

HSI-ERH He hasn't been back since.

YANG *(rather incredulous)* Really?

HSI-ERH Yes, Dad.

YANG *(still unconvinced)* Are you sure?

HSI-ERH Why should I fool you, Dad?

YANG *(reassured)* Well, that's good. Listen, Hsi-erh, how strong the wind is!

HSI-ERH And it's snowing so hard!

YANG It's growing dark too.

HSI-ERH And the road is bad, Dad.

YANG I don't think Steward Mu will come now. I owe the landlord one and a half piculs, and my debt with the interest amounts to twenty-five dollars; but this time I've got by.

HSI-ERH (*happily*) So we've got by again, Dad!

YANG Hsi-erh, fetch some firewood so that I can dry myself. Have you still not finished that maize flour?

HSI-ERH I finished that long ago. This is some Aunty Wang gave me just now.

YANG So you've been to the mountain for firewood again in such cold.

HSI-ERH I went just now with Ta-chun. (*She fetches firewood.*) You must be hungry, Dad.

YANG (*warming himself by the fire*) I'm hungry all right. (*Chuckles.*)

HSI-ERH The cakes are mixed, I'm going to steam them.

YANG Just a minute, Hsi-erh. What do you think this is? (*Producing a wallet from his pocket.*)

HSI-ERH (*clutching at it in delighted surprise*) What is it, Dad?

YANG (*sings*):

*With the money I made by selling beancurd,
I bought two pounds of flour at the fair;
But I didn't want Landlord Huang to see it,
So it's been in my wallet the last few days.*

HSI-ERH (*sings*):

*With the money he made by selling beancurd,
Dad bought two pounds of flour at the fair.
He's brought it home to make dumplings,
So now we'll have a happy New Year!*

Dad, I'll call Aunty Wang over to make dumplings.

YANG (*stopping her*) Wait a bit, Hsi-erh! Look what this is.

HSI-ERH What, Dad?

YANG (*takes a thickly wrapped paper packet from his pocket. When all the paper wrappings are removed, a red ribbon is disclosed. While taking off the wrappings, he sings*):

*Other girls have flowers to wear,
But your dad can't afford to buy flowers;
So I bought two feet of red ribbon
To tie in my Hsi-erh's hair!*

(HSI-ERH *kneels before YANG who ties the ribbon in her hair.*)

HSI-ERH (*sings*):

*Other girls have flowers to wear,
But Dad can't afford to buy flowers;
So he's bought two feet of red ribbon
For me to tie in my hair!*

(HSI-ERH *stands up.*)

YANG (*laughs*) Turn round and let me have a look at you. (HSI-ERH *turns.*) Good. Presently we'll ask Ta-chun and Auntie Wang to come and have a look too. (HSI-ERH *tosses her head shyly yet coquettishly.*) Oh, I brought two door-gods too. Let's paste them up. (*He takes out two pictures.*)

HSI-ERH Door-gods! (*They paste them up and sing*):
The door-gods ride roan horses!

YANG:
Pasted on the door they'll guard our home!

HSI-ERH:
The door-gods carry such big swords!

YANG:
They'll keep out all devils, great and small!

BOTH:
They'll keep out all devils, great and small!

YANG Aha, now neither big devils nor little devils can get in!

HSI-ERH I hope that rent-collector, Steward Mu, will be kept out too!

YANG Good girl, let's hope we have a peaceful New Year.

(*They close the door.*)

(*Enter AUNTY WANG from next door.*)

WANG Today Ta-chun bought two pounds of flour at the fair. I'm going to see if Uncle Yang has come back or not, and if he's back I'll ask them over to eat dumplings. (*Looks up.*) Ah, Uncle Yang must be back: the door-gods are up. (*Knocks.*) Hsi-erh! Open the door!

HSI-ERH Who is it?

WANG Your aunty.

HSI-ERH (*opens the door and WANG enters*) See, Aunty, Dad's back!

WANG How long have you been back, Uncle Yang?

YANG Just the time it takes to smoke one pipe.

HSI-ERH Aunty, Dad's bought two pounds of flour. I was just going to ask you over to make dumplings, and now here you are. Look, look!

WANG Ta-chun has bought two pounds of flour too, child, and for half a pint of rice he got a pound of pork as well. I was going to ask you both to our home.

HSI-ERH Have them over here!

WANG No, come on over.

HSI-ERH Do stay here, Aunty!

YANG Yes, stay here.

WANG Look at you both! Why stand on ceremony with us! (*Turns and whispers to YANG.*) Uncle, after New Year Hsi-erh and Ta-chun will be one year older. I'm waiting for you to say the word!

YANG (*afraid lest HSI-ERH hear, yet apparently eager for her to hear*) Don't be impatient, Aunty. When the right time comes we'll fix it up for the youngsters. Ah....

HSI-ERH (*pretending not to understand, interrupts them*) Aunty, come and mix the dough.

YANG That's right: go and mix the dough.

(AUNTY, *chuckling, goes to mix dough.*)

(*Enter the landlord's steward, MU. He carries a lantern bearing the words, "The Huang Family—House of Accumulated Virtue."*)

MU (*sings*):

*Here I come collecting rent
And dunning for debt!
I've four treasures as tricks of the trade:
Incense and a gun,
Crutches and a bag of tricks.
I burn the incense before the landlord,
I fire the gun to frighten tenants,
With my crutches I trip folk up,
And with my bag of tricks I cheat them!*

This evening the landlord has sent me on an errand to the tenant peasant Yang—a secret errand, not for everybody's ears! The landlord has given me instructions to take Yang to him for a talk. (*Knocks.*) Old Yang, open up!

YANG Who is it?

MU I, Steward Mu!

(*The three inside start, and AUNTY WANG and HSI-ERH hastily hide the flour bowl.*)

MU Old Yang, hurry up, and let me in!

(*There is no help for it but to open the door, and MU enters. All remain silent.*)

MU (*makes a round of the room with his lantern. HSI-ERH hides behind AUNTY WANG*) Old Yang! (*With unusual politeness.*) Are you ready for New Year?

YANG Oh, Mr. Mu, we haven't lit the stove yet.

MU Well, Old Yang, I have to trouble you. Landlord Huang wants you to come over for a talk.

YANG Oh! (*Greatly taken aback.*) But... but... Mr. Mu, I can't pay the rent or the debt.

MU Oh no, this time Landlord Huang doesn't want to see you either about the rent or your debt, but to discuss something important. It's New Year's Eve, and the landlord is in a good humour, so you can talk things over comfortably. Come along!

YANG (*pleadingly*) I... Mr. Mu....

MU (*pointing to the door*) It's all right. Come along. (*YANG has to go.*)

HSI-ERH (*hastily*) Dad, you....

MU (*shining the lantern on HSI-ERH'S face*) Oh, don't worry, Hsi-erh. Landlord Huang will give you flowers to wear. Your dad will bring them back. (*Laughs.*)

WANG (*putting the beancurd cloth over YANG'S shoulders*) Put this over you, Uncle! The snow is heavier now.... When you get there, go down on your knees to Landlord Huang, and he surely won't spoil our New Year.

MU That's right. (*Pushes YANG out.*)

(*YANG looks back as he goes out.*)

HSI-ERH Dad!...

(*YANG sighs.*)

MU Hurry up! (*Pushes YANG off.*)

HSI-ERH Aunty, my dad!... (*Cries.*)

WANG (*putting her arms round her*) Your dad will be back soon. Come on, come to our house to mix dough.

(*They go out.*)

(CURTAIN)

SCENE II

LANDLORD HUANG'S house.

The stage presents the entrance and a small room near the reception hall, furnished with a table and chairs. The candle in a tall candlestick on the table lights up an account book, abacus, inkstone and old-fashioned Chinese pipe.

Sounds of laughter, clinking of wine-cups and the shouts of guests playing the finger-game are heard offstage. LANDLORD HUANG comes in, cheerfully tipsy, picking his teeth.

HUANG (*sings*):

*With feasting and wine we see the Old Year out,
And hang lanterns and garlands to celebrate New Year's Eve!
There are smiles on the faces of all our guests
Who are drunk with joy, not wine.
Our barns are bursting with grain,
So who cares if the poor go hungry!*

(*The servant TA-SHENG brings in water, and HUANG rinses his mouth.*)

HUANG Ta-sheng, go and tell your mistress I have a headache and can't drink with the guests. Ask her to entertain them.

TA-SHENG Very good, sir. (*Exit.*)

HUANG Well, I haven't lived in vain! I have nearly a hundred hectares of good land, and every year I collect at least a thousand piculs in rent. All my life I've known how to weight the scales in my own favour and manage things smoothly both at home and outside. During the last few years our family has done pretty well. Last year my wife died. My mother wants me to marry again, but I feel freer without a wife at home. Women are cheap as dirt. If one takes my fancy, like this one tonight, it's very easy to arrange.

(MU leads YANG on.)

YANG (*sings timidly*):

The red lanterns under the eaves dazzle my eyes,

And I don't feel easy in my mind.

I wonder what he wants me for?

Hsi-erh is waiting for me at home.

MU Old Yang, Landlord Huang is here. This way.

(*They enter the room.*)

HUANG (*politely*) So it's Old Yang. Sit down, won't you? (*Indicates a seat.*)

(YANG dare not sit.)

MU (*pouring tea*) Have some tea.

(YANG remains silent.)

HUANG Have you got everything ready for New Year, Old Yang?

YANG Well, sir, you know how it is... It's been snowing more than ten days, and we have no firewood or rice at home. I've not lit the stove for several days.

MU Bah! See here, Old Yang, there's no need to complain about poverty. Landlord Huang knows all about you, doesn't he?

HUANG Yes, Old Yang, I know you're not well off. But this year is passing, and I have to trouble you for the rent. (*Opens the account book.*) You cultivate one acre of my land. Last year you were five pecks short, this summer another four and a half pecks, in autumn another five and a half pecks.

MU (*reckoning on the abacus*) Five times five... two fives makes ten....

HUANG And remember the money you owe us. In my father's time your wife died, and you wanted a coffin, so you borrowed five dollars from us. The year before last you were sick and borrowed two and a half dollars. Last year another three dollars. At that time we agreed upon five per cent monthly interest. At compound interest it amounts to—

MU (*reckoning on the abacus*) The interest on the interest amounts to—five times five, twenty-five. Two fives is ten.... Altogether twenty-five dollars fifty cents. Plus one and a half piculs' rent.

HUANG Altogether twenty-five dollars and fifty cents, and one and a half piculs' rent. Right, Old Yang?

YANG Yes, sir....That's right.

HUANG See, Old Yang, it's down here quite clearly in black and white, all correct and in order. This is New Year's Eve, Old Yang: the rent must be paid. If you've got it with you, so much the better: you pay the money and the debt is cancelled. If you haven't got it with you, then go and find some way of raising it. Steward Mu will go with you.

MU So it's up to you. I'm ready to go with you. Get going, Old Yang!

YANG (*pleadingly*) Oh, Mr. Mu....Sir....Please let me off this time! I really have no money, I can't pay the rent or the debt. (*His voice falters.*) Sir....Mr. Mu....

HUANG Now, Old Yang, that's no way to act. This is New Year's Eve. You're in difficulties, but I'm even worse off. You must clear the debt today.

YANG Sir....

HUANG Come, you must be reasonable. Whatever you say, that debt must be paid.

MU You heard what Landlord Huang said, Old Yang. He never goes back on his word. You must find a way, Old Yang.

YANG What can I do, sir? An old man like me, with no relatives or rich friends—where can I get money? (*Beseechingly.*) Sir....

HUANG (*seeing his opportunity, signals to MU*) Well....

MU (*to YANG*) Well, listen, Old Yang, there is a way. Landlord Huang has thought of a way out for you, if you will take it....

YANG Tell me what it is, Mr. Mu.

MU You go back, and bring your daughter Hsi-erh here as payment for the rent.

YANG (*horror-stricken*) What!

MU Go and fetch Hsi-erh here as payment for the rent.

YANG (*kneeling beseechingly*) Sir, you can't do that! (*Sings*):

The sudden demand for my girl as rent—

Is like thunder out of a cloudless sky!

Hsi-erh is the darling of my heart,

I'd rather die than lose her!

I beg you, sir,

Take pity on us, please,

And let me off this once!

She's all I have,

This is more than I can bear!

HUANG (*stands up in disgust*) Well, I'm doing you a good turn, Old Yang. Bring Hsi-erh to our house to spend a few years in comfort, and won't she be better off than in your home, where she has to go cold and hungry and has such a hard time of it? Besides, we are not going to

treat Hsi-erh badly here. And this way your debt will be cancelled too. Isn't that killing two birds with one stone? (*Laughs.*)

YANG No, sir, you can't do that....

MU Well, Old Yang, it seems to me you poor people try to take advantage of the kindness of the rich. Landlord Huang wants to help your family. Just think, Hsi-erh coming here will have the time of her life. She will live on the fat of the land, dress like a lady and only have to stretch out her hand for food or drink! That would be much better than in your house where she goes cold and hungry. In fact Landlord Huang is quite distressed by all you make Hsi-erh put up with. So you'd better agree.

YANG But, sir, Mr. Mu, this child Hsi-erh is the apple of my eye. Her mother died when she was three, and I brought her up as best I could. I'm an old man now and I have only this daughter. She's both daughter and son to me. I can't let her go...sir! (*Turning to HUANG.*)

HUANG (*adamant*) Bah!

(*YANG turns to MU who also ignores him.*)

HUANG (*after a while*) I'm not going to wait any longer, Old Yang! Make your choice. Give me your girl or pay the debt.

MU Old Yang, Landlord Huang is in a good humour now. Don't offend him, or it'll be the worse for you.

HUANG (*angrily*) That's enough! Make out a statement! Tell him to send the girl tomorrow! (*Starts angrily off.*)

YANG (*stepping forward to clutch at him*) Don't go, sir!

HUANG Get away! (*Pushing YANG aside, he hurries off.*)

MU All right, better agree, Old Yang. (*Goes to the table to write a statement.*)

YANG (*barring MU's way wildly*) You... you mustn't do that! (*Sings*):

*What have I done wrong,
That I should be forced to sell my child?
I've had a hard time of it all my life,
But I little thought it would come to this!*

MU Get wise, Old Yang. Don't keep on being such a fool. You've got to agree to this today, whether you like it or not! (*Pushes YANG aside and takes up a pen to write the statement.*)

YANG (*seizing MU's hand*) No! (*Sings*):

*Heaven just kills the grass with a single root,
The flood just carries off the one-plank bridge.
She's the only child I ever had,
And I can't live without her!*

MU (*furiously*) Don't be a fool! Presently if you make the master lose his temper, it'll be no joke!

YANG I... I... I'll go somewhere to plead my case! (*About to rush out.*)

MU (*banging the table*) Where are you going to plead your case? The county magistrate is our friend, this is the yamen door; where are you going to plead your case!

YANG (*aghast*) I... I....

MU It's no use, Old Yang! You're no match for him. I advise you to make out a statement and put your mark on it to settle the business. (*Writes.*)

YANG (*stopping him again*) You... you....

(*Enter HUANG impatiently.*)

HUANG (*in a towering rage*) Why are you still so stubborn, Old Yang! Let me tell you, it's going to be done today, whether you like it or not! (*To MU.*) Hurry up and make out a statement for him.

YANG (*at a loss*) Ah!

MU (*reading as he writes*) "Tenant Yang owes Landlord Huang one and a half piculs of grain and twenty-five dollars fifty cents. Since he is too poor to pay, he wants to sell his daughter Hsi-erh to the landlord to cancel the debt. Both parties agree and will not go back on their word. Since verbal agreements are inconclusive, this statement is drawn up as evidence.... Signed by the two parties, Landlord Huang and Tenant Yang, and the witness, Steward Mu...." Right, talk is empty but writing is binding. Come on, Old Yang! Put your mark on it!

YANG (*frenziedly*) You can't do this, sir!

HUANG What! All right, then tell Liu to tie him up and take him to the county court!

YANG (*panic-stricken*) What, send me to the county court! Oh, sir!

MU (*seizing YANG'S hand*) Put your mark on it! (*Presses his fingers down.*)

YANG (*startled to see the ink on his finger*) Oh! (*Falls to the ground.*)

MU Aha, one finger-print has cleared the debt of all these years.... (*Hands the document to HUANG.*)

(*HUANG makes a gesture to MU.*)

MU (*ascertains that YANG is still breathing*) He's all right.

HUANG Old Yang, you'd better go back now, and bring Hsi-erh here tomorrow. (*To MU.*) Give him that document.

MU (*helping YANG up*) This one is yours, here.... (*Hands him the document.*) Tomorrow send Hsi-erh here to give New Year's greetings to Landlord Huang's family. Tell her to come here to spend a happy New Year. Go on. (*Pushes YANG out, then shuts the door.*)

(*YANG collapses outside the gate in the snowstorm.*)

HUANG Old Mu, you take a few men there early tomorrow. We don't want the old fellow to go back and decide to ignore the debt and run away. In that case we'd lose both girl and money.

MU Right.

HUANG Another thing. For heaven's sake don't let word get about: it wouldn't sound well on New Year's Day. If those wretches spread the news, even though we're right on our side it would be hard to explain. If anyone questions you, say my mother wants to see Hsi-erh and you're fetching her to give New Year's greetings to the old lady.

MU Very good. (*Exit.*)

HUANG Ah! The only way to get rich is at the expense of the poor. Without breaking Old Yang, I couldn't get Hsi-erh!

YANG (*comes to himself outside the gate, and gets up*) Heaven! Murderous Heaven! (*Sings*):

*Heaven kills folk without batting an eye!
The landlord's house is Hell!
I'm an old fool, an old fool,
Why did I put my mark on that paper just now?
I've gone and sold my only daughter,
Your dad's let you down, Hsi-erh!
You're happy, waiting at home for me for New Year,
But I'm in despair!
With this hand I've sold my only child,
How can I face you when I get home?*

(*He staggers off.*)

(CURTAIN)

SCENE III

YANG'S old friend, the tenant peasant CHAO, enters with a basket containing a small piece of meat and a pot of wine. He is taking the path by the village.

CHAO (*sings*):

*In the gale the snow whirls high,
Nine homes out of ten are dimly lit;
Not that we don't celebrate New Year,
But the poor have a different New Year from the rich.
There's wine and meat in the landlord's house,
While we tenants have neither rice nor flour!*

(*He hears sounds of merriment from LANDLORD HUANG'S house in the distance.*) Bah! At New Year the rich could die of laughing, while the poor could die of despair! Old Yang's been away a week to escape

paying his debt, but he ought to be back now. I've bought four ounces of wine to drink with him. Getting his troubles off his chest is the poor man's way of spending New Year. (*Sings*):

*Just as officials are all in league,
The poor stick together too.
I'm going to spend New Year's Eve with Old Yang,
To share four ounces of cheap wine with a friend. (Exit.)*

(*Enter YANG.*)

YANG (*sings*):

*I feel as befuddled as if I were drunk,
In such a snowstorm where can I go?
The deed in my pocket is like a knife
That's going to kill my own flesh and blood.*

Where are you, Hsi-erh? You don't know what your dad... (*Falls.*)

CHAO (*enters and sees a prostrate figure. When he goes to help him up he recognizes YANG*) So it's you, Old Yang?

YANG Who's that?

CHAO It's Old Chao.

YANG Oh, Old Chao, friend....

CHAO (*raising him*) What happened to you, Old Yang?

YANG Ah! (*For an instant he appears to be in a frenzy, but then fights down his feelings.*) Nothing.... No, nothing. Just now I went to the rich man's house....

CHAO Oh, so you were badly treated up there. It's snowing faster, let's go back now and talk it over. We'll have a good talk. (*Helps YANG along.*)

YANG Talk.... Talk.... Talk it over.... Have a good talk.

CHAO Here, how is it the door is closed? (*Opens the door and helps YANG in.*) Why is there no light? (*Gropes for the matches to light the lamp.*) Where are you, Hsi-erh?

YANG (*hearing HSI-ERH'S name*) Ah, Hsi-erh, Hsi-erh!

CHAO What is it, Old Yang?

YANG (*controlling himself*) Nothing, Hsi-erh has gone with Auntie Wang to make dumplings.

CHAO So this New Year's Eve you have dumplings to eat? Your daughter must be happy. Old Yang, look, I've got a pound of pork for you, for you two to eat tomorrow. And I've brought four ounces of wine. Tonight the two of us can drink a few cups. (*Heats the wine.*)

YANG Right, drink. Drink a few cups.... Drink a few cups. (*Sits by the stove. They drink.*)

CHAO What happened, Old Yang, in the landlord's house just now?

YANG That... nothing... Old Chao.

CHAO What is it? Tell me. I'm your friend.

YANG Ah, yes....

CHAO Go on, Old Yang! What's there to be afraid of?

YANG I....

CHAO You'd try the patience of a saint, the way you never take other people into your confidence, but keep all your troubles to yourself! But we two have always talked frankly, and tonight you mustn't brood. Come on, Old Yang, out with it!

YANG Very well, I'll tell you. I came home today, hoping to have escaped paying the debt. Then Steward Mu called me to the landlord's house.

CHAO Yes.

YANG Landlord Huang opened the account book and Mu reckoned on the abacus, and insisted on my clearing the debt. I couldn't pay it, so he....

CHAO So what?

YANG He wanted Hsi-erh as payment.

CHAO Did you agree?

YANG I.... No.

CHAO (*excitedly*) Good for you, Old Yang! You did right. To let Hsi-erh go to his house in payment for the debt would be like throwing your child to the wolves. As the proverb says, "Buddha needs incense, and a man needs self-respect." That's something we must fight for. You've shown the right spirit, Old Yang. (*Raises his cup.*) Come on, Old Yang, drink up.

YANG (*in agony of mind*) Old Chao... Old Chao, you know tomorrow—no, next year—next year the landlord will still want Hsi-erh to go.

CHAO Next year? Well, Old Yang, I'm considering that. Next year I'm not going to stay here. I'm going north.

YANG Where? Going north? Ah, even a poor home is hard to give up. If we leave, we'll starve.

CHAO Not necessarily. Here we cultivate these small plots of poor land, and can't live anyway, what with the rent. This year I worked fifty days for the landlord, but even so I didn't clear all the rent for the melon field; yesterday he was pressing me again. Bah! Why should an old man like me, all alone and without children, end my days on these small fields? I think we'd better take Hsi-erh to the north, until she's grown up. At our age, we can't expect to live long, and our death doesn't matter; but we mustn't ruin the child's life.

YANG (*sadly, weighing his words*) Our death doesn't matter, but we mustn't ruin the child's life.

CHAO Think it over, Old Yang! I consider next year, as soon as spring comes, we should take our things and go. (*Raises his cup again.*) Drink up!

YANG Ah!

(*Enter AUNTY WANG, HSI-ERH and WANG TA-CHUN, carrying the dumplings.*)

WANG Has Uncle Yang really come back, Ta-chun?

TA-CHUN I saw him coming out of the landlord's house. (To HSI-ERH.)
Hsi-erh, the path is slippery, let me take that.

HSI-ERH I can carry it, Ta-chun.

(YANG, hearing voices outside, hastily wipes his eyes and pretends all is well.)

HSI-ERH (approaching, sees a light through the door) Aunty, I think Dad is really back. (They enter.)

HSI-ERH (joyfully) Dad, you're back!

TA-CHUN Uncle, you're back!

WANG Uncle Chao, you're here too....

CHAO We two have been chatting quite a time.

TA-CHUN Uncle, what happened in the landlord's house?

YANG I went, and couldn't pay the rent or settle the debt, so he....

ALL What did he do?

YANG Nothing... I... I went down on my knees to him, that's all, and then came back.

TA-CHUN Really, Uncle?

HSI-ERH Really, Dad? That was all?

YANG Certainly, child. Have I ever deceived you?

CHAO That's right.

WANG (wiping her eyes) Thank heaven! All's well then, and we can enjoy New Year. Uncle Chao, we have a few pounds of flour not taken by the landlord, and we made some dumplings. You and Uncle Yang come and eat.

CHAO Right.

YANG Yes.

WANG Ta-chun, empty out the garlic from that bowl, and give it to Uncle Yang. Hsi-erh, you take this one to Uncle Chao.

TA-CHUN (handing the bowl to YANG) Try our dumplings, Uncle.
(YANG takes the bowl in silence.)
(They eat.)

HSI-ERH (sings):
Dad's come home after hiding from the duns!

TA-CHUN and WANG:
We're eating dumplings for New Year!

ALL:
*Old and young we're sitting around,
Enjoying a very happy New Year!
Enjoying a happy New Year!*

WANG:
The snow's been falling for a week or more,

ALL:
But we're all safely here together!

WANG:

Hoping by the time our young folk grow up,

ALL:

We can all pass some years in peace!

Yes, pass some years in peace!

HSI-ERH Dad, you aren't eating!

YANG Yes, I am.

CHAO (*reminiscently*) Ta-chun and Hsi-erh, today we're celebrating New Year and eating dumplings, so let me tell you a story about dumplings. It was 1930, the thirteenth day of the fifth moon, the day when the War God sharpened his sword. There was a fine rain falling. That day troops appeared from the southern mountains. They were called the Red Army.

WANG So you're harping back to that, Uncle. Better eat now.

HSI-ERH Let Uncle Chao talk, Aunty! I like to hear.

CHAO Yes, they had red all over them, their red sashes bound crosswise from shoulder to waist; and they were all ruddy-faced, hefty fellows, so they were called the Red Army. They went south of the city to the Chao Village. I was there then, when the Red Army came and killed that devil, Landlord Chao. Then they distributed the grain and land among the poor, so on the thirteenth of the fifth moon all poor folk had basketfuls of white flour, and we all ate dumplings. In every house I went to then they offered me dumplings to eat.... (*Chuckles.*)

TA-CHUN Where did that Red Army go to then?

CHAO They went to the city, but they hadn't held it long when some Green Army arrived; then the Red Army went to the Great North Mountain, and never came down again. And after the Red Army left, the poor had a bad time of it once more.

TA-CHUN Tell us, Uncle, will the Red Army be coming back?

CHAO I think so.

HSI-ERH When will they come?

CHAO In good time, a day will come when the War God sharpens his sword again and the Red Army comes back. (*Chuckles.*)

WANG Don't keep on talking but eat now. (*To YANG.*) Uncle, eat. There's plenty more.

HSI-ERH Dad, have some more.

YANG (*holding the bowl, unable to eat, after a painful pause*) Ah, Hsi-erh, isn't Aunty good?

HSI-ERH Yes, she is!

YANG Aunty, isn't Hsi-erh good?

WANG She's a good child.

YANG Hsi-erh, tell me, is your dad good?

HSI-ERH What a question! Of course you are, Dad!

YANG No, no.... Dad's no good.

WANG What's got into you, Uncle Yang? Why are you talking like this?

CHAO We've been drinking, and he may have had a drop too much. . . .
(*Chuckles.*) It goes without saying you two are both good, Hsi-erh and Ta-chun. It won't be long now! (*Laughs.*)

(HSI-ERH *turns away shyly.*)

WANG Stop talking and eat!

YANG Yes, eat. . . .

(*They all eat.*)

HSI-ERH (*sings*):

Dad's come home after hiding from the duns!

TA-CHUN and WANG:

We're eating dumplings for New Year!

ALL:

Old and young we're sitting around,

Enjoying a very happy New Year!

Enjoying a happy New Year!

WANG:

The snow's been falling for a week or more,

ALL:

But we're all here safely together!

WANG:

Hoping by the time our young folk grow up,

ALL:

We can all pass some years in peace!

Yes, pass some years in peace!

(*In a state of mental agony, YANG cannot keep still, so he withdraws to a corner, where he clutches the document in his pocket with trembling hands.*)

WANG What are you doing, Uncle Yang? Come and eat.

YANG (*startled*) I'm looking, looking. . . . Ah, it's empty, my pocket. Not a single coin. I can't even give the two youngsters money for New Year.

WANG Come on. To have dumplings is good enough. Come and eat, Uncle.

YANG I. . . I'll eat later.

WANG Uncle Chao, have some more.

CHAO I've had enough.

WANG (*to TA-CHUN and HSI-ERH*) How about you two?

TA-CHUN and HSI-ERH We've had enough.

WANG Then let's clear away. (*They clear the table.*) Uncle Yang has been on his feet all day and is tired, he should rest now.

YANG (*mechanically*) Rest now.

WANG We would go on chatting forever, but we can talk again tomorrow. Tomorrow Ta-chun will come to give you New Year greetings.

CHAO I'll be going too. Hsi-erh, take good care of your dad. Old Yang, tomorrow I'll come and wish you a happy New Year. I'm off now.

YANG Good night, Old Chao.

(Exit CHAO.)

TA-CHUN We're going too, Uncle.

YANG See your mother back carefully, Ta-chun.

HSI-ERH Are you going, Auntie!

WANG Good night. *(She and TA-CHUN go out.)*

(HSI-ERH starts to close the door.)

TA-CHUN *(at the door)* Hsi-erh, Uncle is tired! Get him to rest early.

HSI-ERH Yes. *(Closes the door. WANG and TA-CHUN go out.)*

YANG You'd better go to bed, Hsi-erh.

HSI-ERH So had you, Dad.

YANG Your dad...your dad will see the New Year in.

HSI-ERH I'll stay up too.

YANG Then put on some more firewood.

(HSI-ERH adds wood to the stove and sits by the fire.)

YANG *(coughing)* Hsi-erh, your dad is old and good for nothing.

HSI-ERH Whatever do you mean, Dad! Come and warm yourself!

(They sit by the stove. The silence is oppressive, while snow falls outside. Time passes.)

YANG Are you asleep, Hsi-erh?

HSI-ERH No, Dad

YANG I'll trim the lamp. *(He trims the lamp.) (Presently the lamp on the stove burns low, and HSI-ERH falls asleep.)* The wick is burnt out, and the oil is used up. *(The lamp goes out.)* The light is out too...

Hsi-erh! *(HSI-ERH is sound asleep.)*

YANG Asleep? Hsi-erh! *(Sings):*

Hsi-erh, my child, you're sleeping,

Dad calls you, but you don't hear.

You can't imagine, as you dream,

The unforgivable thing I've done.

Hsi-erh, Dad has wronged you! Auntie Wang, I've wronged you! Old Chao, I've wronged you! I made a statement and put my mark on it... When Hsi-erh's mother died, she said, "Bring Hsi-erh up as best you can." And I brought her up. Hsi-erh has had a hard time of it with me for seventeen years. Today... I've wronged Hsi-erh's mother, I've sold our child... Tomorrow the landlord will take her away. Neither the living nor the dead, neither human beings nor ghosts can ever forgive me! I'm an old fool, a criminal! But I can't let you go! I'll have it out with them! *(He runs wildly out, to be buffeted by the wind)*

and snow.) Ah, magistrates, landlords!... Lackeys.... Bailiffs!...
Where can I go? Where can I turn? (*He clutches the document.*)
Ah! (*Sings*):

Magistrates, rich men—you tigers and wolves!

Because I owed rent and was in debt,

You forced me to write a deed,

Selling my child....

The north wind's blowing, snow's falling thick and fast!

Where can I go? Where can I fly?

What way out is there for me?

(*He pauses, bewildered.*) Ah, I still have some lye for making bean-curd—I'll drink that! (*He drinks it.*) Now I'll drink some cold water....

(*He takes off his padded jacket to cover HSI-ERH, then rushes outside, falls on the snow and dies.*)

(*Crackers sound in the village, signalling the arrival of the New Year.*)

(CURTAIN)

SCENE IV

Crackers sound and TA-CHUN comes in gaily.

TA-CHUN Uncle Yang! Uncle Yang! I've come to wish you a happy New Year! (*He suddenly stumbles on the corpse.*) Oh! (*Clearing the snow from the face of the dead man he recognizes YANG.*) Oh! Uncle Yang! You! What's happened? (*He hurries to the door and knocks.*) Hsi-erh, Hsi-erh! Open the door, quick! (*Hastily turning towards the backstage.*) Mother! Mother! Come quick! Come quick!

HSI-ERH (*wakened from her sleep*) Dad! Dad! (*She looks for her father.*)

TA-CHUN Hsi-erh! (*Pushing open the door.*) Hsi-erh! Look! Your dad—

HSI-ERH Has something happened to Dad? (*Runs out, and seeing her father's body, falls on it and cries.*) Dad! Dad!

TA-CHUN What happened, Hsi-erh?

HSI-ERH (*cries. Then sings*):

Yesterday evening when Dad came back,

He was worried but wouldn't tell me why.

This morning he's lying in the snow!

Why, Dad, why?

Scenes from the opera
"The White-haired Girl"





TA-CHUN (*helplessly turning towards the backstage*) Mother, come quick!

(*Enter AUNTY WANG.*)

WANG What is it, Ta-chun?

TA-CHUN Mum, look at Uncle Yang! He—(*pointing to corpse.*)

WANG What's happened to Uncle Yang? (*She kneels beside the corpse and touches it, hoping the dead man will wake up.*) Ta-chun, go and call Uncle Chao and the others at once.

(*Exit TA-CHUN.*)

WANG (*finding the body stiff and lifeless, wails*) Uncle Yang! Uncle Yang!

HSI-ERH Daddy! (*Cries.*)

(*Enter TA-CHUN with UNCLE CHAO, LI and TA-SO.*)

CHAO What's happened?

TA-SO What happened, Ta-chun?

LI It's Old Yang.

WANG (*crying as she tells the story*) Friends, last night when he came back he was all right. Who could imagine this morning he would— (*Unable to proceed.*)

CHAO (*stoops and examines YANG*) He's drunk lye.

HSI-ERH Daddy!

CHAO (*noticing the dead man's clenched fist*) Ah! (*He starts forcing open the fingers. TA-CHUN and TA-SO help him, and they take the deed of sale.*)

LI (*reading the deed*) Tenant Yang owes Landlord Huang rent.... Since he is too poor to pay, he wants to sell his daughter Hsi-erh to.... (*Unable to finish he lets the deed fall to the ground. They are all horror-stricken.*)

WANG Merciful heavens! This....

HSI-ERH (*shrieks*) Oh, Dad! (*Sings*):

Suddenly hearing that I've been sold,

I feel as if fire were burning me!

Could it be Dad didn't love me?

Or thought me a bad daughter, could it be?

CHAO (*addressing the corpse indignantly*) Old Yang, last night you only told me half! You shouldn't have died! Because you wouldn't leave your little patch of land, you let them hound you to death!

TA-SO (*loudly*) Last night they took away my donkey! Today for this paltry rent they drove Uncle Yang to suicide! They won't let the poor live! It's too much! (*Too angry to speak he turns to rush out.*)

TA-CHUN (*unable to suppress his anger*) They killed Uncle Yang, and they make Hsi-erh.... I'm going to have it out with them! (*He rushes after TA-SO.*)

(*CHAO and LI pull TA-SO back, while AUNTY WANG restrains TA-CHUN.*)

WANG Ta-chun! Ta-chun!

LI It's no good, Ta-so, Ta-chun! It's there in black and white! Uncle Yang put his mark on it.

TA-CHUN His mark? They forced him, didn't they? I'll send in an appeal!

TA-SO Right!

LI (*sighs*) To whom can you appeal? The district head? The magistrate? Aren't they hand in glove with the rich? I think we'd better accept it, if we can.

TA-SO Accept it? I can't!

TA-CHUN How are we poor folk to live! (*Stamps his foot and strikes his head in despair.*)

CHAO Ta-chun, Ta-so, blustering is no use. Time's getting on, and the landlord will soon be here to fetch the girl; we'd better hurry to prepare the dead for burial, so that Hsi-erh can at least attend her father's funeral. We all know what goes on nowadays, but they've got the whip hand. Where can we turn to look for justice?... (*To HSI-ERH.*) This has happened today because we old people are no good: we've done you a great wrong, child! Ta-chun, Ta-so, we'd better first bury the dead! Auntie Wang, get ready quickly, and put Hsi-erh in mourning!

(*They bow their heads in silence, wiping their eyes in sorrow and anger.*)

(*Enter STEWARD MU with thugs.*)

MU A happy New Year, friends! I wish you good luck and prosperity!

(*They are all taken aback.*)

MU (*seeing the dead man in their midst, realizes what has happened, but feigns astonishment*) Ah! Who's that?

LI It's Old Yang.

MU What, Old Yang!... Why, last night he was all right, how could he...? Well, well.... (*Feigning sympathy.*) Who could have thought it? Such an honest fellow.... (*Turns.*) Well then... let us all help, and prepare his funeral.... Oh, Hsi-erh is here. Let's do it this way: let Hsi-erh come with me to beg the landlord for a coffin for her father. Come on, Hsi-erh. (*Tries to lead HSI-ERH off.*)

TA-CHUN (*unable to contain his anger, darts forward and shakes his fist at MU, who steps aside*) I know why you've come. You shan't take her!

TA-SO (*stepping forward too*) You dare!

THUGS (*stepping forward to cover TA-CHUN and TA-SO with their guns*) Hey, there! Don't move!

MU (*changing his tune*) All right, let's put our cards on the table. Old Yang has sold Hsi-erh to Landlord Huang! Here's the deed. (*Taking the deed from his pocket.*) Old Yang put his mark on it, so justice and

reason are on our side. . . . Sorry, Wang Ta-chun, but Hsi-erh belongs to the landlord now.

TA-CHUN Steward Mu, you dog aping your master, bullying the poor!

MU So! You are cursing me? Very well, fellow, just wait and see!

CHAO Mr. Mu, this is too much. The child's father has just died, and you want to carry her off, on New Year's Day too.

MU Too much? (*Pointing to the deed.*) Here's our reason. Better mind your own business.

WANG Mr. Mu, let the child attend the funeral first. . . .

MU Can't be done. Landlord Huang wants the girl taken back immediately. (*Sizing up the situation he adopts a more conciliatory tone.*) Well, actually I can't make any decisions; you must talk to Landlord Huang. Still, I think Hsi-erh will enjoy herself later on. (*He takes hold of HSI-ERH again.*) Come on, Hsi-erh.

TA-CHUN, TA-SO You! . . . (*They want to rush forward again, but are stopped by the guns of the thugs.*)

(AUNTY WANG timidly steps in front of TA-CHUN.)

CHAO (*signing to them to stop*) Ta-chun! Ta-so!

HSI-ERH (*shaking off MU's hand, darts back to CHAO and AUNTY WANG*) Uncle! Aunty! (*Rushing to the dead man, she cries bitterly.*) Daddy! Daddy! . . .

MU (*pulling at HSI-ERH again*) Well, Hsi-erh, we're all mortal. It's no use crying, better come with me. (*Pulls hard.*)

HSI-ERH (*frightened, screams and struggles*) Uncle! Aunty!

WANG Steward Mu, do let the child put on mourning for her father.

MU All right, put on mourning.

(AUNTY WANG goes inside and fetches out a piece of white cloth which she ties round HSI-ERH'S head.)

CHAO (*holding HSI-ERH, speaks to the dead man*). Old Yang, Hsi-erh can't attend your funeral today. This is all the fault of us old folk, we've done her a wrong. (*To HSI-ERH.*) Come, Hsi-erh, kowtow to your father.

HSI-ERH Uncle! Aunty! (*Kneels and kowtows.*)

(MU drags HSI-ERH off crying and screaming, followed by AUNTY WANG. TA-CHUN and TA-SO want to pursue them, but are stopped by CHAO.)

CHAO Ta-chun, Ta-so. . . . They have the whip hand, what can we do? Let us remember how many people the Huang family has killed. Their day of reckoning will come! A day will come when power changes hands. . . . (*They sob.*) Don't cry, but come and bury the dead!

(*They carry YANG off.*)

(CURTAIN)

ACT II

SCENE I

TIME *As in the last scene.*

The Buddhist shrine of LANDLORD HUANG'S mother. Big, bright candles are lit, and incense smoke wreathes the air.

MRS. HUANG *comes in bearing incense sticks in her hand.*

MRS. HUANG Yesterday my son told me our tenant Yang was sending his daughter here as payment for the rent. Why hasn't she come to see me yet? (*Sings*):

At New Year our family gains in wealth and we old folk in longevity,

Thanks to the virtues of our ancestors and holy Buddha's protection.

I carry incense to the shrine where bright candles are lit on the altar,

And bow three times in all sincerity.

One stick of incense I offer Ju-lai of the Western Heaven—

May we grow wealthy, and our rents increase!

The second stick I offer Kuan-yin of the Southern Seas—

Grant peace in the four seasons, and may all our house grow rich!

The third stick I offer Chang-Hsien, giver of children—

Protect us, and may we increase and multiply!

(She closes the door and sits down.)

Now money is depreciating: one maidservant costs so many years' rent! Last year was better, when we bought that girl Hung-lu for only eight dollars; while that girl bought by the northern household only cost five dollars and fifty cents. But this year everything is expensive!

(MU comes on with HSI-ERH.)

MU Come along, Hsi-erh. (*Sings*):

What a queer girl you are!

Why act so strangely here?

Just now, when we saw the landlord,

*You wouldn't look up or say a word,
And when he gave you a flower,
You wouldn't wear it!
Now that we're going to see the old lady,
You'll have to be on your best behaviour!*

Look happy now!

(HSI-ERH gives a frightened sob.)

MU Don't cry! If you make the old lady angry, even with her fingers she can scratch holes in your face. *(They enter the room.)* Ah, Mrs. Huang, the Yang family girl, Hsi-erh, has come to give you her New Year greetings.

MRS. HUANG Oh, it's Old Mu. Come in. *(Enter MU and HSI-ERH.)*

MU *(to HSI-ERH)* Kowtow to the mistress! *(Pushes her down on her knees.)*

MRS. HUANG All right, get up.

MU *(raising HSI-ERH)* Get up, and let the mistress look at you.

MRS. HUANG H'm, a good-looking child. Come over here.

MU *(to HSI-ERH)* Go on. *(He drags her again.)*

MRS. HUANG The child looks intelligent. What's her name?

(HSI-ERH remains silent.)

MU Answer the mistress. You're called... called Hsi-erh.

MRS. HUANG Hsi-erh? Well, that's an auspicious name.¹ It needn't be altered much to match Hung-fu and Hung-lu; we'll just add the word Hung in front. Let her be called Hung-hsi.

MU *(to HSI-ERH)* Thank the mistress for your new name. From now on you won't be called Hsi-erh but Hung-hsi.

MRS. HUANG How old is the child?

(HSI-ERH remains silent.)

MU Seventeen.

MRS. HUANG Ah, seventeen. Good girl, better than Hung-fu. Hung-fu is a regular scarecrow, she looks like nothing on earth! This girl is good. Old Mu, presently you tell my son I shall keep her with me.

MU Oh! That's too good for her.

MRS. HUANG Well, her family is poor. Think of the hardships her father made her suffer—nothing to eat, no clothes to wear. Now that you've come to our house, Hung-hsi, you'll live in comfort. Are you glad?

(HSI-ERH remains silent.)

MU Speak up... You are glad, you are glad! You are a lucky girl!

MRS. HUANG See, the girl is dressed like a beggar! Old Mu, tell my maid Chang to change her clothes and bring her cakes to eat.

MU *(calling)* Ta-sheng! *(There is a response offstage.)* The mistress orders Chang to change Hung-hsi's clothes and bring cakes for Hung-hsi!

¹ "Hsi" means "joy."

(Voice offstage: "Yes, mistress! Visitors have come from the north village to pay their respects to you and Landlord Huang.")

MRS. HUANG All right. (*Stands up. To HSI-ERH.*) Hung-hsi, soon Chang will come to change your clothes and look after you. (*Starting out.*) Ah, whoever does good deeds in his life will become a Buddha and go to the Western Paradise. (*MRS. HUANG and MU leave.*)

(Voices off: "We've come to pay our respects to Mrs. Huang!" "We've come to wish Landlord Huang a happy New Year!")

HSI-ERH Oh dear! (*Sings*):

Oh, Dad!

I hear so many voices here,

I'm all of a tremble!

So many bolts, so many doors!

I call my dad, but he doesn't answer.

Who'll wear mourning for my dad?

Who'll cry at his funeral?

(*Enter TA-SHENG holding a plate, and CHANG with clothes.*)

TA-SHENG So this is Hung-hsi. Here, come and eat your cake.

CHANG You must be hungry, have something to eat.

TA-SHENG Hurry. I have to go and look after the guests.

(*Out of nervousness HSI-ERH drops the plate and breaks it.*)

TA-SHENG What a bad girl you are, breaking a plate on New Year's Day! I'm going to tell the old lady.

CHANG Don't, Ta-sheng! (*Picks up the broken pieces.*) The old lady's in a good temper today; don't make her angry. The girl's just come, she doesn't know how to behave. Let her off this time.

TA-SHENG Huh, little wretch! We'll wait and see how she behaves in future. (*Exit.*)

CHANG Hung-hsi, come with me to change your clothes. (*Taking her arm.*) Child, this is not your own home, not like with your own parents; you'll have to fit in with these people's ways.... Come, don't be afraid. I'm Auntie Chang, I'm a servant too. We shall be together a long time; if there's anything you can't do, I'll help you. If you have any trouble, let me know.... Come now, come and change your clothes. (*Exeunt.*)

(CURTAIN)

SCENE II

TIME *One month later.*

PLACE *At the gate of AUNTY WANG's house.*

Enter TA-CHUN.

TA-CHUN (*sings*):

*Uncle Yang's been dead for a month, and Hsi-erh
In the landlord's house is treated like dirt;
My mother's in tears the whole of the time,
And it's harder than ever to make ends meet.
How can I ever get even with them?
My whole heart seems to burn with hate!
When I went just now to look for Hsi-erh,
Huang's thugs wouldn't let me in at the gate!*

(*Stamps.*) Today I wanted to go and see Hsi-erh in my spare time, but that gateman saw me. . . . It was Ta-so who suggested that some day, when I had time, I should fetch Hsi-erh out; but although I've been there several times, I haven't been able to see her. Yesterday Landlord Huang pressed me to pay my debt, saying if I didn't pay they'd evict me, and drive me away. This evening Steward Mu's coming again. Bah! (*He pushes open the door and goes in.*) Mother! (*No one answers.*) She must have gone over to see Uncle Chao. When she gets back there'll be more sighing and sobbing. (*Enter TA-SO.*)

TA-SO Ta-chun!

TA-CHUN Who is it?

TA-SO Me! (*Coming forward.*) My! That bastard Mu has got his knife into us! Just now when I was out, he went to my home and took away five pints of kaoliang seeds, driving my mother nearly frantic. Some day that bastard's going to get what's coming to him. . . .

TA-CHUN I've just come back from the Huang house. It was no good, I still couldn't see Hsi-erh. . . . (*Pauses.*) Presently Steward Mu is going to throw me out. . . .

TA-SO What, is he coming soon? (*Looking at the sky.*) It's getting dark. . . . (*Looking at the door.*) Is your mother home?

TA-CHUN No.

TA-SO Ta-chun, I think we ought to have a fling at him tonight!

TA-CHUN What do you mean, Ta-so?

TA-SO When the bastard comes, we'll (*makes a gesture and whispers*)

TA-CHUN (*worked up*) Yes. . . but. . . if it leaked out, my mother and Hsi-erh. . . .

TA-SO Don't be afraid. It's dark, and when we're through with the rogue we'll drag him to the North Mountain gully to feed the wolves! (*He whispers again.*)

TA-CHUN All right, we'll be ready for him this evening! (*The watch sounds. TA-CHUN and TA-SO take cover, and TA-CHUN fetches a rope from the house.*)

(*Enter MU, weaving tipsily.*)

MU (*sings*):

*Kings and queens, kings and queens,
And all the aces too!*

*I don't care for kings or queens,
All I want, my knave, is you!*

(*Laughing he reaches the gate.*) Ta-chun! Ta-chun! Why haven't you gone yet, you rascal? Clear out of the house and be off with you!

(*TA-CHUN remains angrily silent.*)

MU You want to spend all your life here, don't you, you rogue! You won't give up! Today you were hanging about the Huangs' gate again! Do you still want another man's girl? True, Hsi-erh was promised to you before, but she belongs to our Landlord Huang now.... Ah, that wench! Let me tell you, Landlord Huang knows you won't keep quiet, you rogue, so he says we've got to get rid of you. You clear out of this house now, and look sharp about it! (*He advances as he speaks.*) TA-CHUN *does not answer, and as MU approaches he falls back.*) Where are you going, fellow? Why don't you say something?... Where are you going? (*Pressing TA-CHUN.*)

(*TA-SO suddenly seizes MU from behind and throws him to the ground.*)

MU Who's that?

TA-SO Don't you dare shout! (*To TA-CHUN.*) Stop his mouth, Ta-chun.

(*MU struggles.*)

TA-SO You're going to dun for debts in hell! (*As they beat MU, two of LANDLORD HUANG'S thugs enter.*)

THUGS What's up?

(*TA-CHUN and TA-SO, seeing them, start to make off but are seized. However TA-CHUN breaks loose and escapes.*)

THUGS (*helping MU up*) Well, Mr. Mu, you've had a fright!

MU (*panting*) Lao San, Lao San—go after him! Go after Wang Ta-chun! (*Pointing to TA-SO.*) Well, so it was you, Ta-so, my fine fellow!... Old Liu, take him back for questioning.

(*TA-SO is pushed off by the thugs, kicking and struggling. MU also leaves.*)

(*The inner curtain falls.*)

(*TA-CHUN hurries in, and hammers at the door.*)

TA-CHUN Uncle Chao! Uncle Chao!

(*CHAO enters.*)

TA-CHUN Uncle Chao, where's my mother?

CHAO She's gone home, Ta-chun. Why have you got the wind up like this?

TA-CHUN Uncle, something's happened! Ta-so and I beat up Steward Mu, but we were found out, and Ta-so was caught. Now they're after me!

CHAO You young fellows! Just rashness is no use. I knew you were

smouldering with rage, but our time hasn't come yet, Ta-chun. You can't stay here now; you'd better make off quickly.

TA-CHUN Uncle....

CHAO Go northwest, quickly!

TA-CHUN Uncle...my mother and Hsi-erh....

CHAO I'll look after them. Go now. When times change, you can come back and see your mother and me.

(TA-CHUN runs off, and CHAO goes out.)

(CURTAIN)

SCENE III

The HUANG house.

Enter LANDLORD HUANG holding a lantern.

HUANG (*sings*):

*Fate's been kind to me, I'm rich and respected,
My barns are stuffed with grain and my chests with gold.
The poor, of course, must go cold and hungry,
Because that's their destiny, fixed by Fate!
If cattle won't budge, I whip them;
If pigs won't die, I slaughter them;
And if the poor set themselves against me,
They'll find out to their cost what fools they've been!*

A few days ago Ta-so and Ta-chun refused to pay their rent, and beat up Steward Mu. Tch! It's really preposterous! They should remember who I am.... Even rats think twice before coming out of their holes. Do they think they can get anywhere by making an enemy of me? Ta-so I have sent to the district jail. Ta-chun ran away, but let him go! I don't think he dares to come back even if he wants to. As for Hsi-erh.... (*Chuckles.*) The only trouble is she's kept by my mother, so I've not been able to get hold of her yet, which is beginning to make me impatient.... Today I went to the north village to feast with some friends, and I'm feeling rather restless. Now that it's dark I'll go and have another try at it—try, try and try again!... (*Laughs.*)

(*The second watch sounds, showing that it is after ten.*)

(*Sings*):

*Hearing the second watch,
I tiptoe to my mother's room.
I've hit on a fine plan
To get my way tonight.*

(Exit.)

(The back curtain rises, disclosing MRS. HUANG'S bedroom.)

(Enter HSI-ERH, carrying broth.)

HSI-ERH *(sings)*:

*The few months I've been here,
My life has been so bitter—
First I am cursed, then beaten,
They treat me all the time like dirt.
But I have to swallow my tears,
My only friend is Auntie Chang.*

(She approaches the left side of the bed, and calls timidly: "Mistress!" Then approaches the right side of the bed and calls again, "Mistress! Mistress!") Ah! (Sings):

*Rich people are hard to please,
I haven't a minute to myself;
And if I'm careless and annoy her,
I'm afraid she may do me in!*

(Voice from within the bed curtains: "Hung-hsi, is the lotus-seed broth ready?")

HSI-ERH *Coming, mistress! (A hand comes out from the curtain to take the bowl.)*

(Voice from the bed: "So hot! Do you want to scald me? You damn slave! Cool it!" She passes the bowl back.)

HSI-ERH *(holding the bowl, sings)*:

*It's either too hot or too cold,
She's never satisfied.
I'm so tired and sleepy,
But it's more than my life's worth to sleep!*

(Voice from the bed: "Give me the broth!")

HSI-ERH *Coming, mistress! (A hand from the bed takes the bowl.)*

(Voice from the bed: "What, so bitter? You can't have taken out the roots properly. You make me furious, damn you! Kneel down!")

HSI-ERH *(frightened) I...I.... (Kneels.)*

(Voice from the bed: "You bitch, who can drink such bitter broth? Open your mouth!" Reaching out with an opium pin she slashes at HSI-ERH'S mouth.)

HSI-ERH *Oh! (Cries.)*

(HUANG steals on, and listens at the door.)

(Voice from the bed: "Don't cry! You really are infuriating!")

HSI-ERH *I...I.... (Cries.)*

(Voice from the bed, angrily: "Damn slave!" She parts the bed curtain and emerges.)

MRS. HUANG *Damn slave! (Beats her again and again with a feather duster.)*

HUANG (*coming in quickly to stop her*) Mother, Mother, don't be angry! Mother! (*Helps her to the bed.*)

MRS. HUANG What brings you here?... (*To HSI-ERH.*) Get up. (*HSI-ERH gets up.*)

HUANG Don't be angry, Mother. You're not feeling well these days, and Hung-hsi has offended you....

MRS. HUANG What brings you here so late?

HUANG I came to see you, and... I would like Hung-hsi to sew something for me.

MRS. HUANG I need Hung-hsi to make my broth.

HUANG Oh....

MRS. HUANG My, how you reek of wine! Better go to bed at once!

HUANG Yes, Mother.... Yes... er... Mother, you rest and have some opium. Don't be angry. (*HUANG prepares the opium pipe for his mother, who smokes; then he puts down the bed curtains.*)

HUANG Come, Hung-hsi, come.

HSI-ERH (*in alarm*) Young master, you....

MRS. HUANG Son, what are you doing? Haven't you gone yet?

HUANG Mother, I was saying that Hung-hsi is quite clever, isn't she (*taking HSI-ERH's hand*), at looking after you!... (*Pinches her arm.*)
(*HSI-ERH gives a scream.*)

MRS. HUANG (*angrily getting out of bed again and sitting down*) You wretched slave, have you gone crazy again?

HUANG Er . . . er . . . Mother, I think tomorrow I'd better ask Dr. Chen from the town to examine you again.

MRS. HUANG Humph!

(*Enter CHANG, and sets a teapot on the bed.*)

CHANG (*sizing up the situation*) Has Hung-hsi offended you again, mistress? (*To HUANG.*) Why are you here, sir? It's getting late, you should rest now.

HUANG (*to himself*) Huh, this servant Chang....

CHANG The old lady is not feeling well and it's getting late.... Better go to bed, sir.

MRS. HUANG Go to bed, son.

CHANG (*nudging HSI-ERH*) Sir, here's your lantern. (*Passing him the lantern.*)

MRS. HUANG Go on back, son. Hung-hsi, prepare that broth for me.

HUANG Well, Mother, you'd better sleep. (*To CHANG.*) Tomorrow you wash those clothes of mine.

CHANG Yes, sir.

(*Exit HUANG.*)

CHANG Hsi-erh, come and heat the old lady's broth.

(*HSI-ERH moves to take the bowl, but CHANG signs to her to be seated, and heats the broth herself.*)

(HSI-ERH remains silent, and they watch the broth.)

CHANG (softly letting down the curtains) How did you offend the old lady, Hung-hsi?

HSI-ERH She said I hadn't taken the roots out of the lotus seeds, and they tasted bitter; but I had picked them clean....

CHANG (indignantly) Well! She feels bitter because she's had too much opium....

(Voice from the bed: "Chang! What are you talking about?")

CHANG I was telling Hung-hsi not to cry, so as not to wake you....

(Voice from the bed: "Oh....")

(Silence.)

CHANG (softly) Hung-hsi, you couldn't have had enough to eat this evening. (Taking a dumpling from her sleeve.) Have this.

HSI-ERH (biting eagerly into the dumpling, gives a cry because her mouth hurts) Oh!

CHANG (surprised) What's the matter? (Looks at the wound.) Oh, so she's hurt you with the opium pin again.... (Indignantly.) Well! Presently I'll go to the kitchen and get some soup for you.

HSI-ERH (in pain) No... no need.

CHANG (looking at MRS. HUANG) Well, the old lady is asleep.... (Sits by HSI-ERH and fans the fire.) Ah, Hung-hsi, it's a hard, hard life. Only we two know it. It was because my family couldn't pay our rent either that I was sent to work here in payment for the rent. The things I've seen during these years! Every single maidservant like us has a wretched life of it. (She sighs, then pauses.) Hung-hsi, I'll tell you something, but you mustn't let it upset you....

HSI-ERH Yes, Aunty.

CHANG Ta-chun and Ta-so, because the landlord pressed them for rent, beat up Steward Mu. Ta-so was caught and put in jail, and Ta-chun ran away....

HSI-ERH Oh! (She starts crying from the shock.)

CHANG (comforting her) It happened nearly a month ago; but I didn't tell you for fear it might upset you....

HSI-ERH Then... Aunty Wang?

CHANG Don't worry, your Uncle Chao's looking after her.... That's how it is, and it's no use crying over spilt milk. We're all in the same boat; although life is so hard, we have to stick it out....

(HSI-ERH cries.)

(The third watch sounds.)

CHANG That's the third watch now.... The old lady is asleep, and the master should have gone to bed too. When the broth is ready, Hung-hsi, come back to bed; don't run around. I'll wait for you. (Exit.)

HSI-ERH (goes on watching the broth, and sings):

It's after midnight now,

*The more I think, the sadder I grow.
Poor Dad was hounded to death,
And Ta-chun forced to leave home.
Why must we poor folk suffer so?
Why are the rich so cruel?
How can we go on living like this?
Will these hard times never end?*

(She dozes and the broth boils. She starts up to remove the pot from the fire, but lets it fall. The pot is broken and the broth spilled. MRS. HUANG snores.)

HSI-ERH (*sings*):

*I'm dizzy and I feel so frightened;
I've broken the pot and spilt the broth!
Now I've done such a dreadful thing,
I'm afraid I shan't escape with my life!
Where can I hide myself?
Oh, Heaven, save me!*

(As she runs out, the back curtain falls. HSI-ERH re-enters from the side of the curtain, and sings):

*At dead of night it's so dark,
The road is black and everywhere there are dogs.
I can hear someone coming after me;
I can't escape this time!*

(Enter HUANG with a lantern to confront her. HSI-ERH halts in dismay.)

HUANG (*overjoyed*) Aha, what luck! What brought you here, Hung-hsi?

HSI-ERH (*frightened*) I...I....(*Wants to leave.*)

HUANG (*seizing her*). Ah! Hung-hsi, sew something on for me! I need it now. Come, come on over! (*Pushes open the door. The back curtain opens. He pushes HSI-ERH in and bolts the door behind him. This is LANDLORD HUANG'S study. A painting of a big tiger hangs there. The tiger is crouching, ready to spring.*)

HSI-ERH (*terrified*) Oh! (*She turns to fly, but is pushed aside by HUANG.*)

HUANG (*seizing HSI-ERH'S hand*) Come, Hung-hsi. (*His eyes gleam with lust, as he pushes HSI-ERH.*) Come on!

HSI-ERH Oh! (*Struggling.*) Aunty! Aunty! (*She starts running, but is pushed into the inner room.*)

HUANG You! Ha! Still shouting! You won't escape now! Come on! (*Follows HSI-ERH inside.*)

(The fifth watch is heard. Day gradually dawns.)

(CURTAIN)

SCENE IV

CHANG enters hurriedly.

CHANG Hung-hsi! Hung-hsi! (*Sings*):
*Last night she was beaten and frightened,
So I stayed with her till it was late.
Only when all was quiet, at midnight,
And she had calmed down, I came back.
But this morning she's not to be found,
Though I've looked for her everywhere.
Hung-hsi! Hung-hsi! (Exit.)*

(Enter HSI-ERH with dishevelled hair and crumpled clothes. Her face is tear-stained, and she walks with difficulty.)

HSI-ERH (*comes to the door, but shrinks from opening it. Sings*):
*Heaven!
You could kill me with a knife or axe,
But you shouldn't have shamed me!
I little thought of this
When I came to the Huang house....
Mother bore me, Dad brought me up,
Was it all for nothing?
Now—how can I face people?
How can I live on?*

Oh, Dad, Dad, I've let you down! Auntie Wang, Ta-chun, I can never face you again! (*Having decided to commit suicide, she finds a rope in a corner of the room, and picks it up.*) Oh, Dad, Dad, I'm coming. (*Ties the rope to a rafter.*)

(CHANG enters and sees her through a crack of the door.)

CHANG Hung-hsi, let me in!

HSI-ERH (*startled*) Oh! (*The rope falls from her trembling hands.*)

CHANG Hung-hsi! Open the door for me, quickly!

HSI-ERH (*opens the door, and runs to CHANG as she enters*) Auntie!
(*Cries.*)

CHANG Hung-hsi! You—

HSI-ERH I...I....

CHANG (*seeing the rope, understands*) Hung-hsi, how could you think of such a thing? You must never...never....

HSI-ERH Auntie! (*Cries.*)

CHANG Child, how could you be so foolish as to think of such a thing! You must on no account do that.

HSI-ERH Auntie, I...I can't face people any more.

CHANG I understand. It's my fault for not looking after you better.

HSI-ERH Aunt, I can't go on living....

CHANG Don't talk nonsense, child. What's done is done, but you have to live anyway. You're young, child, and there is hope. I'll look after you, and later on we two will live together. The day will come when we shall avenge your father.... (*Helps her up, wiping her eyes.*)

(HSI-ERH remains silent.)

CHANG Stop crying now, and come and rest.

(TA-SHENG enters.)

TA-SHENG Hung-hsi, Hung-hsi! (*Seeing them.*) Oh, there you are, Hung-hsi! Last night you made such trouble, the old lady is asking for you!

(HSI-ERH looks frightened.)

CHANG Go now.

HSI-ERH Aunt! (*She clings to CHANG.*)

CHANG I'll go with you, Hung-hsi. (*They go out together.*)

(CURTAIN)

ACT III

SCENE I

TIME *Seven months after the Second Act.*

PLACE *MRS. HUANG'S room.*

Enter HUANG and MU carrying wedding invitation cards. The servant TA-SHENG follows, holding a teapot; and after him come thugs dressed in military uniform. CHANG comes on carrying coloured silk. MRS. HUANG enters holding a teacup from which she is sipping. The atmosphere is lively.

HUANG (*sings*):

Cassia trees in autumn—

ALL (*sing*):

Make the whole courtyard fragrant!

HUANG (*sings*):

Preparing for the wedding—

ALL (*sing*):

We all work with a will!

MU Our young master is now promoted captain of the militia, and getting married. This is truly a double happiness!

HUANG and MRS. HUANG (*sing*):

The masters are busy!

ALL (*sing*):

The servants are busy!

All busy and happy together!

MU The preparations for our master's wedding have made every member of the household happy, whether young or old, master or servant!

MRS. HUANG (*sings*):

New clothes and coverlets must be quickly made!

(CHANG and TA-SHENG tear up the silk, while HUANG, MRS. HUANG and MU sing cheerfully.)

TOGETHER (*sing*):

Red silk and green, like ten thousand flowers!

MRS. HUANG (*sings*):

Measure it quickly! Cut it straight!

ALL (*sing*):

*Some for our master and some for his bride!
And some for quilts and covers for the bed!
To deck the bride!
To spread the bed!
Let's all hurry to get them made!*

MRS. HUANG (*sings*):

Send cards at once to our relatives!

MU (*sings*):

I take my pen and quickly write!

HUANG To Secretary-General Sun of Kuomintang County Headquarters, to Magistrate Liu and Captain Li. . . .

MRS. HUANG To the Seventh Aunt, and to Uncle. . . .

MU (*sings*):

One card is written and then another. . . .

ALL (*sing*):

*When the time comes, guests will gather,
Men and women, old and young,
To feast here in our hall together!*

MRS. HUANG Chang, go to the servants' quarters, and see how the sewing is getting on.

CHANG Yes, mistress.

MRS. HUANG Ta-sheng, go and see how the preparations for the feast are going forward.

TA-SHENG Yes, mistress.

MRS. HUANG Old Mu, you speed them all up.

MU Yes, mistress.

ALL (*sing*):

*Cassia trees in autumn make the whole courtyard fragrant,
The whole household's busy preparing for the wedding!
We're just waiting for the happy day to come,
When with flutes and cymbals we welcome the bride home!*

(MU, CHANG and TA-SHENG leave.)

MRS. HUANG (*in a low voice*) Son, has that procurer from the city arrived?

HUANG Not yet. I'm so worried, yesterday I sent for him again.

MRS. HUANG Better hurry. Her condition is more obvious every day, and your wedding is drawing near. If you don't make haste, and word gets out, our family reputation will be ruined.

HUANG How about this, Mother—for the next day or two let Old Mu keep an eye on her, and stop her running around. Later we can find a quiet place, and lock her up.

MRS. HUANG (*approvingly*) Good. (*Exeunt.*)

(*Enter MU.*)

MU (*picking up the invitations and glancing round prior to going out again*) Ah, here comes Hung-hsi. Landlord Huang told me to keep an eye on her. Let's see what she's up to.... (*Hides behind the door.*)

(*Enter HSI-ERH, carrying a wooden pail. She is seven months pregnant, looks haggard, and walks with difficulty.*)

HSI-ERH (*sings*):

Seven months have passed—

Like a twig crushed beneath a stone,

I bear the shame, swallowing my tears.

I can't say how ill I feel.

Things have gone so far, there's no help for me,

I'll just have to bear it and swallow my pride.

(*Entering the room she sees the red silk and invitation cards on the table.*)

HSI-ERH Ah, there's going to be a wedding. Does it mean Landlord Huang?...

(*MU coughs. HSI-ERH steps aside. Enter MU.*)

MU Oh, Hung-hsi, what are you doing here?

HSI-ERH Fetching hot water for the old lady.

MU You must be happy now. What do you think I'm doing?

HSI-ERH How should I know?

MU Well, look at this! (*Picking up the invitation cards.*) What are these?

HSI-ERH Those?

MU Wedding cards, for the wedding! Ah, these days we're all busy preparing, didn't you know? As for you... you ought to be pleased now! You ought to be laughing! The old lady says you mustn't run around these days.... Just wait! (*Exit.*)

HSI-ERH What? Steward Mu said I....

(*Enter HUANG.*)

HSI-ERH (*seeing HUANG*) Oh, it's you.

HUANG Ah, Hung-hsi! (*Wants to turn back.*)

HSI-ERH (*stopping him*) You—wait! I want to ask you something....

HUANG Well, but I'm busy now, Hung-hsi....

HSI-ERH Let me ask you—

HUANG All right. (*Taking up an invitation card, and listening helplessly.*)

HSI-ERH I'm growing bigger every day, what can I do? People laugh at me and despise me. But I can't die, however much I want to. Tell me, how shall I live on?...

HUANG Er.... (*Wanting to make off.*)

HSI-ERH (*stopping him*) Sir, you.... (*Weeps.*)

HUANG Now, Hung-hsi, don't cry. Er, you know, Hung-hsi, the time has nearly come. Just keep calm. Keep quiet, Hung-hsi, and don't run

about. I'm going now to make preparations. (*Exit hastily.*)

(*Enter CHANG with silk.*)

HSI-ERH (*bewildered*) Auntie....

CHANG So you're here.

HSI-ERH What's that you're carrying, Auntie?

CHANG Clothes I made for the bride.

HSI-ERH Is there going to be a wedding, Auntie?

CHANG I was just going to talk to you, Hung-hsi. Come along to our room for a talk....

(*She leads HSI-ERH out of the door, to their own room. The back curtain falls.*)

HSI-ERH Auntie—

CHANG You know, Hung-hsi, the time is getting near....

HSI-ERH I know.

CHANG You ought to realize.

HSI-ERH I do realize, Auntie: it's seven months now. But what can I do? At least now he's....

CHANG (*surprised*) What are you talking about, Hung-hsi?

HSI-ERH Just now Landlord Huang said he was going to marry me....

CHANG What! You're dreaming, Hung-hsi! You've got it wrong, child!

HSI-ERH (*greatly taken aback*) What do you mean, Auntie?

CHANG (*sings*):

*Oh, Hung-hsi, you foolish child,
He's not going to marry you,
But a girl called Chao from town;
Her family's rich and powerful....
Child!*

Just think, Hung-hsi, how could he dream of marrying a servant like you or me?

HSI-ERH No need to go on, Auntie. I lost my head for a moment. Landlord Huang is my enemy; even if he married me, he would make me lead a wretched life. Oh, it's just because I'm getting bigger every day, and can't do anything about it. So I thought—

CHANG Ah, I meant once the child was born you should give it to me to bring up for you; then one day when you left the Huang family you could marry someone else. I didn't think to tell you about the wedding. Who could imagine you would suppose....

HSI-ERH I understand now, Auntie. Now he's going to be married, and he's cheating me too. What a devil he is! I'm not a child. He's ruined me, so that I can't hold up my head again; but I'm not like my father! Even a chicken will struggle when it's killed, and I'm a human being! Even if it kills me, Auntie, I'm going to speak my mind!

CHANG (*crying*) I never thought of you as a child, love. I like your spirit—

HSI-ERH Auntie! (*Too moved to speak she falls into CHANG'S arms.*)

(*Voice offstage: "Auntie Chang, the mistress wants you."*)

CHANG Someone's calling me. Wait a little, Hung-hsi. I'll be back soon. (*Crossing the threshold she turns back.*) Don't go out again. (*Exit, closing the door.*)

(HSI-ERH watches CHANG go. Presently she can no longer contain herself for anger, and rushes out, just as HUANG enters from the other side.)

HSI-ERH (*fiercely*) Sir!

HUANG (*startled*) Hung-hsi, why are you here?

HSI-ERH (*stepping forward*) Sir, you...

HUANG Now, Hung-hsi, go back quickly. It doesn't look good if you're seen in the courtyard.

HSI-ERH (*loudly*) Landlord Huang!

HUANG (*startled*) What! You—

HSI-ERH On New Year's Eve you forced my dad to commit suicide! On New Year's Day you got me to your home. Since I came you've never treated me as a human being, but as dirt beneath your feet! Your mother beats and curses me! (*Coming nearer.*) And you—you ruined me!

HUANG You... why bring that up now?

HSI-ERH (*coming nearer*) I'm seven months gone, but you're getting married and deceiving me! I ask you, what do you mean by it! (*Bites and tears at him.*)

HUANG (*throwing HSI-ERH down*) You fool! Mad! (*He shakes her off and hurries out.*)

HSI-ERH (*getting up*) I'll have it out with you! I'll have it out with you! (*Runs out after him.*)

(CURTAIN)

SCENE II

MRS. HUANG'S room. HUANG enters hastily.

HUANG Mother! Mother!

MRS. HUANG (*putting down her opium pipe*) What is it, son?

HUANG Mother, I was too careless. I didn't have Hung-hsi watched, and now she's making trouble.

MRS. HUANG (*sitting on the bed*) What's she been doing?

HUANG She's after me now! Look, Mother, she's coming here! The guests will be here directly. If this gets known, it will be too bad.

MRS. HUANG The fool! She must be mad! Well, you go. Send Old Mu here.

(Exit HUANG.)

(MRS. HUANG picks up a broomstick and stands waiting angrily.

HSI-ERH runs in.)

HSI-ERH I'll have it out with you!... (Enters the room.)

MRS. HUANG Silly girl! You are mad! Kneel down!

HSI-ERH You! (Refusing to kneel.)

MRS. HUANG (fiercely) Kneel down!

(HSI-ERH looks at her angrily, trembling with hate.)

MRS. HUANG Wretched girl! Do you admit your guilt? I ask you, who got you with child?

HSI-ERH What!

MRS. HUANG Wretched girl! Carrying on with men, you've spoiled our family's reputation. Speak! Who is your lover? Speak up, who is it?

(MU comes in behind HSI-ERH'S back.)

HSI-ERH (loudly) It's your son! (CHANG is listening from one corner and HUANG from another.)

MRS. HUANG (furiously) What! You liar! You are accusing my son? You are asking for trouble! (Steps forward to strike her.)

HSI-ERH (starts to rush forward but is seized by MU. She shrieks) It's your son! It's your son! You've ruined my whole family! There isn't one good person in your Huang family! Not a single man or woman in your family for generations has been any good! You're all bitches and....

MRS. HUANG Old Mu! Old Mu! Stop her mouth, quickly!

(MU gags HSI-ERH with a handkerchief.)

MRS. HUANG Quickly shut her in the inner room and whip her!

(MU drags HSI-ERH to the inner room and whips her. The strokes of the lash and muffled cries are heard.)

MRS. HUANG (listening) Good, good. Today she must be well beaten.

(CHANG listens in distress outside the door.)

(There is a pause.)

MRS. HUANG (taking out a lock) Old Mu, lock the door for me.

(As MU locks the door HUANG enters hastily. CHANG hides herself and listens at the door.)

HUANG Mother, it's time now. I think we'll have to find a way to get rid of her. The guests will soon be here. If outsiders hear of this, it will be too bad.

MRS. HUANG You're right. The bride is coming. If the bride's family hears of it we'll be in an awkward position.... Old Mu, is there anybody outside?

(As MU looks outside the door CHANG hides herself. MU re-enters the room, closing the door, and CHANG listens again.)

MU No one.

MRS. HUANG Good. We mustn't lose any time. Tonight when they are all asleep, Old Mu, you get a horse and take her away.

HUANG Yes, Old Mu. When you get to the city, take the girl to the procurer for him to get rid of quickly. On no account must people know

MU Very good, sir. I'll do that. (*Exit.*)

HUANG Don't be angry, Mother. Let's go to inspect the preparation of the bridal chamber. (*Takes his mother's arm to help her out.*)

(CHANG hides herself as HUANG and MRS. HUANG leave. Then she runs into the room and tries to open the inner door, but finds it locked.)

CHANG The key? (*She looks for the key on MRS. HUANG's bed, and finding it opens the door. A voice is heard offstage: "Aunty Chang!" Enter TA-SHENG. CHANG hides the key, and pretends nothing is amiss.*)

TA-SHENG Aunty Chang! (*He comes in.*) Oh, there you are, Aunty Chang. The mistress wants you to go to supervise the sewing.

CHANG All right, I'm coming. (*TA-SHENG goes out, followed by a distracted CHANG.*)

(*Voices are heard offstage:*)

MU Old Kao, what a drunkard you are!

KAO It's the young master's wedding. Why shouldn't I drink?

MU Saddle a horse for me at once. Quickly!

KAO Why do you want a horse so late?

MU Never you mind. Just get it ready.

KAO All right. All right.

(CHANG re-enters, carrying cakes, and hastily closes the door. She puts the cakes on the table, then opens the door of the inner room.)

CHANG Hung-hsi! Hung-hsi! (*After dragging HSI-ERH out, she locks the door and puts the key back on the bed.*)

CHANG Hung-hsi! (*Undoing the rope binding HSI-ERH's arms.*) Hung-hsi! Hung-hsi! (*Removing the gag from her mouth.*) Hung-hsi! Wake up, Hung-hsi!

HSI-ERH (*coming to herself*) Who are you?

CHANG (*softly*) It's Aunty.

HSI-ERH Ah, Aunty!... (*Falls on CHANG.*)

CHANG Hung-hsi, Hung-hsi, I know all that happened. (*Helping her up.*) You must go quickly. They want to ruin you.

HSI-ERH Ah!

CHANG They're murderers! They've sold you! They'll be coming to fetch you, you must go at once! If you fall into their hands, you'll never escape again.

HSI-ERH Aunty, they...they.... (*She wants to rush out.*)

CHANG (*pulling her back*) Don't be foolish, Hung-hsi. You're no match for them. Go quickly. You must fly for your life.

(HSI-ERH says nothing.)

CHANG Go by the back door. Along the gully. I've opened the door for you. Quick! *(They start out.)*

(Voice from offstage: "Aunty Chang! Aunty Chang!" Taking fright they hide. The voice grows fainter.)

CHANG *(urgently)* Hung-hsi, soon you won't be with me any more. In future you'll have to make up your own mind. I can't go with you. They're calling me.

HSI-ERH Aunty!

CHANG *(giving HSI-ERH the cakes from the table)* Here are some cakes to eat on the road. Mind you only drink running water. However hard life is, you have to go on living. Remember how they destroyed your family. A day will come when you can avenge yourself.

HSI-ERH I shall remember, Aunty.

CHANG *(giving HSI-ERH money)* Here's some money I've saved. You'll need it on your journey. Soon I'll be leaving their family. One day we shall meet again.

HSI-ERH *(takes the money and kneels down)* Aunty—

CHANG Ah, Hung-hsi, get up. Go quickly. *(Opens the door and runs out, leading HSI-ERH.)*

(Voice from offstage: "Aunty Chang! Aunty Chang!")

(After a while CHANG comes back by the way she went out, walking calmly. The third watch sounds. Enter HUANG and MU.)

HUANG *(taking the key from his mother's bed, unlocks the inner room, goes in, and discovers HSI-ERH has gone. In surprise)* What! Where's Hung-hsi? She's disappeared!

MU What!

HUANG Old Mu, Hung-hsi has escaped! The back window is open. She must have climbed out through the window. Go and catch her, Old Mu. When you've caught her, strangle her with a rope and throw her into the river, so we won't have any more trouble.

(They leave the room.)

MU She won't dare leave by the front gate, sir. Let's go by the back gate. *(Exeunt.)*

(CURTAIN)

SCENE III

HSI-ERH *is escaping by the back gate. There are stars in the sky.*

HSI-ERH *(falls down and gets up again. Sings):*

*They want to kill me, to murder me,
But I've escaped from their tigers' den!*

*Mother bore me, Dad brought me up,
I want to live, I want to live!*

(She runs off.)

(HUANG and MU enter in pursuit, carrying ropes.)

HUANG Hurry up after her, Old Mu!

MU Right.

HUANG If she took this road, there's a big river in front, and she can't get away.

(They pursue. A mountain looms in front. On one side is a rushing river flanked by marshland. HSI-ERH hurries in.)

HSI-ERH *(sings)* :

*I'm going on, I'll not turn back,
I've been wronged and I want revenge!
They killed my dad and ruined me,
I'll remember it in my grave!*

(The sound of running water is heard.)

*I can hear running water,
There's a river gleaming under the stars;
It's a great river flowing east,
I've lost my way—where shall I go?*

(Suddenly the sound of heavy footsteps behind throws her into a panic.)
Ah! I'm being followed! *(She stumbles and falls in the mud. When she extricates herself her shoes have fallen off; but her pursuers are near, and she has no time to pick up her shoes.)* There are some reeds. I'd better hide myself there. *(She crawls into the reeds.)*

(Enter HUANG and MU.)

HUANG Can you see her, Old Mu?

MU No. *(They search.)*

HUANG The river's in front. Where could she have gone?

MU The mountains on both sides are steep, and there's no path.

HUANG A girl, and so near her time, where can she go?

MU She won't get away, sir. *(They search again.)*

MU *(suddenly discovering a shoe)* Ah, sir, isn't this Hung-hsi's shoe?

HUANG *(taking the shoe)* Yes, it's hers alright.

MU Then she must have jumped into the river.

HUANG Ah, well, she brought it on herself. Well, that saves us trouble. Let's go back, Old Mu. If questions are asked, we'll just say she stole things and ran away. Don't let anyone know the truth.

MU Right. *(They leave by the way they came.)*

HSI-ERH *(emerges from the reeds and sings)* :

*They want to kill me, how blind they are!
I'm water that can't be drained dry!
I'm fire that can't be quenched!*

*I'm not dying, I'm going to live!
And live to be avenged!*
(*She hurries into the mountains.*)

(CURTAIN)

ACT IV

SCENE I

*Three years later—the autumn of 1937.
On the hillside overlooking the river, not far from the Goddess' Temple.
It is dusk. The sun is setting.
Enter UNCLE CHAO with a long whip, leading his flock.*

CHAO (*sings*):

*Year after year passes,
And the road's overgrown with wild grass;
Houses crumble and the place is empty,
Some have died and some have gone.
When cold winds blow, the lonely grieve;
Water flows eastward never to return.*

(He stands at the river's edge watching the water flow eastward, then speaks with feeling.) Ah, how quickly time passes. It's three years since that child Hsi-erh drowned herself in the river.... *(Sits on a boulder.)*

(Enter LI from one side carrying incense.)

LI (*seeing CHAO*) Ah, Uncle Chao, watching the flock?

CHAO Well, Li, where are you off to?

LI I'm going to burn incense before the White-haired Goddess.

CHAO Burn incense before the White-haired Goddess?... Oh, yes, it's the fifteenth of the moon again today....

LI (*sitting down beside CHAO*) It's quite some time now since the White-haired Goddess appeared in these parts....

CHAO Well, we shall see. Something must be going to happen....
(Leans forward a little, as if he heard something.)

LI (*suddenly standing up*) Listen, Uncle Chao!

CHAO (*after a pause*) Oh, it's only the wind in the reeds.

LI (*relaxing. Softly*) Tell me, Uncle, have you seen it?

CHAO Seen what?

LI The White-haired Goddess, Uncle. Old Liu met her once in Uncle Yang's land, and Chang Szu saw her when he was cutting wood in the

North Mountain gully. They say she was all white, in the shape of a woman; but she was gone in a flash.... (Shivers.)

(Pause.)

CHAO (*thinking back*) Ah, if the White-haired Goddess were any good, then Hsi-erh's family should have been avenged.

LI May the fairy help us! (Pauses.) Say, Uncle, wasn't it that autumn Aunty Chang sent Hsi-erh....

(CHAO *hastily stops him and looks around.*)

LI (*in a lowered voice*) Didn't you say Aunty Chang sent her away?

CHAO Ah, how could a girl run far? She drowned herself in the river, poor thing....

LI (*sighs. They are silent. He looks at the sky*) Uncle, I must go to burn incense now. A storm is coming. (*He moves toward the temple.*)

CHAO (*sighs sadly. Sings*):

Is there no good judge

To right the wrongs of old?

What we suffered in the past

No words can tell!

But if the goddess were any good at all,

She'd avenge the ghosts of those unjustly killed!

(AUNTY WANG, *leaning on AUNTY CHANG'S arm, enters from the direction of the temple.*)

CHANG Uncle Chao!

CHAO Oh, Aunty Chang, Aunty Wang! You've been all that way to burn incense?

CHANG Well, Aunty Wang insisted I come with her. Ah, when you're brooding over something, you can't forget it.

WANG (*crying*) Uncle Chao.... I want nothing else, great goddess, but let my child come back.... I've never done a bad deed in my life. Why should this have happened to me? All these years have passed, Uncle Chao, yet every day as soon as I close my eyes, I see Hsi-erh on one side and Ta-chun on the other. Oh, son, why have you forgotten your mother? Poor children! One drowned herself, and the other ran away.... (*Cries bitterly.*)

CHANG Now don't cry, Aunty Wang. (*Comforting her.*) Don't take on so, Aunty Wang.

CHAO Nothing can bring the dead to life. What's the use of crying?... Although Hsi-erh died, she died well.... As for Ta-chun, although there's been no news of him since he left, he'll come back some day....

CHANG That's right. Every day since I left the Huang family, I've reasoned with her, saying, "Wait, Aunty. Although Hsi-erh is dead, Ta-chun is sure to come back. Don't complain of fate. Our fate is the

same. I'll help you, and you help me. Then we shall struggle along in spite of difficulties."

CHAO (*nodding sadly*) Struggle along, struggle along. One day Heaven will stop being blind.

(LI *enters hurriedly, in consternation. There is a gust of wind.*)

LI (*looking pale*) Uncle Chao! Uncle Chao!

CHAO What is it?

LI She's coming! She's coming!

THE OTHERS What is it?

LI Behind the temple! White! All white! The White-haired Goddess!

THE OTHERS (*panic-stricken*) What, is it true? Let's go quickly!

(*They run off. CHAO follows with his sheep. The sky grows dark, thunder rolls and the storm breaks.*)

(*A chorus sings offstage*):

The storm is coming,

The storm is coming,

THE STORM IS COMING!

Heaven and earth grow dark

With lightning and with thunder!

Heaven and earth grow dark

With lightning and with thunder!

God has grown angry,

And the world's in chaos!

A gale has sprung up, and from the mountain

The White-haired Goddess is coming down!

(*A great clap of thunder and flash of lightning.*)

(*Enter the WHITE-HAIRED GODDESS—HSI-ERH—with dishevelled white hair, rushing through the storm.*)

HSI-ERH (*sings*):

I came down to gather fruit and berries,

When this sudden thunderstorm broke.

The mountain's steep and the path is slippery,

I can't get back to my cave, so I'll take shelter

In the Goddess' Temple nearby.

(*She slips and falls, and her fruit rolls to the ground. She hastily picks it-up.*) I've spent more than three years out of the sun. Today I came out to get some maize and potatoes, and steal some food from the shrine for my winter store. . . .

(*Thunder and a downpour. HSI-ERH sings*):

Lightning makes me close my eyes,

Thunder makes me lower my head,

Wind tries to sweep me off my feet,

And I'm drenched in the pouring rain!

*But never mind the thunder and lightning,
The wind and the pouring rain!
I clench my teeth
And step by step
Push on—
The temple's close ahead!*

(Exit in the direction of the temple.)

(MU enters running through the storm with a lantern and umbrella.)

MU *(sings)* :

*Thunder's crashing, lightning's flashing,
This storm broke out of the blue!
Master went to town on business,
What's keeping him so long?*

(At a clap of thunder he crouches down.) Ah, what weather!... Really, what is the world coming to! Recently I heard the Japanese fought their way across from Lukouchiao and have occupied Paoting. They may even be here in a few days. Landlord Huang went to town for news. He ought to be back by now.... *(He is restless and anxious. Thunder rolls again. He stares ahead, not knowing what to do.)* Ah, during the last few years the villagers have been talking about some white-haired goddess, and ghostly noises are heard at midnight. *(Sighs.)* What can I do?... *(Shivers.)*

(He suddenly sees a shadowy figure on the left, and gives a start.)
Who is it?

(After a pause, LANDLORD HUANG'S voice is heard in the dark:
"Oh.... Is it Old Mu?")

MU *(reassured)* You're back at last, sir!

(HUANG hurries in holding an umbrella, followed by TA-SHENG.)

MU Are you all right, sir?

HUANG Things look bad, Old Mu! *(Sings)* :

*I set out for the county town
The day before yesterday;
But I'd only reached the market town
When I heard some dreadful news!
The Japanese have taken the county town,
So I hurried right back,
Hurried back like mad today!*

MU *(startled)* What! Is it true?

TA-SHENG Yes.

HUANG It's appalling! The Japanese kill people and set fire to houses!
All my in-laws have fallen into their hands!

MU *(more alarmed)* Heavens! Then what can we do, sir?

HUANG *(reassuringly)* Don't worry, Old Mu. Whatever changes take

place, we'll always be able to find a way out. Come on, let's go home first.

(There is a clap of thunder, and the rain pours down more heavily.)

MU The storm's growing worse, sir. Let's take shelter first in the temple. *(The three battle their way toward the temple. On the way they meet HSI-ERH. A flash of lightning lights up the WHITE-HAIRED GODDESS.)*

HUANG *(panic-stricken)* What!

(There is another flash of lightning, and HSI-ERH recognizes HUANG.)

HUANG Ghosts! Ghosts!

(The three men hide in terror.)

HSI-ERH *(in rising anger rushes at HUANG and the others, throwing the sacrificial fruit at HUANG and shrieking)* Ahh!

HUANG and MU *(flying in terror)* Help!... Help!... Ghosts! Ghosts!
(They rush off, followed by TA-SHENG.)

(A pause.)

HSI-ERH *(halting in alarm and uncertainty)* Ghosts? Ghosts? *(She looks round, then is silent for a moment.)* Oh, you mean I'm a ghost? *(She looks at her hair and clothes.)* So, I don't look like a human being! *(Her voice trembles with indignation and grief.)* This is all your doing, Landlord Huang! You brought me to this! And you call me a ghost?...

(Wind, rain and thunder are heard, and lightning flashes, as HSI-ERH sings.)

I'm Hsi-erh whom you ruined,

I'm not a ghost!

(Thunder crashes even closer.)

... I've lived in a cave for more than three years,

Gritting my teeth for misery;

Hiding by day for fear folk see me,

While at night there are tigers and wolves;

I've only rags and leaves to wear,

Only temple offerings and berries to eat,

So my hair and skin have turned white!

(Accusingly):

I was brought up by parents too,

But now I've come to this pass!

It's all through you, Landlord Huang,

You brought me to this, yet now you call me

A ghost! All right—

I'm a ghost!

The ghost of someone cruelly killed!

The ghost of someone hounded to death!

I'm going to scratch and pinch you!

I'm going to bite you!

(Shrieks.)

(She rushes headlong into the storm.)

(Lightning and sheets of rain.)

(The chorus sings "The Storm..." offstage, the sound gradually dies away in the distance.)

(CURTAIN)

SCENE II

The following afternoon.

Under a big tree at one end of the village.

OLD CHAO and two peasants enter. *They are obviously upset.*

ALL *(sing)* :

*A storm's sprung up. The world's
In a bad way, we can't live in peace.*

FIRST PEASANT:

Landlord Huang has practically squeezed us dry!

SECOND PEASANT:

The White-haired Goddess is making trouble!

CHAO:

The Japanese are fighting their way over!

PEASANTS:

It's said they've taken Paoting city!

FIRST PEASANT:

Hu-tzu has gone to town for news,

SECOND PEASANT:

Why isn't he back yet?

ALL:

It's enough to distract one, such goings on!

CHAO Ah, Hu-tzu went to town three days ago; how is it he's not back yet?

FIRST PEASANT Could he have met the Japanese?

SECOND PEASANT Surely they can't be there already? *(Sighs.)*

(As the three are waiting impatiently, AUNTY CHANG hurries in.)

CHANG Oh, you're here. Have you heard the news?

ALL *(startled)* What's happened?

CHANG Yesterday evening when Landlord Huang was coming back from town and took shelter in the temple from the rain, he saw a ghost!

ALL *(amazed)* Really?

CHANG It's true. He's ill now from the shock.

CHAO Well! Now the Huang family's sins are finding them out, if ghosts come out to confront him!

CHANG And I heard those Japanese have occupied the county town!

ALL (*startled*) No! Then what's to be done?

CHAO (*stamping impatiently*) Why isn't Hu-tzu back yet?

FIRST PEASANT Oh, look! Isn't that Hu-tzu coming?

ALL (*shouting*) Hu-tzu! Hu-tzu!

(HU-TZU hurries in.)

HU-TZU (*panting*) You're all here. Things are in a bad way! (*Sings*):

*The Japanese have taken the county town,
And smashed the Kuomintang troops!
The county head's fled, the commissioner too,
Leaving just the people, with nowhere to turn!*

ALL Ah! Only the people are left to bear the brunt!

HU-TZU (*sings*):

*When the Kuomintang troops fled from the market town,
There was cursing, conscripting, beating and looting!
And when the Japanese come, so they say,
There's always burning, raping, shooting!*

ALL Heavens! Only the people are left with no one to care for them!

HU-TZU (*sings*):

*But I heard some good news too—
Troops have come from the west, with banners flying.
They'll fight the Japanese and save us all!
They can march sixty miles in a single night,
They're super men and officers, they really fight!*

ALL (*astounded*) Really?

HU-TZU (*sings*):

*At Pinghsing Pass they won a great victory,
Killing several thousand Japanese,
Then fought their way north....*

ALL What army is that?

HU-TZU (*sings*):

*They call it the eight—eight—
Eighth Route Army!*

ALL (*at a loss, echoing him*) What—the Eighth Route Army?

HU-TZU (*emphatically*) Yes. They're called the Eighth Route Army. I heard they're very good to the people—

(Li rushes in before HU-TZU has finished, carrying a hoe.)
(The "Eighth Route Army March" is heard.)

LI (*showing amazement*) Quick! Quick! I was just coming in from the fields, when I saw troops coming down the Southern Hill!

ALL (*alarmed*) What! Troops?

FIRST PEASANT Could it be the Japanese?

LI No, they didn't look like Japanese. They're Chinese troops!

SECOND PEASANT Ah, they must be retreating.

LI They don't look like retreating either. You look! (*All stare in the direction he points.*) They're in good order, heading briskly due north.

ALL (*looking*) Ah, there are so many of them!

LI Ha! That's a funny army! They're all youngsters, wearing big straw hats, and with no puttees, only shoes. And there's a figure "eight" on their sleeves.

ALL (*in unison*) Oh, they must be the Eighth Route Army!

(*The martial music grows louder.*)

(*They watch anxiously.*)

SECOND PEASANT (*suddenly catching sight of them*) Ah! Here they come! Here they come!

(*An armyman's voice offstage: "Hey! Countryman—countrymen!"*)

(*They all take cover in fright.*)

(*Enter TA-SO, ragged and unkempt, leading a soldier who proves to be TA-CHUN.*)

TA-SO By calling out like that, Ta-chun, you frightened them all away! Say, Ta-chun, just now there was someone here who looked like Uncle Chao.

TA-CHUN Let's call him then.

TA-SO Uncle Chao! Uncle Chao!

TA-CHUN (*calling too*) Uncle Chao!

(*After a pause, CHAO and others enter; but the sight of the soldier makes them fall back a few steps in fear.*)

TA-CHUN (*advancing*) Uncle Chao, don't you know me? I'm Ta-chun!

TA-SO I'm Ta-so!

ALL (*incredulously*) What?—Ta-chun!—Ta-so! (*After a second they recognize them, and are overjoyed.*) Well! Well! Ta-chun! Ta-so! You've come back! (*Other peasants crowd in.*)

(*They sing happily in unison*):

A clap of thunder,

And then a sunny sky!

The stars in heaven

Are falling from on high!

Ta-chun! (Some: Ta-so!) You've been away so long,

Who could tell you would come home today!

(*Enter a peasant: "Ta-chun! Your mother's coming!"*)

(*TA-CHUN goes to meet her.*)

ALL (*following TA-CHUN to meet her, sing*):

Now mother and son will meet,

And be together from now on!

*All we country folk are happy too;
 All we country folk are happy for you!*
 (AUNTY WANG, calling "Ta-chun! Ta-chun!", runs in.)
 TA-CHUN (*shouts*) Mother!
 WANG (*unable to believe her eyes, hesitates, then rushes forward, crying*) Ta-chun! My boy!
 TA-CHUN Mother! (*He breaks down too.*)
 SOME PEASANTS (*comfortingly*) Aunty Wang.... (*Sing*):
 Don't take on so!
 OTHERS (*sing*):
 Don't be so upset, Ta-chun!
 CHANG Don't make your mother sad, Ta-chun!
 CHAO (*wiping his eyes*) Don't take on so, Aunty. Ta-chun's back, isn't he?
 WANG (*wiping her eyes*) Oh... I'm not... not sad. (*Cries again.*)
 CHAO Well! (*Sings*):
 *You waited day after day so many years,
 Now Ta-chun's here, isn't he?*
 ALL (*sing*):
 Isn't it grand that he's back!
 CHANG Your day of rejoicing has come, Aunty.
 CHAO Tell us, Ta-chun, how did you come back?
 TA-CHUN and TA-SO Right!
 TA-CHUN Mother, Uncle—
 TA-SO Aunty Chang, neighbours—
 TA-CHUN and TA-SO (*sing*):
 *When we left that year,
 Landlord Huang—*
 TA-CHUN:
 Drove me out with nowhere to go!
 TA-SO:
 Threw me into the county jail!
 TA-CHUN:
 *I fled to Shansi province,
 And joined the army there!*
 TA-SO:
 Life was misery in that jail!
 TA-CHUN:
 *Today our troops have come to the front,
 Determined to fight the Japanese invaders!*
 TA-SO:
 *They stormed the county town and opened the jail doors,
 Letting us out after all we'd suffered!*

BOTH:

*So we came back together,
Home to see our old neighbours!*

ALL (to TA-CHUN) What army do you belong to then?

TA-CHUN (sings):

I'm in the Eighth Route Army.

TA-SO (simultaneously):

He's in the Eighth Route Army!

ALL (delighted, crowding round him) Oh, so you joined the Eighth Route Army then! (Sing):

The Eighth Route Army! The Eighth Route Army!

You've come from the west!

It was you who won the battle of Pinghsing Pass,

You're the army with the super officers and men!

TA-CHUN Yes, the Eighth Route Army, led by the Communist Party, is like one family with the common people. Do you remember, Uncle Chao, you used to talk about the Red Army? That Red Army is the present Eighth Route Army!

CHAO Eh? What's that you say? The Eighth Route is the same as the Red Army? (*Wildly happy, to all.*) Ho! Have you all forgotten the Red Army that came to Chao Village on the thirteenth of the fifth moon that year, the day the War God sharpened his knife?... It's too good to be true! It's too good to be true! Everything will work out all right now. The Red Army's come back again!

TA-CHUN (*correcting him*) The Eighth Route Army—the Eighth Route Army's come back!

ALL (*in unison*) The Eighth Route Army—the Eighth Route Army's come back! Now there'll really be a change for the better!

(*Laughter.*)

(*The "Eighth Route Army March" sounds loudly offstage.*)

(*All go to meet the troops.*)

(CURTAIN)

ACT V

SCENE I

Spring, 1938.

Under the big tree in front of the village. The tree has come into leaf. This village has become one of the Eighth Route Army's anti-Japanese bases behind the enemy's lines. The early morning sun lights up the sentry box of the Self Defence Corps. From a tree beside it hangs a reading board on which is written: "Resist Japan and Reduce Rents."

HU-TZU, carrying a lance with a red silk tassel, is on sentry duty.

HU-TZU (*sings*):

*The first clap of thunder in spring!
The first lamp lit in the valley!
The poor are going to be masters,
Now the Communist Party's come!
We mustn't be afraid, we must fight
To build up our new people's power.
Since the government's ordered rents reduced,
We must all rally round and work hard!*

(*Cheerfully*) Ah! At last the time has come for us poor folk to be masters! Last year when Ta-chun was transferred here from the army he became assistant officer of our district. When the village held an election for political officers in the first moon, Uncle Chao was elected village head and Ta-so chairman of the Peasants' Union. Now an order has come that rents be reduced, so we shall have to settle old scores with Landlord Huang. (*Sighs.*) Only the villagers don't all see eye to eye yet. Folk are still so afraid of Landlord Huang and that "White-haired Goddess" that nobody dares stick his neck out. There was to be a meeting today, but I'm sure they won't all come. (*Walks to one side to look round.*)

(*Enter* UNCLE CHAO and TA-SO.)

CHAO and TA-SO (*sing*):

*If everyone rallies round,
Our struggle is sure to succeed!*

*The government will back us up,
They're sending us cadres today.*

TA-SO Hu-tzu!

HU-TZU (*turning round*) Oh, Ta-so! . . . Oh no—(*hastily correcting himself*) Peasant Union Chairman and Village Head. (*Laughs.*)

CHAO (*laughing too*) Have you seen anybody from the district, Hu-tzu?

HU-TZU (*impatiently*) Not yet!

TA-SO They said they'd come today; why aren't they here yet? (*Goes to one side to look.*)

CHAO Hu-tzu! This time we're going to demand rent reduction and settle old scores with Landlord Huang. How about it, youngster, do you dare stand out and speak up?

HU-TZU Need you ask, Village Head? Of course I want to attack Landlord Huang. (*Raising his thumb.*) I'll be the first! . . . But one person isn't enough. See here, this looks bad: a meeting was announced for today, but so far nobody's shown up! Bah! I think it'll be a washout.

CHAO (*reassuringly*) Now, Hu-tzu, don't you worry. It's always darkest before dawn. Today cadres are coming from the district with Ta-chun, we've already thought out a good plan, and we're not afraid of Landlord Huang's tricks! . . . Keep cool, youngster, and wait and see. It won't be long now!

HU-TZU All right. (*Smiles contentedly.*)

TA-SO (*seeing figures on the road to the village*) Hey, Uncle Chao, is that Ta-chun and the district head there?

(*CHAO and HU-TZU look.*)

HU-TZU Yes, it is. It's Ta-chun. And the district head!

(*Two figures approach, and they go eagerly to meet them, calling "District Head!" "Ta-chun!"*)

(*The district head and TA-CHUN walk briskly in.*)

HU-TZU Hey! Ta-chun. . . . Oh no, it's our Assistant Officer Wang who's come!

(*TA-CHUN mops his head and smiles at HU-TZU.*)

CHAO (*to the district head*) We've been waiting a long time. Why are you so late?

DISTRICT HEAD (*wiping his face*) Ta-chun and I came by way of Liu Village, otherwise we'd have been here much earlier.

CHAO How about it? I suggest we go first to the village office.

TA-SO Yes, let's go to the village office first.

(*They start for the village.*)

(*Sound of villagers singing in unison offstage.*)

DISTRICT HEAD (*seeing the villagers approaching*) Hullo! What are these folk doing?

HU-TZU (*stepping forward*) Bah! They're going again to sacrifice to the "White-haired Goddess," damn them! See, there's that rogue Steward Mu too!

TA-CHUN (*to the district head*) Suppose we step out of sight for a second, District Head, and watch them?

CHAO Yes, just come over here. (*They hide on one side. HU-TZU takes cover too.*)

(*Enter the villagers—an old man, an old woman, two peasants and two women, carrying incense and offerings. MU follows.*)

ALL (*sing*):

*The world is out of joint,
And troubles never cease;
But the White-haired Goddess has power
To protect and give us peace!*

MU (*seeing there is no one about, addresses them craftily*) Ah, do you know? Another strange thing happened yesterday evening!

ALL (*startled*) What?

MU The White-haired Goddess appeared again! (*Sings*):

*Yesterday, at the dead of night,
The White-haired Goddess appeared again!
"You shan't reap what you've sown," she said.
There's great trouble ahead!
Ruin will stalk the land,
Everywhere men will die,
Everywhere fires will break out,
The sound of weeping will reach the sky!*

ALL (*aghast*) Oh! What can we do?

MU (*sings*):

*Then she warned men:
To be safe and sound,
You must do good deeds!
Don't meddle in things that aren't your concern,
And offer more incense in the temple.
If you do this you'll be safe!*

ALL (*pray*) Oh, Goddess, help us!

MU And the goddess said too—(*Sings*):

*The Eighth Route Army won't last long,
It'll vanish like dew in the sun!
When the sun comes out the dew disappears,
And the Eighth Route Army will soon be gone!*

(*HU-TZU has already appeared behind MU. Now he rushes forward, snatches MU'S incense and candles, and dashes them to the ground.*)

HU-TZU You bastard, what rumours are you spreading?

MU (*taken by surprise, is at a loss for words*) I... I.... (*Stoops to pick up his incense and candles.*)

HU-TZU Get out! (*Kicks him off, stamping on the candles and incense.*)
(*Exit MU in alarm.*)

(*The others make as if to leave, but HU-TZU stops them.*)

HU-TZU (*angrily*) Stop! No one must pass! Well! When you are summoned to a meeting you won't come, but you have plenty of time for burning incense.

CROWD (*protestingly*):

What are you doing, Hu-tzu?

What if you offend the goddess?

This concerns us all, not just you.

HU-TZU (*not yielding*) The goddess, indeed! Where is the goddess? No, I won't let you go! (*He is spoiling for a fight.*)

(*The district head, TA-CHUN, CHAO and TA-SO come in hastily. CHAO pulls HU-TZU aside and restrains him.*)

CHAO Hu-tzu....

TA-SO Don't be angry. No need to get excited.

DISTRICT HEAD That's right, friends. Don't get heated....

(*The crowd quietens down.*)

OLD MAN Now the district head is here.

CROWD Ah, District Head, Ta-chun....

DISTRICT HEAD Friends, weren't you talking about the White-haired Goddess? Let's hear what miracles the goddess has worked.

TA-CHUN That's right. Just what?

OLD MAN District Head, Ta-chun.... (*Sings*):

*The White-haired Goddess often shows herself,
It's three whole years now we've seen her.*

FIRST PEASANT (*sings*):

*We've all seen her,
She comes and goes without a trace....*

SECOND PEASANT She's all in white! A flash—and she's gone! (*Sings*):

*She's often in the Goddess' Temple,
Where she comes out at dead of night!*

THIRD PEASANT (*sings*):

*The sacrifice set out one day
Will be gone by the next!*

FOURTH PEASANT (*sings*):

*She declares truths in the temple,
Every word can be heard distinctly!*

FIFTH PEASANT It's true. She said—(*Sings*):

*Men are wicked, sinful creatures,
That's why we can't have peace!*

SIXTH PEASANT And Steward Mu told us—(*Sings*):

*The White-haired Goddess is so powerful,
We must all mend our ways!*

ALL (*sing*):

Otherwise we'll offend her, and that'll be the end of us!

HU-TZU (*impatently*) That's a pack of lies! Where is the White-haired Goddess? Why haven't I seen her?

(The crowd shows fresh indignation.)

FIRST How can you say that, Hu-tzu?

SECOND Everybody knows how powerful the goddess is.

THIRD Who will bear her anger if you offend her?

DISTRICT HEAD (*intervening persuasively*) Friends, don't lose your heads. Let's look into the business of the goddess. We must get to the bottom of it.... If you want to burn incense, we won't stop you. But I hope you'll give some thought too to the matter of reducing rents. Our government will always work for the people.

TA-CHUN Just think what we've suffered all these years. Now the communists are here, leading us to become our own masters. We must stand up and act!

OLD MAN Well, yes, District Head, Ta-chun.... We'll leave you now.

DISTRICT HEAD All right. In a few days we'll get together and have a talk. *(The villagers leave.)*

DISTRICT HEAD (*to CHAO and TA-SO*) Village Head, Ta-so, it's clear what's happening. We've studied the relevant materials in our office too. *(In a low voice.)* This is no simple matter....

TA-CHUN (*following him up*) That's right. Landlord Huang is involved. The district office has decided to get to the bottom of the mystery of the "White-haired Goddess".... Tonight there'll be a full moon. I think Ta-so and I should go to the Goddess' Temple....

(They confer in whispers.)

DISTRICT HEAD (*to CHAO and TA-SO*) What do you think? Do you agree?

CHAO Yes. A good idea.

TA-SO Right, let's see what happens tonight.

DISTRICT HEAD Better be on your guard, Village Head.

CHAO (*eagerly*) That goes without saying.... *(Turns to HU-TZU.)* Hu-tzu, you keep a sharp watch in that direction tonight. Our day of vengeance is coming, youngster.

TA-CHUN Then let's go quickly and prepare.

(They walk briskly out.)

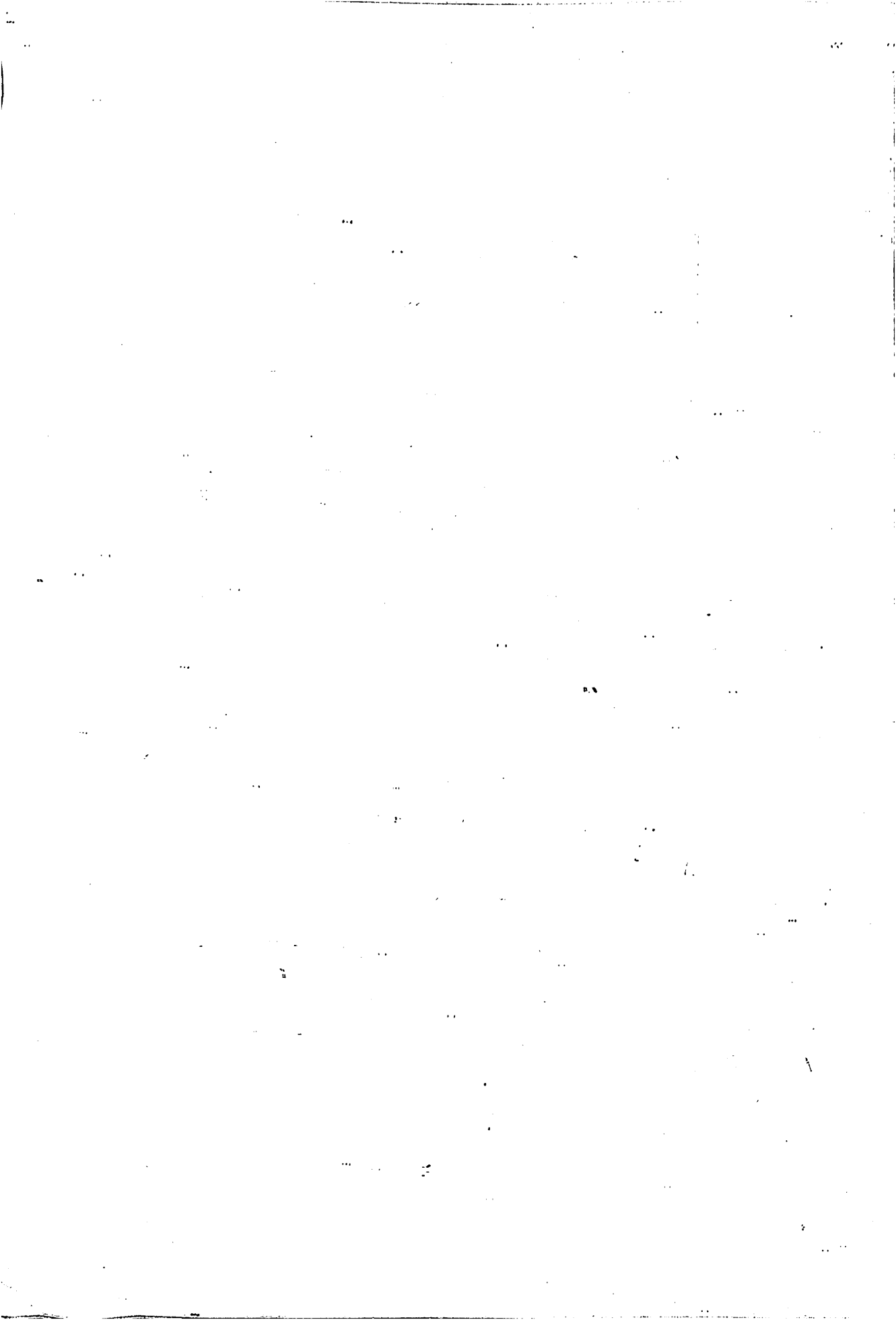
(HU-TZU, holding his red-tasselled lance, climbs onto a mound to stand guard.)

(CURTAIN)



Scenes from the opera
"The White-haired Girl"





SCENE II

Evening.

The Goddess' Temple. There are offerings on the shrine. It is dark and eerie.

Enter TA-CHUN carrying a pistol, and TA-SO with an unlighted torch and a big knife. Approaching the door, they look around, then whisper together and enter the temple. TA-CHUN points out a corner to TA-SO, and both hide themselves.

The wind roars. The temple lamp sheds an eerie light.

Pause.

TA-CHUN peers out from the gloom, then shrinks back into the shadows. There is musical accompaniment throughout.

TA-SO (*nervously*) Ta-chun! Ta-chun!

TA-CHUN (*stopping him*) Quiet! (*Makes a gesture, and they keep silent again.*)

(Enter the "White-haired Goddess" from outside. She darts behind the shrine. After a while, seeing there is nobody there, she comes out to collect the sacrifices on the shrine.)

(TA-CHUN and TA-SO leap out from the darkness.)

TA-CHUN (*shouting*) Who are you?

HSI-ERH (*taken by surprise, is bewildered. She shrieks and rushes at TA-CHUN*) Ah!

(TA-CHUN fires. HSI-ERH is hit in the arm and falls, but she gets up and runs out in fright.)

TA-CHUN Ta-so! After her, quick!

(The scene changes. On the mountain path.)

(HSI-ERH, clutching her wounded arm, runs with difficulty, and jumps over a ditch and runs off.)

(TA-CHUN and TA-SO follow.)

TA-SO Which way? She's vanished again!

TA-CHUN (*looks around and down at the ground*) The trail of blood has disappeared too.

TA-SO (*looking down*) There's a valley beneath us. We have come a long way.

TA-CHUN (*making a discovery*) Look, Ta-so! There's a gleam of light!

TA-SO Ah, it must be a cave!

(The crying of a child is heard.)

TA-CHUN (*listening hard*) There seems to be a child crying.... Let's go after her, Ta-so.

(The two jump across the ditch.)

TA-CHUN Ta-so, light the torch! (*Exeunt.*)

(The music continues. There is a gust of wind.)

(The scene changes again. Inside the cave. An oil lamp gleams on a ledge of the rock, its flickering light revealing the gloom and horror of the cave. On one side are piled firewood, wild fruit, maize and temple offerings. The child is struggling and crying on the firewood as HSI-ERH, panic-stricken, crawls into the cave, and blocks the entrance with a rock. Seeing its mother the child crawls over, crying "Ma!" Outside the cave TA-CHUN'S voice is heard "Ta-so! Here! Here!" They push at the rock, which crashes down. They enter the cave, TA-SO holding the torch. HSI-ERH hastily steps to one side to shield her child with her body.)

TA-CHUN *(covering HSI-ERH with his pistol)* Are you man or spirit? Speak!

TA-SO Quickly! Man or spirit?

TA-CHUN Speak or I'll fire!

HSI-ERH *(with hatred, fiercely)* I....

TA-CHUN Speak! Speak and I'll let you go.

HSI-ERH I... I.... *(Explosively.)* I'm human, human, human!
(Sings):

I'm flesh and blood! I've a heart like you!

Why do you say I'm not human?

TA-CHUN Where did you come from?

HSI-ERH *(sings):*

Under the mountain a stream flows by,

From Yangko Village my family!

TA-CHUN and TA-SO *(startled)* Then how did you come here?

HSI-ERH All because of your Huang family! *(Sings):*

You hounded my dad to death!

You forced Ta-chun to leave home! (TA-CHUN and TA-SO stand dumbfounded.)

You want to kill me, but I won't die!

I came and lived in this cave,

Each day I traced a line on the stone,

But they're not enough to express my hate!

Such hate, such burning for revenge

Is cut in my bones and engraved on my heart!

Ah! (Cries.)

Did you think I was dead?

You were wrong, wrong! (Laughs loudly.)

I'm a fire you'll never put out!

I'm a tree you'll never uproot!

TA-CHUN and TA-SO What is your name?

HSI-ERH *(sings):*

I'm the fire in the waste, I'm the tree on the hill!

And I am Hsi-erh—who is living still!

(TA-CHUN and TA-SO exclaim in amazement.)

HSI-ERH Well, now you've come again, I'll have it out with you! I'll have it out with you! (*Rushes wildly at them.*) (TA-CHUN and TA-SO stand there at a loss. The torch in TA-SO's hand is still burning, and by its light she sees TA-CHUN's face.) Ah, you, you! (*To her amazement she recognizes TA-CHUN.*) Are you Ta-chun? (*Faints.*)

(*The child cries over her.*)

(TA-CHUN and TA-SO step forward hastily and look at her.)

TA-CHUN (*speaking as if in a dream*) Yes...It is Hsi-erh. (*He pauses, not knowing what to do, then sees the wound on her arm.*) Ah! (*Taking a towel, he binds it up very sadly, calling softly.*) Hsi-erh!

TA-SO Hsi-erh!

(*The pain of her wound brings HSI-ERH to herself. She sighs and opens her eyes. When she sees TA-CHUN she knows all is well, and listlessly closes her eyes again.*)

(*Musical accompaniment.*)

TA-CHUN (*looks from HSI-ERH to the cave. He remembers all the past, and his tears flow. Then he grows angry.*) Now I understand everything! Ta-so! Go back quickly to tell the district head. Have Landlord Huang arrested! Tell Old Chen to report to the district!

TA-SO Right!

TA-CHUN Hold on! And tell my mother and Auntie Chang to bring some clothes to fetch Hsi-erh back!

TA-SO Right! (*Hurries off.*)

TA-CHUN (*to HSI-ERH*) Hsi-erh! Hsi-erh! (*HSI-ERH comes to herself.*) We've come to ask you to go back.

HSI-ERH Eh? To go back? (*Shakes her head.*)

TA-CHUN (*vehemently*) You don't realize, Hsi-erh, how things have changed outside. Do you remember the Red Army Uncle Chao spoke about that year? Well, now the Red Army's come—it's called the Eighth Route Army now. They've come, and we poor folks have become masters! You must go out, we must take revenge!

HSI-ERH (*after a pause, in a low voice*) Ah... changed... changed! Revenge! (*She nods.*) Revenge!

(TA-CHUN takes off his jacket and puts it over HSI-ERH's shoulders, then picks up the child and leads HSI-ERH out of the cave. Dawn is breaking and birds can be heard. There is sunlight outside the cave.)

(*Singing offstage:*)

The sun's come out! The sun's come out!

The sun so bright—a blaze of light!

For generations till today

We suffered pain and grief;

But today we've seen the sun rise

To drive away the gloom of night!

*Where did our Hsi-erh disappear to?
She's left us many a year.*

But today—

*We'll trample down the hill,
We'll tear open the mountain cave,
To rescue Hsi-erh!*

To rescue her!

(TA-SO leads the district head, AUNTY WANG, AUNTY CHANG, OLD CHAO and others up the mountain path. They enter singing.)

ALL (sing):

Where is Hsi-erh?

Where is Hsi-erh?

TA-SO Over there—ah, look!

ALL (sing):

Hsi-erh has come! She's coming home!

(They advance in welcome.)

(HSI-ERH'S appearance dumbfounds them. After a moment AUNTY WANG goes up to her.)

WANG Hsi-erh!

CHANG (going to her) Hsi-erh!

CHAO Hsi-erh!

(Seeing these familiar faces, HSI-ERH is at first unable to speak. Presently she calls: "Uncle Chao! Aunty Chang! Aunty Wang!" Finally she falls into AUNTY WANG'S arms and sobs bitterly. All are moved to tears. AUNTY WANG and AUNTY CHANG straighten HSI-ERH'S hair.)

DISTRICT HEAD Don't be sad, friends! Today we've rescued Hsi-erh! That's good! Tomorrow we'll hold a mass meeting to accuse Landlord Huang, avenge Hsi-erh and vent our anger. Let's go back now!

ALL (sing):

Country folk, comrades, don't shed tears!

The old life forced men to turn into ghosts,

But the new life changes ghosts back into men.

It's saved our unhappy sister here!

The new life changes ghosts into men,

She's been restored to us again!

(While singing they help HSI-ERH off.)

(CURTAIN)

SCENE III

The following morning at sunrise.

At the gate of the HUANG family ancestral hall, chosen as the meeting place for the peasants' mass meeting.

Gongs sound offstage. Shouts are heard: "Come to the meeting!" "The meeting's at the gate of the Huang family ancestral hall."

(Singing offstage):

*Age-old injustice must be avenged,
And a thousand years' wrongs be set right!
Hsi-erh, who was forced to become a ghost,
Becomes human again today!
Crushing rents must be reduced,
The grain extorted must be restored!
Those who suffered their whole lives long,
Will stand up and become the masters today!*

*How much of our blood have you sucked?
How much have you drunk of our sweat?
How much of our grain did you steal?
How much of our gold did you get?
How long have you tricked and oppressed us?
How many deaths lie at your door?
Today we shall settle scores with you,
Settle every old score!*

(The curtain parts.)

(Innumerable peasants have stood up to accuse LANDLORD HUANG.)

(The district head, TA-CHUN, UNCLE CHAO and others are standing on the platform. Self Defence Corps guards, armed with red-tasselled lances and swords, surround the meeting place. LANDLORD HUANG, in mourning for his mother, stands with bent head below the platform, while STEWARD MU has hidden under the table.)

(HUANG has just spoken, and now it is the turn of the masses to question him. Feeling is running high.)

FIRST PEASANT (sings):

You pretend to reduce the rent, but it's all a lie!

ALL (in chorus):

You pretend to reduce the rent, but it's all a lie!

SECOND PEASANT (sings):

You take the land back on the sly!

ALL (in chorus):

You take the land back on the sly!

THIRD PEASANT (*sings*):
When you've rumours to spread, you rattle away!

ALL (*in chorus*):
When you've rumours to spread, you rattle away!

FOURTH PEASANT (*sings*):
When you hound folk to death, you've nothing to say!

ALL (*in chorus*):
Then you've nothing to say!
Then you've nothing to say!
So much rent you squeezed, so much money too,
There's no counting the tragedies caused by you!

Speak, Landlord Huang! Speak up, you!
 (HUANG mumbles and wants to justify himself. The crowd grows angry.)

CHAO (*sings*):
Landlord Huang, do you argue still?
To pretend to be crazy will serve you ill!

ALL (*in chorus*):
Serve you ill!

TA-CHUN Landlord Huang, I tell you—(*Sings*):
The bad old times have got to stop!
We common folk are up on top!

ALL (*in chorus*):
Today the world is ours instead!
Murderers must atone for the dead!
Pay what you owe to the folk you've bled!
We'll have your blood for the blood you've shed!

(Two peasant women rush forward.)

FIRST WOMAN (*sings*):
That year—in the ninth moon,

SECOND WOMAN (*simultaneously*):
That year—in the twelfth moon,

FIRST WOMAN (*sings*):
You came to our door for the rent!

SECOND WOMAN (*simultaneously*):
You came to our door for the debt!

FIRST WOMAN (*sings*):
You beat my boy till he nearly died!

SECOND WOMAN (*simultaneously*):
You beat my dad till you broke his legs!

TOGETHER (*sing*):
We'll have your blood for the blood you've shed!

ALL (*sing*):
Murderers must atone for the dead!

*Pay what you owe to the folk you've bled!
We'll have your blood for the blood you've shed!*

(THIRD and FOURTH PEASANTS rush forward.)

THIRD PEASANT (*sings*):

The wrong you did me I'll never forget!

FOURTH PEASANT (*simultaneously*):

The hatred I bear you I'll never forget!

THIRD PEASANT (*sings*):

My son must repair the dike, you said!

FOURTH PEASANT (*sings*):

My brother must build you a tower, you said!

My brother fell to his death from the tower!

THIRD PEASANT (*sings*):

My son was swept off and drowned in the flood!

TOGETHER (*sing*):

Your crimes will be visited on your head!

ALL (*sing*):

Murderers must atone for the dead!

Pay what you owe to the folk you've bled!

We'll have your blood for the blood you've shed!

(*The crowd roars*):

Make Landlord Huang speak!

Landlord Huang! Answer us!

(HUANG continues to mutter.)

CHAO (*loudly*) Neighbours! Since he won't confess, let's not waste our breath on him! Hu-tzu! You fetch Hsi-erh here!

ALL (*echoing him*) Right! Fetch Hsi-erh!

(HU-TZU runs off. HUANG and MU stand aghast.)

PEASANT WOMEN (*tearfully, sing*):

Hsi-erh!...

ANOTHER GROUP OF WOMEN (*sing*):

Hsi-erh!...

PEASANTS (*sing*):

Hsi-erh!...

Hsi-erh!...

PEASANT WOMEN (*sing*):

The poor child suffered bitterly,

But a new life starts for us poor folk today!

ALL (*sing*):

A new life starts! A new life starts today!

(HU-TZU'S voice offstage: "Hsi-erh is coming!")

(All turn to see HSI-ERH. Sing):

Today the world belongs to us,

We'll take revenge for past wrongs!

Past wrongs!

We'll accuse!

We'll accuse!

And avenge Hsi-erh for all past wrongs!

(Enter AUNTY WANG and AUNTY CHANG supporting HSI-ERH, who is wearing a new dress.)

THE CROWD (shouts) We want vengeance for Hsi-erh!

(Seeing HUANG, HSI-ERH rushes across like a mad thing to scratch him, but her thirst for vengeance overcomes her, so that she falls fainting into the arms of AUNTY WANG and AUNTY CHANG.)

(Pause.)

CHAO (moved to tears) Child, don't be upset! The time has come for you to speak!

TA-CHUN Hsi-erh! Did you hear? The time has come for you to speak!

HSI-ERH (as if in a dream) What? The time...has come...for us to speak?

ALL (thunderously) Yes! Hsi-erh, the time has come to speak!

WANG and CHANG Speak, child!

HSI-ERH I'll speak, I'll speak, I—will—speak! (Sings):

I want vengeance for all that happened,

My wrongs are too many to tell!

They're a mountain that can't be levelled,

A sea that can't be drained!

But what's caused such a great change

That I can beard my enemy today?

Landlord Huang—

To be cut into pieces is too good for you!

ALL (sing):

To be cut into pieces is too good for you!

To be cut into pieces is too good for you!

To be cut into pieces is too good for you!

HSI-ERH (sings):

That year—(Her voice falters.)

WANG (sings):

That year on New Year's Eve,

HSI-ERH (sings):

In storm and snow—

WANG (sings):

Mu came and pressed for rent!

HSI-ERH (sings):

And hounded my dad to death!

WANG (*sings*):
Our good Old Yang was hounded to death!

ALL (*sing*):
*Those hounded to death
Are too many to count!
Too many to count!*

HSI-ERH (*sings*):
On New Year's Day—

CHANG (*sings*):
They took her to the Huangs' house that day—

HSI-ERH (*sings*):
I led a wretched life there—

CHANG (*sings*):
She was raped by Landlord Huang!

PEASANT WOMEN (*shocked, sing*):
Ah! Ah!

HSI-ERH (*cries and sings*):
Ah!...

CHANG (*sings*):
Then they wanted to sell her—

HSI-ERH (*sings*):
*As a prostitute!
Landlord Huang! Landlord Huang!
Murderous brute!*

ALL (*sing*):
*You man-devouring beast!
The day of reckoning has come!*

(Unable to control their anger, the villagers rush forward to beat HUANG.)

(The district head and others stop them.)

DISTRICT HEAD Friends, don't beat him yet! Let Hsi-erh finish.

HSI-ERH (*sings*):
*But Aunty Chang, she saved me,
So I could leave the tiger's den.
It was pitch black!*

ALL (*sing*):
It was pitch black!

HSI-ERH (*sings*):
And the way was dark!

ALL (*sing*):
And the way was dark!

HSI-ERH (*sings*):
I didn't know where to turn!

ALL (*sing*):

Where did you go?

HSI-ERH (*sings*):

*I stayed in a cave in the mountain,
Far from people and out of the sun,
Eating raw fruit and offerings,
Till I seemed neither ghost nor man!
But I refused to die,
Though stones rot or streams run dry!
I bore my hardships till today,
And today they have vanished away!*

WANG, CHANG and PEASANT WOMEN (*sing*):

In the light of the sun....

HSI-ERH (*sings*):

Let vengeance be done!

PEASANT WOMEN (*sing*):

She'll be avenged in the light of the sun!

ALL (*sing*):

*Now our time has come,
We must be revenged!
We want justice done,
Hsi-erh must be avenged!*

*(No longer to be stopped they rush forward and beat HUANG and MU.)
(The district head and other cadres try to stop the crowd. The district head stands on a table.)*

DISTRICT HEAD (*shouts*) Friends! I represent the government. I support your charges against Landlord Huang. We will certainly avenge Hsi-erh. First let us arrest Huang and Mu for public trial according to proper legal procedure.

(All cheer excitedly.)

(Members of the Self Defence Corps tie up HUANG and MU.)

ALL (*sing*):

*Landlord Huang, you have bowed your head!
You quake with dread!
You have bowed your head!
You quake with dread!
Age-old feudal bonds
Today are cut away!
Crushing iron chains
Will be smashed to bits today!*

(The song is repeated.)

(The sun rises. It shines brightly on HSI-ERH and the surging crowd, who shout for joy and sing):

*We, who suffered in days bygone,
Shall be our own masters from now on!
Shall be our own masters from now on!
Our—own—masters—from—now—on!*

*(LANDLORD HUANG crouches before the crowd like a felled tree.)
(The peasants stand proudly under the sun, countless arms raised
high.)*

(CURTAIN)

How "The White-haired Girl" Was Written and Produced

by Ho Ching-chih

In 1940, in northwest Hopei, which was part of the Border Region,¹ there spread a story about a "white-haired goddess." Owing to the deep-rooted superstition of the villagers and cadres of a certain village near the mountains, our work there had made little progress even though several years had passed since the place was liberated by the Eighth Route Army. Rumour had it that a "white-haired goddess" had appeared. She was said to be all in white, and to reveal herself at night. This deity had made the temple just outside the village her dwelling place, and ordered the villagers to sacrifice to her twice a month. For a long time her command was obeyed and, strange to relate, the sacrifice set out one evening always disappeared by the following morning. Once, however, when the villagers neglected to place offerings there at the appointed time, a shrill, strange voice sounded from the dark shrine:

"You who neglect your goddess—beware!"

One day a cadre from the district administration office went to the village and fixed a date for a general meeting to elect village officers. When the day came, however, the villagers failed to attend; and when asked the reason the village cadres explained diffidently:

"Today there's a full moon; they've all gone to sacrifice to the 'White-haired Goddess.'"

After ascertaining details, the district cadre decided either the villagers must have mistaken some wild animal for a goddess, or this was some enemy scheme of sabotage. He determined to go to the temple to lay this ghost. That same evening he and the village security officer went, armed, to the temple and hid themselves in a dark corner west of the shrine. After midnight, when the worshippers had left and the moon was shining fitfully, there came a gust of cold wind and footsteps were heard. Then a white figure entered the temple. In the dim light it was just possible to see it snatching food from the altar. As it turned to leave, the district cadre leapt out from his hiding place, and shouted:

"What are you?"

¹ Referring to the liberated areas bordering on Shansi, Chahar and Hopei provinces.

Startled, the apparition gave a wild shriek, then rushed at him. The cadre fired, and it fell, only to struggle at once to its feet and make hastily off. The two men pursued the white figure through the woods and up the mountain until, after passing several cliffs, they lost sight of it. They were standing there irresolutely when they heard a child crying in the distance, and peering through the darkness saw a mysterious flicker of light at the end of the dark mountain gully. Pressing on boldly they discovered a deep, dark cave, in the recesses of which the "White-haired Goddess" was shrinking, clasping a child. The cadre covered her with his gun, and said:

"What are you? Speak up, and I'll spare your life! Otherwise I'll fire!"

The "White-haired Goddess" dropped to her knees before the cadres, crying bitterly, then poured out her story.

Nine years earlier (before the War of Resistance to Japanese Aggression broke out and before the Eighth Route Army reached this district), there had been a wicked landlord in the village, who oppressed the peasants cruelly. One of his old tenants had a daughter of seventeen, an intelligent and pretty girl who took his fancy; so on the pretext of collecting rent he contrived to drive her father to commit suicide, then carried off the girl, and when he had her in his clutches raped her. Later she became pregnant. When this happened, he decided to murder her and take a new wife, but his plot was discovered by a kind-hearted maidservant, who helped the girl to escape by night. However, after flying from the landlord's house she had nowhere to go; so she found a mountain cave in which to stay, and there she had a child.

Nursing her hatred and bitterness, she remained several years in the cave. Because she went cold and hungry, was seldom in the sun, and had no salt in her diet, her hair turned white. Villagers who saw her stealing offerings from the temple thought her a goddess, and sacrificed to her. So she was able to keep alive. She knew nothing of the war or liberation by the Eighth Route Army, quite unaware that the world had changed.

The girl's story brought the old, evil, man-devouring society before the cadre's eyes, and he was moved to tears. He explained to the "White-haired Goddess" the changes that had taken place since the Eighth Route Army liberated the people, and that tragedies like hers were things of the past, for now the people had become masters of their own destiny and were leading a happier life than ever before. Finally, he brought her out of the dark cave into the bright sunlight. Once more she became a human being, and started a new life.

This story is the creation of the people. Told and retold, it was amended, amplified and polished until it reached its present form. From the first day of telling, it spread rapidly, and soon enjoyed immense

popularity. Writers of the Border Region wrote it up into short stories, songs and reportage, and by 1944 it had reached Yen-an.

As with all stories handed down orally, there were different versions, and ours is only one of many. However, the variants differ only in certain episodes: the central theme, chief characteristics and main episodes are common to all. When we hear this story we are deeply moved by it, for it is a superb folk tale. Through the tragic experiences of the daughter of a tenant peasant, it gives concentrated expression to the sufferings of the peasants under the dark feudal rule of old China, at the same time revealing the splendour of new China and the new democracy led by the Communist Party in which the peasants have become their own masters. In the words of the opera: "The old society changed men into ghosts, while the new society changes ghosts into men." Such a folk tale came into circulation in the Border Region mainly because after centuries of hardship the Chinese peasants had been liberated. Under the leadership of the Communist Party their life has undergone a radical change, and light has flooded their hearts, stimulating their imaginations and intelligence. Thus this story is endued with actual, positive significance and the revolutionary romanticism of the people's struggle.

The libretto adopted the central theme of the folk story, and retained some of its chief characteristics and episodes. However, in order to bring out the main theme clearly and forcefully and adapt it for effective stage representation, certain alterations were made to the original story.

It took some time to understand and portray the main theme. To begin with it was considered by some as a ghost story devoid of any social significance. Others felt it could be written up as a story to overcome superstition. Later, however, after careful study, we came to consider it not merely as a ghost story or an attack upon superstition but grasped its more positive aspect—the portrayal of the contrast between the two types of society and the significance of the people's liberation.

Writing the libretto and rehearsing took more than three months (January—April 1945), during which time we never ceased experimenting and revising. We lacked experience in writing, and knew too little about life in the Border Region; above all we were ill-equipped to handle the opera form and technique. We asked advice from comrades familiar with that region, at the same time making use of our past experience in rural work; and we consulted many friends about the episodes of the story while writing the libretto. During rehearsals the libretto was revised by the performers and producer, and many experts and students offered good advice. Particularly noteworthy is the fact that many of the country folk, as well as our school messengers and cooks, came eagerly to watch the rehearsals and made excellent suggestions, even on very minor points. When we wrote the last act describing the new society,

we also asked the advice of comrades engaged in administrative work in the Border Region.

In April 1945, the opera was produced in Yen-an. More than thirty performances were given in all, and it was very well received. Most of our cadres and the local people came to see it, some even from a considerable distance. The songs became well known, and in the street members of our cast were often pointed out.

"That's the white-haired girl!" someone would say.

"There's Tenant Yang!"

And sometimes children gathered to point their fingers at us and say mischievously:

"The running-dog Mu is here!"

"Landlord Huang, you bad egg!"

"It's all true to life," said country folk discussing the story. "We've all come from the old society. Who wouldn't cry at the dreadful things that happened to that girl!"

One labour hero who saw the opera was reminded of the past when he had been forced to sell his daughter. "I shall never forget!" he said. "Today with the Communists guiding us, we poor people have really become masters."

One characteristic of the cultural life of Yen-an was the special attention paid to drama and the enthusiastic criticism given both by cadres and the masses. This being the case, *The White-haired Girl* was constantly revised as a result of suggestions and criticisms received. When we sat with the audience to watch performances, or listened to their comments afterwards, we often heard the most unrestrained, genuine and valuable comments. Sometimes we also solicited the opinion of play-goers, both cadres and ordinary citizens.

In October 1945, we went to Kalgan where we decided to produce *The White-haired Girl* again. We received great assistance from the comrades engaged in literary work there, who were familiar with local conditions and had rich working experience. Thanks to their advice, and bearing in mind the criticism of previous audiences, we made further changes in the libretto. Important revisions were made also in 1947, and again in 1949 when we wrote the final version of the opera.

The foregoing account of the composition of the opera makes it clear that this is a collective work with a wide mass basis and a new significance. The libretto, for instance, is based on a folk tale founded on real life which was already the work of many people. Then the opera was studied, criticized and revised by many others, who assisted directly or indirectly in its making. Without collective effort and co-operation, *The White-haired Girl* could never have come into being.

Most important is the fact that, apart from assistance received from experts, artists and cadres, this opera was composed mainly by means of the help and criticism of the masses. The people are our teachers, and it was they who taught us how to work. They are our most reliable judges and authoritative critics. The new art serves the masses and reflects their lives, and the masses are the characters and the critics, sometimes the creators too, of this art, as our experience proves.

GET THEM DOWN!

by Wei Wei

I

There was a heavy mist in the morning, and from the chestnut groves that covered the hillside water was dripping. In this heavy mist, the divisional political commissar and I took a jeep to the frontline headquarters. The previous evening he had told me that a small battle was being organized here, and fighting would start this evening. That was why I was here. The jeep raced like a romping calf along the narrow valley roads. We crossed one tinkling stream after another, one green peak after another, and very soon our clothes were wet with the mist.

The jeep stopped at the foot of a steep hill. "Here we are!" said the commissar with a gesture. We got out and started up the hill. The grass was high, mist lay thick on the slope, and there were clumps of pines, part green, part brown. The political commissar told me these trees had been burnt by enemy incendiary bombs the previous year, the grass too had only grown again this year. As he was talking, we turned into a denser wood, and heard a clear voice ring out somewhere behind the trees.

"Tell them to give the reason! How can they lose one of my men for no reason at all?"

"I'll have them send in a report criticizing themselves this evening," answered a slightly deeper voice.

"It must be a thorough criticism," emphasized the man with the clear voice. "They've got to learn a lesson! The report must be here before five this afternoon."

I realized it was our young division commander speaking. I hadn't seen him for several years, but we were old friends. As we emerged from the little wood, we saw a cabin built against a cliff. In front of the cabin was a piece of level ground about the size of a big bed-spread, where the division commander was standing with one of his aides. At the sound of our footsteps he whirled round, and called out: "Hallo! You've come!" We hurried over to shake hands. "I heard you were here," he said to me with a smile.

I took a good look at him. From head to foot he was as spick and span as ever, and still looked every inch a soldier. But his face seemed

to have aged. There were fresh lines on his forehead, his eyes showed signs of strain, and you could see he had done a lot of serious thinking.

We sat down on wooden stools, and the guard brought us tea. "Do you keep pretty fit?" I asked the division commander.

His bloodshot eyes twinkled, as he said with a smile, "If it's a question of climbing mountains and inspecting the terrain, none of our regiment commanders can keep up with me!"

"That's one thing he can boast about," put in the political commissar. "The men in our division all call him 'Mountain Tiger!'"

The aide brought over a map, and the division commander spread it on the ground, shifted his stool forward, glanced at the political commissar and me, and said: "Come on! I'll first tell you the actual disposition of forces in this battle. Presently I have a meeting with the artillery unit. The enemy planes and tanks can't do much to us now, but we have to use our brains to cope with the enemy artillery and silence his guns." Without thinking he took off his cap and put it on his knee, and I saw he was beginning to grow bald on top. He passed his fingers lightly through his thinning hair. After a pause, he seemed to jerk his thoughts back from far away.

"This evening," he said, pointing to the enemy's frontline on the map, "I'm going to get a foothold there, whether they like it or not!" When he had described the disposition of troops and artillery he raised his head and fixed his blazing eyes not on us but on the top branch of a pine. "That's what the fighting's like in Korea today," he said. "If they won't settle the Korean question fairly, reasonably and peacefully, we'll keep on fighting. As long as they hold things up at the conference table in Panmunjom, we'll keep on at them here. We'll get them down!"

Just as he was about to roll up the map, another younger staff officer came out from the office, and reported that the enemy had attacked one of our squad's positions at dawn, and lost a dozen men. Now the enemy were carrying off their dead. When the division commander heard this, he looked his staff officer in the eye, and said:

"And what instructions did you give?"

As if afraid of being reprimanded, the staff officer blinked boyishly, because he had given no instructions at all. The division commander stood up, and his cap slipped to the ground.

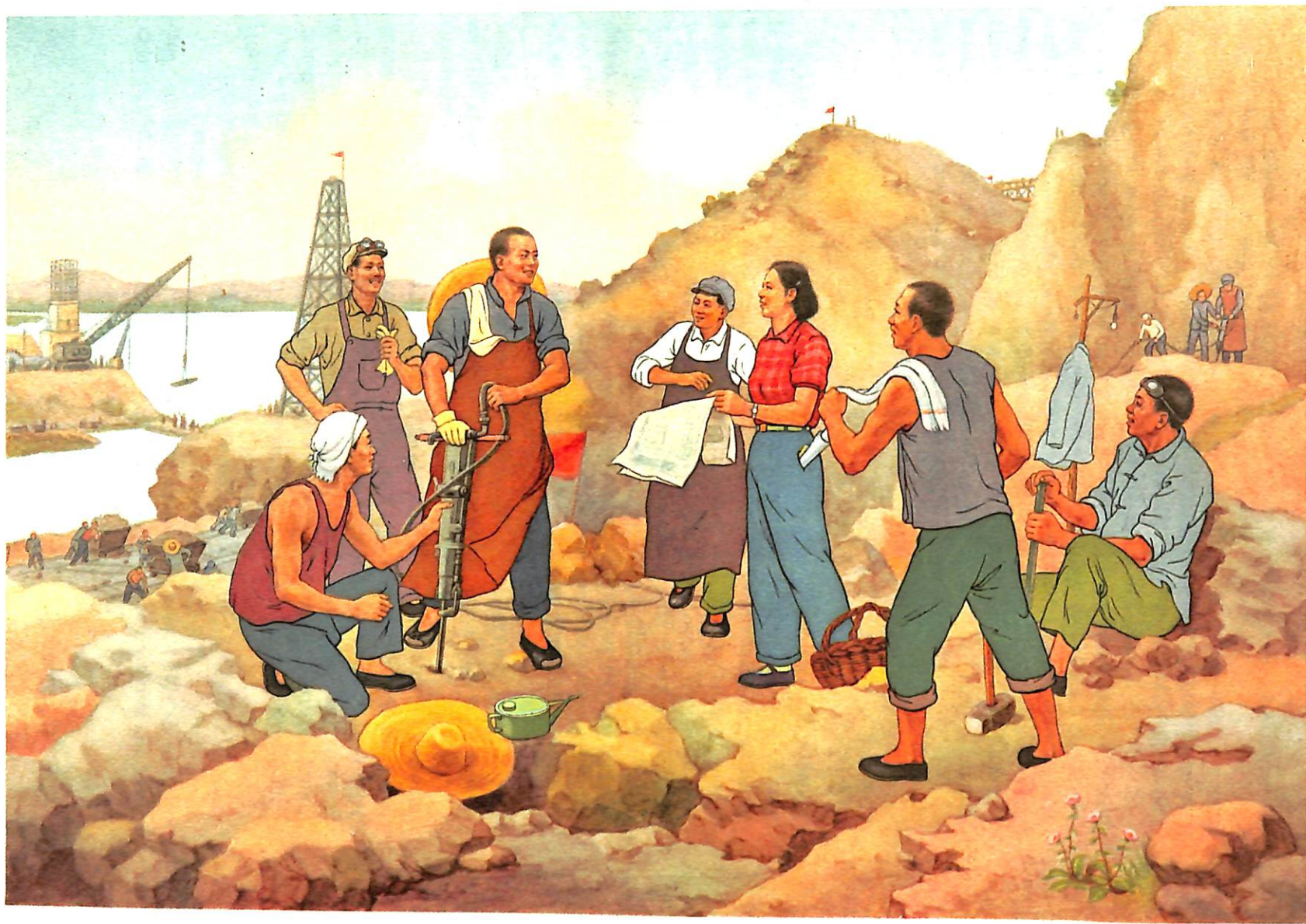
"Tell the men to give the enemy a lesson," he said.

"The enemy's laid down a smoke-screen."

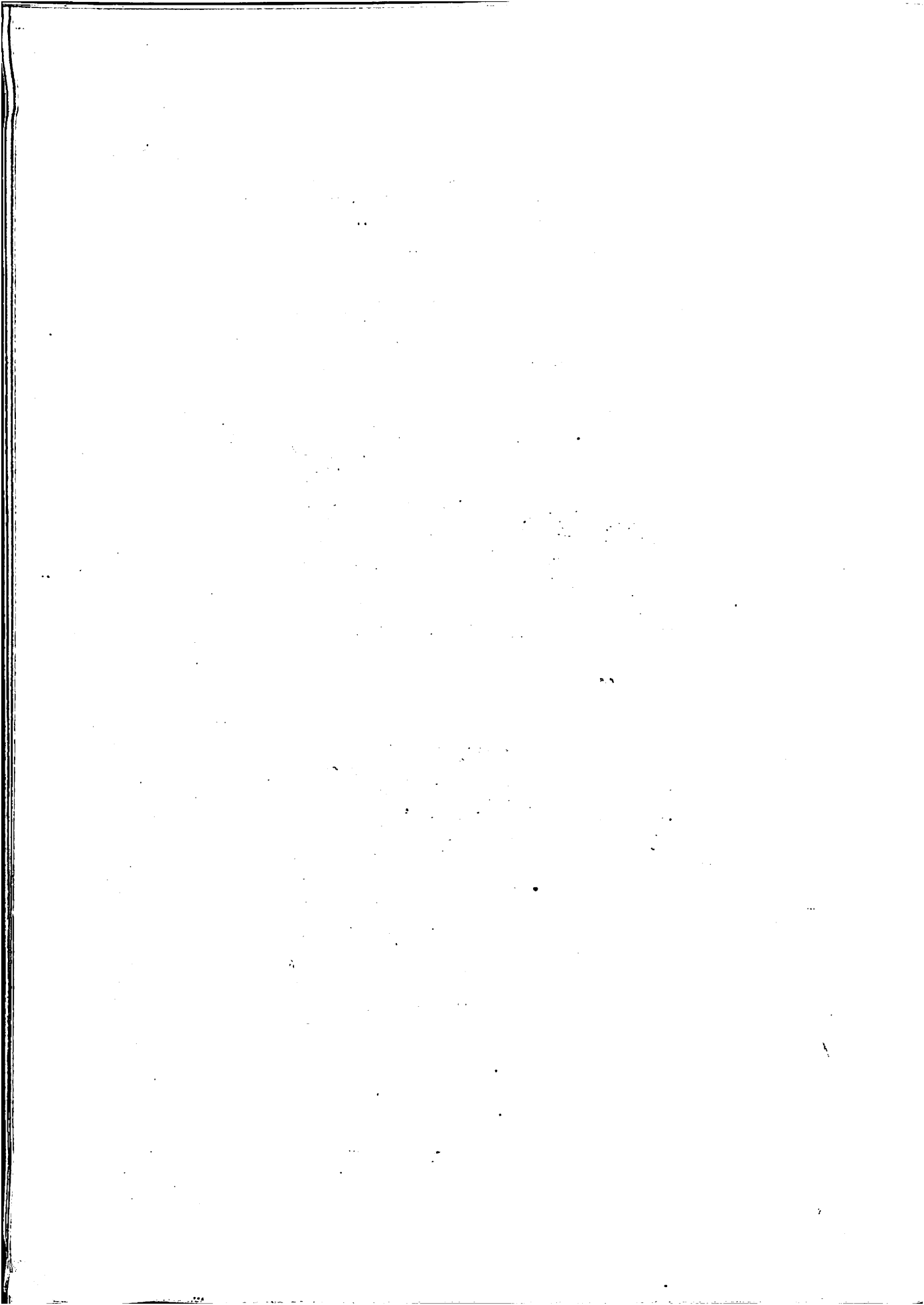
"Fire into the smoke-screen! Use 60 mm. guns!"

As the staff officer turned to go, he called him back:

"In front of our position is no public highway, we mustn't let these visitors circulate freely!"



CHIN CHENG & TUNG PO: Peasants Working for Industrialisation



He sat down, rolled up the map and gave it to his aide to take away, then picked up his cap, dusted it off, and said:

"A few months ago these invaders were still running wild. Apart from launching attacks every day, they actually danced up and down the position, right under our noses!... But now, you can see for yourself! Our men have taught them to keep a respectable distance."

By now everybody had arrived for the artillery meeting. I knew the political commissar would soon have something else to do, so I was eager to take advantage of his free time, and went with him to his quarters. A few heavy explosions sounded—the enemy was bombarding the foot of the hill, and blue grey smoke drifted slowly up. By now the mist had lifted to merge with the snow on the mountain tops. The sun had risen in the east to bathe the peaks in its orange rays.

II

The political commissar's cave was the size of an ordinary room. It was spotlessly clean, and the walls were papered with newspaper. There was a mosquito-net over the bed, and a picture of Chairman Mao hanging on the wall near the table. There was another coloured picture of model worker Ho Chien-hsiu, cut from a pictorial. In a bottle on the table was a spray of golden red wild lilies, one of the common wild flowers of Korea.

The commissar didn't smoke, but he passed me a cigarette. We sat down side by side on his cot. Looking out through the door we could see eight enemy planes bombing a bridge in the neighbourhood. Puffs of smoke from anti-aircraft guns kept bursting near the planes.

The political commissar was very experienced and level-headed, and looked something of an intellectual. He spoke unhurriedly and evenly as the shuttle on a weaving loom, and expressed his ideas clearly and concisely.

"You visited the Korean battlefields shortly after the Volunteers came from China, Comrade Wei. You must find things very different now." He looked round his attractive quarters with a smile. This was a combined living quarters and office. The red-gold lilies looked very colourful. I recalled my first visit to Korea, and our difficulties then, how we had had to stoop to enter the dugout. "Yes," he went on. "The time's past when

We fought to the Thirty-eighth Parallel

On roasted flour and cold water.

Our equipment and technique are much better now. We're firmly entrenched, and the truth is, even if the enemy wants to drive us back

and make us quit these positions,"—he drummed his heels on the ground—"it's utterly impossible."

"And why is it?" he went on after a pause. "It's because we know that we are fighting against American invasion and for the freedom and independence of our neighbour and for world peace, and that all peace-loving people are with us. You can see, if we stay in one place for more than a month, we build and settle down. If we don't use the buildings, at least the Korean troops can use them; and when we leave, the Korean people can live in them. A lot of places which used to be in the battle-line are now part of the rear. We've tables, stools and lots of other useful things that comrades who used to be carpenters have made. Here, Old Wei, don't you admire my chest?"

I looked round the room, but couldn't see any sign of a chest.

Seeing me looking right and left, he couldn't help smiling. "It's staring you in the face," he said, pointing at the table in front of me. "Don't you see it yet?" Quickly removing the flowers from the table, he opened the lid of a chest, and I saw that inside was filled with books and papers. I realized this was a chest with four detachable legs. Set on these legs it served as a desk, so it was table and chest combined. I couldn't help laughing too.

"Of course, this is only one small example," he said, closing the lid of the chest. "You can see a lot more all round. This expresses an idea and a determination—the determination to fight a protracted war! We're all used to making ourselves at home at the front. If the Americans don't want peace, we're determined to keep them company."

"You're determined to keep them company," I joked, "but I'd like to hear just how you'll do it!"

"How we'll do it, eh? Have you seen that friend of mine?" I knew he meant the division commander. "With him in the division, the enemy in front of us doesn't have time to catch his breath. With him as locomotive, even we ourselves find we have scarcely time to stoke up and take on water."

He sat down again.

"Half a year ago, when we first came to this position—" I knew he was going to describe the phases of the fighting, "the enemy was really rampaging, relying on his artillery to dance on his position, and do setting-up exercises. He built his defences just anyhow. Our division commander went to the frontline to see it for himself, then he told the men: 'We can't just let ourselves be cooped up inside our defences, we must make the enemy lie low too. We must think of a way to keep him on tenterhooks.' After that we started a sniping movement. This was just after the men's own heart, the fighters had been longing to do just that. They kept up their sniping all day, and whenever there was

moonlight. Before long the Americans got the wind up, and carted wood over to build defences, where they stayed quietly. But, oddly enough, our friend wasn't pleased with that."

"Why not?" I asked.

"Why? Because our division commander's such a keen fighter. He wanted to keep the enemy on the jump, to weaken their morale further, and inflict more casualties on them. 'We can't stay squatting here,' he told me, 'defence doesn't mean just squatting here. We must squeeze forward. When hornets don't dare sting you, you have to stir up their nest to get them to come out. That way you can kill more of them!' That's his reasoning. So he pores over the map and goes to the frontline every day to look for a weak place in their armour. And when he's found one, we squeeze a piece off. Sure enough, the enemy gets annoyed, and struggles for dear life, and the upshot is they lose both men and positions. This way we've come to close grips with the enemy, in some places there are only a few dozen metres between us. The enemy holds half of some heights, while we hold the other half. We can hear each other's voices. Nowadays we strike at them every night, so the enemy is really sick to death of us. But now our division commander tells the men—" the political commissar stood up elatedly, and raised his voice slightly: "Whichever cadre makes the enemy most fed up—he's the best cadre. Whichever fighter gets on the enemy's nerves most—he's the best fighter!"

"Has the enemy given ground then?" I asked.

"Sure. Only, to begin with, he couldn't quite make up his mind to it. There were some positions where he moved in during the day and moved out at night. Then we laid an ambush to mop him up. Our scouts are rather bold fellows, sometimes they get themselves up in the living likeness of a tree, and slip behind the enemy's lines, even to within a few paces of the enemy sentries. They spy on the enemy till they know him like the palm of their own hands. Our surprise attacks often left the Americans with no one even to go back and report casualties. Finally they felt there was really nothing to gain from being so close to us. So they drew back. Their tanks became more active, and they threw up more barbed-wire entanglements—sometimes as many as a dozen of them. They laid mines too of every variety, all over the place, relying on these trump cards to protect them."

"Well, all those mines must have been quite a headache," I said.

"Yes, only at the beginning," the political commissar nodded.

"I don't mean to say much about fighting tanks," he went on. "In our division alone, in three months we've knocked out over forty enemy tanks. There's a Bazooka man who's still saying it isn't fair, because he didn't get a chance to fire. Whenever tanks are put out of action,

we tell the men to blow them up—we're not going to let the enemy take them to Tokyo to repair. As for mines, our infantry had no experience with them, but they don't mind tackling them. Some fighters, when they discover a mine, look hard at it and say: 'What's so wonderful about you! Think I don't dare touch you? Well, that's just what I'm going to do.' Very soon the enemy mines had become useless. Our men got a great kick out of lifting them, and gained experience. Then those mines moved house in a big way, some were laid in front of our positions, some on the enemy's lines of communication. One day the enemy came up this height, and set off a mine. They raced down for cover to the dugout at the foot of the hill, when the mines at the mouth of their dugout went off too, killing all who were there. When all the mines had been cleared up, our friend started bawling into the telephone: 'Comrades, we've been squatting here for quite a time, let's push forward! Our division commander likes to plant maize on the ground we've squeezed from the enemy to remember the places by. When the men knew this, what do you think they said?'

"What did they say?"

The political commissar smiled. "They said, 'Good news! Our division commander wants us to reclaim more land to plant maize. Let's all take a hand in the planting. First, turnips; second, cabbages; third, buckwheat. We must step on it.'"

"So you're turning up fresh soil for crops now!" I laughed.

Our conversation ended there. But the artillerymen's meeting was still going on across the way. I could hear the division commander's voice ring out:

"That's how we'll do it. Don't forget the enemy's fundamental weakness is cowardice. He can't overcome it! Now we're better equipped with artillery, the folk at home have given us all these big guns! If we can send the enemy infantry slinking off like dogs with their tails between their legs, can't we do the same to their artillery?..."

A roar of laughter went up.

III

At eight in the morning we set out for the front with the scout section chief from headquarters. And we had a very keen scout guiding us, a young fellow with a small, heavily tanned face, who dimpled when he laughed. He was wearing comfortable plimsolls, and had a carbine slung over his shoulder. He fairly bounded forward.

We advanced along a small road tucked away in the valley. Planes were circling overhead, but we paid no attention to them. There were

green hills on either side of us as we walked, really beautiful green ranges. The slopes were covered with chestnut trees, and the ground was scattered with their jade-like flowers, which filled the air with their fragrance. Wild cherry blossom lay like scattered silver along the river bank, and small fish splashed in the murmuring stream. We had not gone far, however, before we saw smoke ahead, and rounding a hill came upon a house in flames. Not far from the house was a pretty little drum tower, just like the ones we have in China, which had been knocked crooked by the explosion. It may have been some historical monument.

We had not left the burning house far behind, when we came to a few more houses, which were in comparatively good shape, though the corner of one had been torn off by a shell. On the threshing-ground in front of the house was a grizzled old man, working away stripped to the waist, with his trouser legs rolled up. When he caught sight of us, he stared with his bleary eyes, nodded to us, then went on with his work. Just inside the door, a woman with a child on her back was slicing vegetables, while a girl of twelve or thirteen, in a worn-out sailor suit, was reading quietly to herself.

"Look out!" the scout section chief suddenly exclaimed, clapping me on the shoulder. "Look!" His voice was still in my ears, when I heard a crash, and, looking in the direction in which he was pointing, saw there had been a big explosion in the paddy fields over there.

When the crash died away, a ball of black smoke went up, as a shell landed near some Korean women who were planting rice in the paddy fields there. I saw them dart to one side, crouch down, wipe off the mud which had splattered their faces, then hurry back to go on with planting. Two of the Korean women—I could see them quite clearly—were dressed all in white, the third was wearing a light blue blouse and a black skirt. The mirror-bright water of the paddy fields reflected their stooping figures as they bent to their work, as well as the mountains behind them.

"Ah!" exclaimed the scout section chief. "The further forward you go, the more you can see. As we advance fighting, the Koreans follow close at our heels planting! As we squeeze a fresh piece from the enemy, they plant a fresh plot behind us. Between us and the enemy is the only place they don't go. But they're right behind our advance company. Even though some of them are killed by bombs in the paddy fields! Their blood too flows into the fields. . . ." His voice was rather gruff.

"And see how straight and trim the lines of rice they've planted are! Do they seem to have been planted carelessly, in a hurry? You couldn't tell they'd been planted in conditions like these."

I looked at the straight lines of rice plants, then glanced back at the Korean women who were planting. Two of them were bending to

their work, while the third was walking along the raised path by the field, probably to fetch some more rice shoots.

"They're a wonderful people!" said the scout section chief with feeling as we walked on. "Things like this happen every day. If someone's killed planting rice at the front, his family bury him the same day. Then they dry their tears, and go on planting. Don't think it's because they're thick-skinned. No. Like their sons and daughters in uniform, they know what they're fighting for. And farming in Korea is just another form of fighting. So, you see, they are with us too in our struggle to wear down the enemy."

Suddenly the scout turned round to say: "Look out! we're coming within range of the enemy's guns."

As he was speaking, puffs of smoke shot up in front, and there was a burst of fire from the enemy's artillery.

"Chief!" The scout's face was stern, and his dimples had disappeared. He fixed his section chief and me with his small black eyes, and said, "Any other time I take orders from you, but now you must do as I say! I'm responsible for you...."

We watched him with a smile.

Without allowing us to protest, he took our raincoats and tucked them under his arm. Then gripping his rifle he looked keenly ahead. We waited for two or three minutes, while there were more explosions from the enemy guns, firing as before. Then he shouted, "Run!" And we sprinted after him. The ground over which we were running was pitted with shell holes and bomb craters. Some of them had water inside. There was mud too, spattered from the paddy fields, and shrapnel like bits of elm bark. All the earth was scorched black.

"All right! We can take it easy now!"

Pleased with the success of his "command," the young scout made a face. As he took his towel to mop his sweat, he turned to us with a smile, showing his dimples again.

The scout section chief deliberately pulled a long face, and said in the bantering tones a commander uses to a young fighter: "Cheeky beggar! You think you've been commanding us!"

"Aw, never mind, anyway I've carried out my task—it's that height in front!"

IV

We entered a trench. It was a very long trench, stretching into the distance. It wound its way over the height, down the hillside and into the valley. Then, like the Great Wall of China, it flew up a steep hill.

There were places where trenches crossed, where different ways met to branch out in all directions. No one could tell how many units of the Korean People's Army and the Chinese People's Volunteers, how many positions and headquarters these trenches led to. They linked up all the mountains from the east to the west coast, threading them all together.

"This took some building! It's really like our Great Wall," I exclaimed.

"You haven't seen the real 'Great Wall' yet," said the scout section chief. "If you could see our fighters using their two hands—using their determination, I should say—to build that underground 'Great Wall,' you'd really marvel."

As we were speaking, we heard the sound of heavy, rhythmical hammering not far away.

We hurried forward, and saw a small matting shed on one side of the trench, where two bare-armed fighters, streaming with sweat, were using a great iron hammer to beat iron. Another fighter was squatting there, plying bellows, and adding coal to the furnace. The flames were leaping and crackling. On a pole of the shed was a notice "The Little Factory."

We stopped to take a good look. The bellows were quite diminutive, and we realized they had been made from a cartridge case. The iron anvil was a converted American 8-inch shell, the tapering end of which had been buried in the ground to make a forge. One of the bare-armed fighters was holding a red-hot mattock with his tongs, while the other was hammering it fast and furiously. Several dozen picks and mattocks of different sizes were heaped at the side, some had been worn down till the rims were sharp, some had been knocked out of shape, some had been ground down till only a few inches were left. I realized at once that these were the same picks that had been on exhibition at Peking—the picks used to throw up defence works, which had hacked their way from the Yalu River to the River Han, and from the east coast of Korea to the west! These picks had built defence works for peace and the happiness of us all.

The fighter with the tongs lifted up the red-hot mattock, on which flames were flickering, and the man with the bellows picked up another mattock to put in the fire. The bellows creaked again, and flames leapt and crackled.

As we were watching, we heard a shout: "Get a move on with those for our squad! The picks inside are worn away again into ducks' bills!"

Turning, we saw a fighter with his hands on the mouth of the cave, looking our way. His hands and face were black, as if he had just come out of a coal cellar. His face was rather thin from hard work. He was gulping in the fresh air.

I was very curious to know why he was so grimy. We hailed him, and went into the cave with him. When we first went in, it was too dark to see anything, we could only smell the scent of pine wood. After we had walked quite a distance, we saw a flicker of light, and when we drew near we found they were burning pine torches. The pine wood was smoking, and its resin sputtering. Then we understood why the fighters' hands and face were so black with smoke. We went a little further on, where more pine torches were being burnt. By their light we saw a fighter sitting there, lifting his mattock and hacking away. When I looked carefully, I saw that all around was hard rock. When the mattock struck the rock, it drew sparks, and brought down a few fragments. Sometimes one stroke only made a white mark, and it took several strokes to bring down a piece of rock as big as a walnut. But the fighter set his teeth and went on quarrying away.

"Hard going that, comrade!"

He turned round, saw us, and said: "All in the day's work." Then he went on quarrying. I offered him a cigarette, and gripped the hand he stretched out for a smoke. The palm of his hand was all over blisters, and when I looked carefully, I saw three or four of them were purplish blood blisters. One of them had burst and was bleeding.

"Look at all the blood blisters on your hand!" I said.

He lit his cigarette at the pine wood torch, and took a puff. Then he smiled and joked: "Nothing to it. There's not a single big one, all small fry."

Seeing us talking to this man, the other fighter took up his mattock and went on quarrying.

Not wanting to hold up their work, we left the cave.

Just then, a man came running along the trench on the height. He was wearing a helmet camouflaged with leaves. From his back hung a brass trumpet, with red silk attached to it. He was bounding along, the red silk streaming out behind him. He had something in his hands, and as he drew near, he called out: "Another's hit the dust!"

The fighters at the forge put down their hammer and asked:

"Where's it come down, signalman?"

"Smack at the foot of this hill. The wings are broken, and the plane's ripped several feet into the ground. The pilot is unrecognizable! See here...." The signalman spread out the contents of his handkerchief at the mouth of the cave.

We hurried over too.

The handkerchief wrapper was a striped and spotted American flag. Inside the handkerchief was the photograph of an American girl, a love letter with the print of rouged lips on it, and a snap of this assassin cheer-

fully hugging a Japanese girl. Then there was a meticulous record of pay received, and a wrist-watch minus the strap. Other things too.

We picked up a neatly folded white cloth, and spread it out. There was writing in different languages printed on it—Japanese, Korean, Chinese, Russian and other languages I couldn't identify. A small square was allotted to each language, containing eight or nine sentences. Written in the square of Chinese was:

Will anyone here help me?

I'm hungry!

Please give me some hot food, and hot water!

I've come to help you.

Please hide me, don't let the Communists kill me!

When I read it out, the fighters let out a great bellow of laughter. Then the one with the hammer said chuckling: "Ask a lot of life, don't they—expecting hot food!"

The two fighters quarrying in the cave had come out too.

"Look," said the signalman. "You're all so busy laughing, you haven't seen the prize item in the collection." And from the wallet he produced a scrap of paper.

We all looked, and saw it was a ticket for a show in a Japanese theatre that evening.

"What d'you think of that?" said the signalman, waving the ticket. "We'll be the ones to have a show this evening. This ticket is fine material for a song. I'm going to take it to the cultural officer!"

Then he tied the things up in the handkerchief wrapper again, and was off like a streak of smoke down the communication trench.

The fighter with the blood blisters tugged at his mate, and said: "Come on back to the job. We're making out all right. What do a few blisters matter; this is the way to wear them out!"

They disappeared back into the cave, and the little forge resounded again to heavy blows on the anvil.

V

On the hillside we found the company which was going to carry out the attack that evening.

The scout section chief hurried off to inspect the work of the scouts. Here I met the vice political instructor. He had just finished a Party branch meeting, and was squatting there helping the fighters fasten together hand-grenades. When he saw me he stood up and saluted. He was very young, not more than twenty-two at the most, and his face was burnt a ruddy bronze by the sun. When I praised their achievement under

these hard conditions, his jet-black eyelashes fluttered with a suggestion of boyish awkwardness and shyness.

He moved over a cartridges case for me to sit on. A cool breeze had sprung up. This might have been the quietest time at the front, only a few enemy scout planes were flying listlessly overhead. From time to time the enemy fired off a volley of shells, but no one paid any attention. From all the caves in the neighbourhood, snatches of songs could be heard.

I asked to see the men. The vice political instructor at once detailed someone to take me to the cave of one squad, and he himself set about fastening hand-grenades again. As I entered the cave, I saw four or five wires stretched across one of the walls. The books suspended from the wires looked like a rich harvest of beans, the most conspicuous being the coloured picture books. On most of the covers was written: "For our Volunteer Uncles." The characters were crooked and irregular, but that gave the childish writing a special charm, like the steps of a toddler just learning to walk. From near the top of another wall hung a row of gift bags: emerald green, pale blue, yellow and pink.... The fighters had hung them up at regular intervals, and there was not a speck of dust on them. Although some of the bags had been washed, the words and flowers embroidered on them were quite clear. When a breeze blew in, they swayed gently like gourds hanging from a trellis. Beneath was the fighters' wall-newspaper, with rhymes praising model fighters and pledges that the men had pasted there themselves. On a small plank by the wall were the fighters' bowls and chopsticks. Hanging from the inside wall were fiddles made from snake and frog skins. With these different things the cave looked really like a comfortable home.

"Who's that in the doorway? Don't stand in our light, come on in!"

I hurried in and sat down. It was a few seconds before I could see the fighters clearly. They were sewing hand-grenade cases. Although we have plenty of big guns and strong fire-power, hand-grenades are pretty useful when it comes to hand-to-hand fighting with the enemy. The men were afraid four hand-grenades wouldn't be enough in a charge, so here they were sewing cases to carry a good round dozen.

Soon we were chatting like old friends.

These were all sturdy youngsters. They were in shirts, some of them with brawny arms showing, some with their bronze chests bared. They were sitting on their ground sheets, close together, singing as they sewed. All were singing different songs, each according to his taste, some high, some low. The main thing, anyway, was to get the hand-grenade cases sewn.

A few of them weren't singing. These were the new fighters, for whom this would be the first battle. They didn't know what a battle was

really like, and the hands holding the needles were trembling ever so slightly with excitement. The old fighters, however, looked as if they had been veterans all their lives. There was something cocky about them, and they sang louder than the others.

A fighter with a small round face was singing away most cheerfully. I put him down as a Szechuanese. His feet were bare, and he kept tapping them in time to his singing.

"What are you so happy about, kid?" I asked.

"We're going to fight, of course we're happy."

At once a slightly older fighter butted in: "We haven't introduced you, comrade. This is the happiest lad in our squad. The last few days he's had two wonderful things happen to him!" Everybody stopped singing, and looked curiously at the youngster.

"What wonderful things?" I asked.

The kid reddened, and burst out: "Don't try to make a fool of me in front of a visitor!"

"This isn't fooling, it's the truth!" The older man went on boldly: "The first good thing was he got a letter from his old father, saying: 'Don't be homesick, land reform's been carried through, we've been given both a house and land. We don't live in that matting shed any more, we've moved into the best part of the landlord's house. The family used to squabble before, but now everything's going smoothly. Mind you win a merit for the people! Another thing, your wife--'"

"Is he married?"

The youngster blushed scarlet and, his round face set in grim lines, said threateningly: "You dare go on! You dare go on!"

But the other fighter continued: "Well, now your wife's been made chairman of the village women's association. Why keep it a secret?"

"Hasn't practically everyone in our company had letters like that?" fired back the youngster. "Why pick on me?"

"What harm is there if he tells?" put in another fighter. "You want to hide in a corner and be happy all by yourself?"

"Hey! Don't squabble! This is the first good thing, but there's another," went on the older fighter. "The second thing is even better! All the lads in our squad keep hollering they want to see Chairman Mao, yet nobody has seen him. But he's seen Chairman Mao—"

"In the pictorial!" cried someone.

"No, the day before yesterday, when I came back at night from sentry duty, I lit the lamp and was getting ready to sleep, when I heard him yell: 'Chairman Mao, Chairman Mao...' I woke him up, and asked, 'What are you dreaming about?' He rubbed his eyes and blinked for a moment, then said, 'I dreamed I'd won a merit, and gone to see Chairman Mao! Chairman Mao was just shaking my hand and talking to me!'"

"Still talking about me!" The youngster decided to get his own back. "Didn't you dream last night you were at the meeting to celebrate merits, and had just gone up to the platform to describe how you won your merit! You were woken by the clapping. The fighting hasn't started yet, but you've already joined the celebration meeting." He laughed heartily.

Just then we heard the platoon commander call from the mouth of the cave: "Have you finished sewing those hand-grenade cases yet? The company commander's coming in a minute to inspect them!"

Most of the men had finished their cases. The hand-grenades were fitted in, clanking. The fighters looked as if they were wearing a waist-coat of bombs when they strapped the cases on. It was some sight.

After the company commander had carried out his inspection, a message came from company headquarters summoning members of the Youth League to a meeting. Presently the regiment commander who was to direct the fighting walked briskly past us along the communication trench. Minute by minute zero hour was drawing nearer.

VI

The sun had set. The battle was about to start.

When the scout section chief had finished his inspection, we climbed up one of the higher hills, from which we could watch the progress of the fighting.

I stood there in the trenches—trenches quarried out by blistered hands. It was these trenches, this miraculous underground "Great Wall," manned by these fighters with blistered hands, that had contributed to make hundreds of thousands of excellently equipped aggressors unable to advance a step, and made them tremble before our military might. It was a great, impregnable position I was standing on.

Before us, two ranges of hills were clearly visible, and between the hills a valley filled with wild grass. Through the valley wound a little brook.

"See that small stream?" the scout chief asked, pointing to it.

"Yes."

"Fine," said he. "This is much clearer than looking at a map. On this side of the stream is the peace camp, on that side is the aggressors' camp! However—can you see some rather brown-looking hills on the other side?"

I peered across. Yes, at the foot of the enemy's range of mountains, there were a few brown hills. "Those brownish hills have all been squeezed out of them recently," he went on. "If you can't make out which is the enemy's position and which is ours, just see whether the

hills are green or brown, and you'll know. Most of the green ones are enemy hills, most of the brown ones are ours. Heavy enemy fire has scorched our heights brown. But there's another rule, see: the brown heights are advancing, while the green heights are falling back. When you passed regiment headquarters, did you see the maize the regiment commander had planted?—That was a newly won position. The regiment commander likes to plant maize as a memento. But by now all that maize is well in the rear!"

I said nothing in reply, just watching the brown knolls on the far side of the stream. I wondered how many of our fighters were defending those heights, and what they were doing now. Though there was nothing to be seen, I went on staring at those brown hills on the other side of the valley, below the green enemy mountains. They stood there stubbornly, confronting the enemy's swarming pillboxes.

Gradually it became too dark to see. I heard the whistling sound of a shell being fired behind us, and turned to see flashes lighting up the sky. Our artillery had opened fire. Following this, the artillery posts right and left set up a furious bombardment. There seemed to be thousands of wild beasts hurtling with a whirr over our heads. They came over, wave after wave.

The battle had started.

When I looked at my watch, the minute-hand was pointing to zero hour.

On the enemy hills great balls of fire could be seen, blood-red balls of fire that flashed for a moment and then were gone. Then came deafening explosions tearing up the sky. The waves of sound crashed over our heads. An enemy searchlight flickered over the height like some great white serpent, making it bright as day.

I guessed, by the look of things, we were in for a fierce artillery duel.

Just then a scout coming down the communication trench told us the spearhead company had already broken through the third line of barbed-wire.

Three lines of wire had been passed, and there were seven more! I thought of the comrades of the shock troops, especially of the young vice political instructor and the fighter with the small dark face. They must be crawling through the barbed-wire, advancing. Our artillery lengthened its range. A fierce volley of machine-gun fire and hand-grenades broke out in front.

Judging by past experience, the battle must have entered the decisive stage of hand-to-hand fighting.

Enemy planes hurtled over our heads with a deafening roar. I could tell by the sound these were heavy bombers. Obviously, they were out

to bomb our artillery posts. And the flashes from our artillery were so great, I was afraid their positions would easily be spotted.

The heavy bombers started circling over our artillery posts. They had found their objectives and were ready to unload their bombs, when our anti-aircraft guns opened up, the red tracer bullets like flaming dragons. The bombers made off hastily to other artillery posts, but when they met the same resistance there, they flew far away.

A heavy explosion was heard in the rear.

"Cowardly devils!" exclaimed the scout section chief with a contemptuous smile. "These bombers set out to bomb our artillery, but when they ran into anti-aircraft fire, they scuttled off to dump their bombs goodness knows where! All the enemy troops are the same. In the past their artillery was pretty fierce! Now, as soon as we bring pressure to bear on them, most of them don't dare fire back."

Sure enough, apart from a few guns which were returning our fire, most of the enemy artillery was silent. I remembered what the division commander had said at the artillery men's meeting, and felt like taking off my hat to him. The days of hard work were being rewarded.

Suddenly the scout ran over again, and shouted: "Section chief! The deputy commander told me to tell you they've taken the position! The enemy's been wiped out! He wants you to go back to the cave to rest!"

We went to the cave that served as battalion headquarters.

The telephone rang, and the deputy commander took up the receiver. After taking the message, he put down the receiver and said to us:

"Our division commander really keeps us up to scratch!"

"What does he say?"

"He says reports on the fighting must be sent in tomorrow morning. Tomorrow evening the summaries of lessons learnt in the fight must be sent in. We must learn something from each battle. Even small encounters can't be taken casually. Next time we must do even better. See, before the battlefield's been cleaned up, the post-battle work's mapped out. Wouldn't you say he keeps us up to scratch?"

Just then we heard singing outside. Someone was singing at the top of his voice:

*The roar of guns makes our hearts beat faster,
Victory spurs us on....*

Suddenly the deputy commander's face grew grave. "Isn't that the voice of the vice political instructor of the spearhead company? What brings him back before the battlefield's been cleared?" We went out to look, and saw a stretcher being carried over. The man on the stretcher went on singing:

*The peoples of China and Korea are brothers,
Side by side they fight against the foe!*

It was the vice political instructor. The young fellow with his face burned a ruddy bronze.

The deputy commander and I moved forward together. The deputy commander gripped one of the stretcher bearers by the arm, and whispered: "Where's he hit?"

"In the leg, pretty badly."

However, the wounded man had heard. He tried to sit up, but couldn't make it.

"Don't worry about me, deputy commander," he said. "In less than a week I shall be back!"

We gripped his hand—the hand which had just been throwing hand-grenades and still reeked of smoke. In the starlight I strained my eyes to take a good, close look at him. He was a stout lad.

The stretcher moved on, to pass slowly behind the hill. The breeze carried his singing back to us. The sound of this singing made me remember all I'd seen at this position. It all added up to one purpose, one voice, resounding like a clarion call: Fight firmly on! Use greater courage to crush the enemy. If they don't want peace, and trump up excuses to go on using force, why then, boys, we'll get them down!

HAPPY DAY

by Shih Kuo

It was quite some time after the sun had sunk behind the western mountains that Jade Yeh and her sweetheart Dz-ping reached the half-way point on the slope above Pine Tree Village. They were on the way back from the district government office, where they had registered their intention to marry. A few minutes later, panting slightly, Jade entered a small thatched house with flimsy cornstalk walls. Here, she lived alone with her mother.

The old lady, nearly sixty, was preparing dinner. She fumbled for utensils in the dusk. Flames from the open stove shone on the walls and cast black dancing shadows.

"I'm back, Ma. Let me do it."

Mama Yeh handed her the spoon and said sorrowfully, "You young people! Why can't you walk more slowly? You're so tired you can't catch your breath!"

Jade groped around till she found the matches, then lighted the oil lamp. The evening breeze, blowing in through the cracks in the cornstalk walls, kept the lamp flame flickering. Mama Yeh seated herself on a low stool before the stove and gazed at her daughter in the uneven light. Long eyebrows, round black eyes, a faintly flushed face—the picture of joy. Suddenly, Mama was engulfed by misery. There was something she wanted to ask, but the words stuck in her throat.

"Ma, we fixed the happy day. The district leader says they're going to give out the new deeds in our village on the fifth of next month. That's a good day. He says we ought to get married then. I was talking it over with Dz-ping...."

"The fifth!" cried Mama Yeh abruptly. Two big tears rolled down her wrinkled cheeks. She buried her face in her wide sleeves and began to sob.

Jade hastily covered the pot and flew to her mother's side.

"Ma, why are you feeling bad again? Didn't we talk it all over? This is a happy event! There are only three people in Dz-ping's family. They're sure to welcome you moving over there with me. Their paddy fields and ours are right next to each other. Are you afraid Dz-ping won't take care of you? If he won't, I'll do it alone! Anyhow, that could never be. Everyone educated by the Communist Party is good

and solid! If you find you really can't get along over there, I'll move back here with you...."

Mama Yeh gently placed her hand over her daughter's mouth.

"Dear baby, don't talk nonsense. This is the biggest thing of your life. You mustn't say anything that'll bring bad luck. Mama didn't do right by you. When she thinks of that, it makes her cry!"

She heaved a long sigh, then with her sleeve vigorously scrubbed the tear stains from her face. But her emotions could not be subdued, and when her daughter returned to the other side of the stove, Mama stood up and walked shakily to the back door. It too was made of stalks. She opened it and went out. Moonlight flooded the side of the mountain against which the little house nestled. The night breeze sighed through a grove of pines higher up the slope. Beyond the grove was the bald dome of the mountain. There was a stone-flagged road on this mountain that went straight along to Heaven Gate Gap and then plunged down into southern Szechuan. Mama couldn't see the road, but she flew far along it in her mind. She wept for a while; now she stood woodenly, deaf to Jade's repeated calls.

Dinner was ready. Jade came out and led her mother back into the house, but this evening Mama Yeh could eat even less than usual. In response to her daughter's urgings, she managed to force down half a bowl of rice.

As a rule, if she had no meeting to attend after dinner, Jade would go to the village school at the foot of the mountain to listen to a reading of the daily newspapers. Tonight, however, her mother insisted that she stay home.

"Don't go out, Jade. Let's cut that 'fruits of victory' cloth they gave us during land reform for our share in the landlord's personal things. We'll get your new clothes started. Tomorrow, I'll sew it for you. I see better in the daylight. If Chairman Mao hadn't come, dear, Ma couldn't even buy you a comb!"

"Ma, nobody cares about dowries any more. We can do the clothes a day or two later."

"You're in such a hurry to go! You'll be leaving me soon enough. Tonight, Ma wants to talk to you. No matter what the reason, I'm not going to let you out!"

"She probably doesn't want to move over to Dz-ping's," Jade mused. "The way old folks look at things.... Still you can't blame her. But what am I to do? Now we've all gotten up from our knees. Ma always had a hard life. I ought to give her a chance to enjoy this new happiness. I'm only twenty-one. That's not very old. Why be in such a rush to get married? A few years later won't make any difference...."

Carrying the oil lamp as she preceded her mother into the narrow bedroom, Jade decided to postpone her wedding.

From the recesses of a decrepit wooden chest, Mama Yeh produced a small cloth-bound packet tied with string. This she opened to reveal a document, yellow and wrinkled with age. Mama spread the document on the bedroom's small square table and pulled her daughter to sit beside the table, opposite her.

Jade suddenly had the feeling that the question was not as simple as she had thought. Worried, she scanned her mother's face. Mama Yeh coughed slightly, closed her eyes a moment, then began to speak.

"Do you know where we're from, Jade?"

"You told me long ago, Ma. We used to live in Chenjya Field in southern Szechuan."

"Right. And why did we come here to this mountainous Kweichow province?"

Jade didn't understand why her mother was going into "ancient history." However, she answered to the best of her knowledge: because they were driven out by a landlord named Jang.

"That's right too. But do you know who else there is in our family?"

Jade was baffled. So far as she knew, there were four of them who came to Kweichow—Papa, Mama, an older brother and herself. When she was about seven, Papa made a trip to Szechuan. When she was ten, her father returned to Szechuan a second time; the next thing they heard, he had died. Her mother was sure that "Pockmark" Jang was at the bottom of it. Her brother was dragged off to the army by the rotten Kuomintang government when Jade was thirteen. They never heard from him again. Several times after liberation Mama had wanted to go back to Szechuan and settle their score with Pockmark Jang, but the government workers and her friends persuaded her against it. The mountains are high and the road is long, they said. Under Chairman Mao's leadership, the peasants are bringing to book all the landlords. Pockmark Jang certainly wouldn't escape.

As a result, Mama Yeh became very active in the exposure of the crimes of local landlords, especially those of Wild Dog Liu and Boss Li. The latter was also former Kuomintang chief of an administrative ward embracing several villages. When he was being tried at a mass meeting, Mama raised the question of her son several times. Li was responsible for the boy having been taken away. . . . Recalling this, Jade raised her head.

"I know, Ma. You mean my brother Yuching."

Mama Yeh shivered. She spoke in a voice that trembled.

"Child, dear child! You have still another brother! Ma brought you up for twenty years, and for twenty years she's fooled you. . . . You, you, you came with that cursed sheet of paper! . . ." Mama Yeh pointed at the document with a palsied hand, and tears rolled from her eyes. But instantly she wiped them away.

Jade couldn't have been more startled had she suddenly been flung up into the middle of the sky. Her heart beat fast.

"Ma, what are you saying!"

The old lady stared at her with bleary eyes. "Listen carefully to what I tell you. Through wind and rain, Ma brought you up for twenty years. But I didn't bear you. That devil Pockmark Jang...."

To start from the beginning, the story was this—Twenty-one years ago, Mama Yeh and her husband had been tenant farmers of the landlord Pockmark Jang in the village of Chenjya Field, in southern Szechuan. They lived in a small shack beside his mansion. On the twenty-fourth of the twelfth lunar month, during the night of the big wind and snow-storm, Mama Yeh gave birth to her second child, a little boy. Three days later, the landlord's wife brought a little girl into the world. Pockmark Jang, who was the only son in a third generation of only sons, was constantly hoping for a son to carry on his line and, of course, inherit his property. When his wife now again gave birth to a daughter, he frowned and grumbled. But he didn't dare to complain aloud because his wife's family had money and influence. She was good-looking too, and Jang both feared and loved her. His wife guessed what was on his mind. While she knew he didn't dare to take a concubine for the time being, she was afraid to let the situation continue.

"You're an able man," she said to him. "You can always think of some angle. Why can't you think of a way to get a son?"

Therefore, on New Year's Eve, the traditional time for settling debts, Jang sent his housekeeper to press the Yehs for the rent they owed him. She screwed down on them hard, and when they were at their wit's end, she made them a proposition. If they would give their infant son to the landlord to be his male heir in exchange for his little girl, some compromise could be made on the rent; otherwise, the landlord guaranteed they would have a very unhappy New Year. Power of life and death was in his hands. If you didn't let the man on the single-plank bridge come over first, you'd never get across yourself. With tears in their eyes, the parents consented. That night, the contract was signed, and at the last minute the landlord had insisted on some harsh arbitrary conditions. The Yehs had to agree to keep the contract a secret; they could not live within a radius of fifty *li*¹ of the landlord's home; no Yeh could ever again cross Pockmark Jang's threshold. Jang reduced their debt of two piculs of grain to one, for which he took their ox in payment. He gave them five measures of rice to tide them over while they moved.

And so, a month after Mama had given birth, the Yehs were forced to leave Chenjya Field. They drifted from village to village until they came to Daya Gap, on the border between the provinces of Szechuan and

¹ One *li* is about a third of a mile.

Kweichow. There, Papa dug coal, toted salt sacks, cut firewood. . . . They lived from hand to mouth. In 1936 there was a famine. The parents, carrying their two young children, took to the road and became beggars. They begged their way to the village of Pine Tree in Szechuan, where they found work with the landlord, Wild Dog Liu. Mama cooked and Papa worked as a farmhand. Their boy Yuching, who was now nine years old, became the landlord's cowherd. For the work of these three people, no wages were paid. They were given only enough food to feed themselves and their baby daughter. Wild Dog Liu called his treatment of them a "good deed." They slaved in the service of this "good deed" do-er for more than a year, when Papa asked permission to clear a piece of uncultivated ground on the mountainside. Liu assigned him a tract halfway up the mountain. Whose land it really was nobody knew, but Liu insisted that once cleared, it would belong to him; from the second year on, Liu collected rent for it.

The soil on the mountain was thin, and full of stones. No matter how hard they toiled, they could only produce corn no bigger than chicken eggs and turnips the size of mice. To preserve even these, they had to wage constant battles against boars, hedgehogs, wild pigs, mountain goats and the like. Over and above all this was the exploitation they suffered at the hands of Wild Dog Liu and the rapacious Kuomintang government official, Boss Li. Papa was pressed so hard, he could barely breathe. "I put 100 percent into the land, but get next to nothing to take home," he would say angrily. Fortunately, all the peasants on the mountain, whether old residents or new arrivals, were very neighborly. They loaned things freely; they helped one another with work. It was in this environment that the Yehs, slowly and painstakingly, were able to establish a new "home."

The parents thought with longing of the son they had left with the landlord, Pockmark Jang, and in their third year at Pine Tree, Papa stole back to Chenjya Field. When he returned to Pine Tree, he was seething with rage. It seemed that Pockmark Jang's wife subsequently had borne two more children—both of them boys. Thereafter, the Yehs' child was treated like a slave. His clothes were in tatters; frequent beatings had raised thick welts on his body. Papa managed to meet him secretly once in a small grove. They only had time to exchange a few words. The boy was skinny as a monkey.

"When your Papa came back to Pine Tree, he hadn't eaten anything for a whole day on the road, he was so angry," said Mama Yeh. "The minute he came into the room he thumped his chest and cried, 'Do you know what stuff rich people's hearts are made of? What are they made of!'. . ."

Jade had been hanging on Mama's every word from the beginning. The girl's own heart was like a rubber band being stretched longer and



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longer and tighter and tighter, until just breathing was an effort for her. When she learned her true origin, Jade's heart seemed to snap; the rubber band had reached its breaking point. Her mind whirled.... She would never have imagined this in her wildest dreams! As far back as she could remember, Jade only knew poverty, hardship, oppression by landlords and Kuomintang ward bosses. Yet she herself came from a landlord family—and the landlord cast her out practically on the day she was born! Landlords, landlords! They just weren't human!...

Gradually, Jade regained her faculties. And when her mother related how Papa had returned to Pine Tree, Jade jumped to her feet.

"The landlord class doesn't have any heart, Ma! Papa didn't know that. If a man's a landlord, he has to be heartless!"

Mama Yeh closed her eyes and nodded. After a while she slowly opened them and looked at Jade. "Your father was *really* good to you, dear! He used to say to me, 'A baby is a baby, whether it's a boy or a girl. Little Jade must have been fated to suffer, or why would she be sharing these hard times with us?' If your older brother was cranky, your father would speak sharply to him. But you—he was afraid to even breathe hard on you!..."

Jade's eyes were growing red. She could vaguely picture him—back a little bent, a whisp of a mustache on his upper lip. Although she didn't recall him too well, today, he was a thousand times greater than the way she usually remembered him, a thousand times dearer. Jade looked at her mother, and found the old lady gazing at her. A wave of warmth surged over her heart...there were so many things she wanted to say. ... But before Jade could speak, her mother asked:

"Jade, what are you thinking of? You don't hate me? You had such a hard time with us...."

This was more than Jade could bear. Tears gushed from her eyes and she flung herself, sobbing, on her mother's bosom.

"Ma, Mama, how can you say such a thing? The landlord class has no use for women. That Jang didn't want to bring me up. Brother suffered in my place in the landlord's house. On account of me, the family is scattered. And Papa died so miserably! I, I want to eat the flesh off that landlord Jang's bones!..."

Tenderly, Mama Yeh stroked her daughter's face. "Dear child, you're a good girl. You understand what's right.... Now, Chairman Mao has come, and Ma can say she's brought you safely through! ... It's only because you're going to be married, and I began thinking of your brother in Szechuan.... Who knows whether he's still alive?..."

That night, Jade thought for many hours. Moonlight, shining in through the chinks in the stalk wall, stretched into long slanting beams, and still she could not sleep.

The next day, she told the whole story to young Dz-ping. Jade said she wanted to take a trip to Szechuan personally. Dz-ping considered for a while, then replied he didn't think that would be necessary. If the landlord Jang hadn't been completely exposed, Jade's information would be important. But Szechuan had gone through land reform some time ago; Jang probably had long since been dealt with. So far as her going to Szechuan was concerned, she should remember that her mother's chief concern was whether the brother was still alive. Of course, if he was, that would be wonderful. But suppose he was dead? That would be sure to make the old lady feel even worse. Dz-ping's idea was this: In a few days, he and some of the other villagers were going to deliver some shipments of grain to Puhö. It was only fifty or sixty *li* from there to Chenjya Field. Let him go to the Yehs' home town first and see what the situation was; then they could decide what to do.

"Don't tell Mama Yeh anything about this," he cautioned. "We don't want to keep her watching and hoping."

The day the grain delivery group was to set out, Jade secretly handed the old "child exchange contract" to Dz-ping. He obtained a letter of introduction from the Pine Tree Village administration office before he left.

One by one, the days passed. The delivery group returned, then went out with a second shipment of grain. Every time Jade climbed the slope, it was she who was watching and hoping....

Mama Yeh noticed that her daughter seemed especially restless. If Jade had no work to do at home, the minute she finished eating she would be gone.

"She's going to be married soon, but she doesn't bother about preparing anything," fretted the old lady. "There must be some important work to do in the village again!"

Late one afternoon, Mama Yeh was sitting in a corner of the room, sewing "good" clothes for her daughter. The sun was sinking, and the old lady stood up and rubbed her blurred eyes. She decided to take advantage of the cool shadows to water some late corn. Stepping outside, she suddenly observed Jade running towards home full speed along the road from the village administration office. The girl raced up the slope in the light of the setting sun, and the old lady watched her with alarm.

"Ma! I've got something big to tell you! Good news, enormously good news!" Jade came flying up, panting hard, and flung her arms around her mother's neck.

"What is it? You're always talking so wild!"

Jade stepped back and wiped the perspiration from her forehead. "Ma! Will you believe me?" she said breathlessly. "Brother's come! ... The brother you told me about that night, he's here!"

"Which brother?"

"The one you said you exchanged for me—Lasheng! Ma, he's here!"

Mama Yeh stiffened as though she had been struck. After a moment she said quietly, "Jade, you're a big girl now. You shouldn't talk nonsense...."

Jade was so frantic she nearly danced. She gripped her mother's shoulders with both hands and shook. Every part of her body strained to make the old lady believe.

"Ma, it's true, one million two hundred thousand times true! The day after you told me, I talked to Dz-ping. When they went with the grain, he made a special trip to Chenjya Field.... Dz-ping found him!... I just met them at the village office. The mayor is making them have a wash and drink some water before they come here...."

"Oh!" Mama Yeh's body felt strangely empty. There was a white glare before her eyes, and earth and sky seemed to be whirling together. For a moment she didn't know where she was. By the time she came to herself again, Jade had disappeared. The old lady rubbed her eyes and looked down. There on the ground was the unfinished clothing, with needle and thread still sticking into it. As she bent to pick them up, Mama wondered whether she hadn't just been dozing and dreamed it all. But then she saw a group of people walking up the rising road that led to the foot of the slope.

Mama Yeh stared; and the harder she looked the more confused her vision became. Somehow she suddenly decided—there was no son of her's in that group; he was someone else. The people kept coming closer. She still couldn't see clearly. Then she was aware of several men crowding toward her. Her body swayed a little.

Jade rushed over and supported her mother. "Ma," she said in a high voice, "this is brother! Lasheng!"

Dimly, the old lady could see a tall man, kowtowing on the ground before her in the old manner. "Mother!" he cried stridently. She wanted to extend her hand to raise him, but she couldn't move. Then, she was swept into the house by the swarm of people.

Jade lit the lamp and invited everyone to be seated. Mama Yeh gradually became clearer. In the silence that followed, she at last fully realized what was happening. Suddenly the old lady rose to her feet, picked up the lamp and walked over to beside the newcomer. She pressed his head forward and looked at the base of his neck. There, on the right side, was a little black birthmark, no bigger than a grain of millet.

"My son!... You really are my Lasheng!"

A flood of hot tears fell on Lasheng's neck. He stood up and put his arm around the weeping old lady.

"Ma, it's true, it's really me!"

Mama Yeh had so much to say, she didn't know where to start. "I hate to think of it," she sobbed. "The wrongs Pockmark Jang did us

reached higher than the sky and deeper than the sea. . . . He should be slowly hacked into little pieces! . . . You've been away from me for twenty years, the family was scattered. . . . If Chairman Mao hadn't come, I'd probably never have seen you again. . . . Your father, your big brother. . . . your sister Jade. . . . Jade is such a darling; for twenty years she suffered beside me. . . ."

"Ma, Pockmark Jang has been tried, and got what he deserved! I and the others exposed him without mercy! We got our revenge!" Lasheng paused. "Ever since that time I met Papa in the grove, I knew my name was Yeh, not Jang. Not long afterwards, I ran away. I began to work as a farmhand."

Briefly, he related to his mother the high points of his life during the past twenty years. As Mama Yeh listened, it was as if her heart was slowly being immersed in warm lovely water. Her eyes became brighter, and she raised her head and looked about the room. Only then did she realize that these were the men who brought her son—Dz-ping, the mayor, and Liu, the school principal. She could hear the compound gate squeaking. Big and little friends and neighbors were gathering in an ever growing crowd that overflowed the courtyard.

"Sit down, everyone sit down!" Mama Yeh called out. "Jade, go to borrow some more stools!"

But Jade was not in the room. She had long since gone into the kitchen, and was cooking the food Dz-ping and her brother had brought.

The Yeh home was jammed with people, all wanting to be the first to congratulate Mama Yeh and her son. Lasheng was plied with questions about the new life of the peasants in Szechuan; he was asked all about this year's harvest. Old timers, reminiscing about Papa Yeh, had nothing but praise for their old friend. Prompted by their elders, little children pushed forward to greet Lasheng as "Uncle Yeh" and "Big Brother Yeh". . . . Autumn evenings are cool on the mountainside, but in the joyous hubbub the room was hot and stifling. The mayor rose to his feet and shouted:

"Everybody go home, go home! Let Brother Yeh get a little rest. He and his mother have a lot to talk about. . . . Brother Yeh is going to stay with us a while! . . ."

Only after some of the understanding older folks departed, did the mass of well-wishers slowly and very reluctantly begin to leave. Several invited Lasheng to come and visit them the next day; some arranged to show him the village's bumper corn crop; others wanted to take him to see the new irrigation canal. . . . Responding left and right, half as a host and half as a guest, Lasheng saw them to the gate of the starlit courtyard. The mayor and his group wanted to leave too, but Lasheng and Mama Yeh wouldn't hear of it. They just couldn't go until after dinner!

Wine and food were served first. All sat down around a cleanly scrubbed square wooden table. Mama Yeh at last had a chance to take a good look at her son. He had bushy brows over rather deep-set sparkling eyes and a wide face. When he laughed, his upper lip curled out. . . . He looked a little like his father, but he was tall, and in this resembled his elder brother. . . . Were it not for the others talking beside her, the old lady would soon have been lost in reverie.

Jade urged everyone to drink a round of wine. She raised a full cup and said to Lasheng, "Brother, let's drink together. I've got something to say to you."

"Good!" Lasheng stood up and drained his cup in fine style. Jade drank down her own wine, saluted all at the table, then turned to Lasheng.

"Brother, I'm always in a hurry! You've come today, and Mama has no more worries. But I have to ask you—do you want to take Mama back with you, or will you move over here to Kweichow?"

The old lady's heart suddenly skipped a beat. Anxiously, she scanned her son's face.

Lasheng nodded thoughtfully and bid his sister be seated. After a moment, he slowly began to speak.

"I talked to Dz-ping about that question on the road. I'm a man who's just begun a new life too. Except for the land I got from land reform, I don't own a thing. I can move in a minute. I only got married this year, after spring planting. My wife also comes from these Kweichow mountains; her old home is in Pushantai. When she was thirteen she was sold as a slave girl to a bastard of an opium merchant. She still often thinks of coming back to Kweichow. . . . My idea is to let Ma decide." He looked at his mother. "I'll take Ma to Szechuan if she wants to go. But if she doesn't, it may be a little trouble, but I can move over here. Of course I have to talk it over with my organization, with my leaders. I'm the chief of our village militia, and I'm a member of the Youth League! . . ."

The mayor raised his head. He practically jumped with delight.

"Very good! Excellent! We welcome you! A Youth Leaguer, a chief of militia! We're just reorganizing our militia unit here—Dz-ping knows about it. . . . He and your sister are also in the Youth League! . . ."

Jade laughed. "I'm only a candidate member! Our Youth League branch secretary and the chairman of our peasants' union went to a meeting in the city together. They'll be sure to welcome you too!"

"But what about his land?" asked Liu, the school principal.

Dz-ping shook his head. "That won't be any problem. We can give him a plot from our public land in exchange. It'll be as easy as moving this cup."

At this, the mayor also moved his own cup. He raised it for a hearty swallow, then smacked his lips and said to Lasheng with a laugh:

"But you must know, our mountain land doesn't have much water, Comrade Yeh. Our land isn't as good as what you've got in Szechuan, with all those streams and rivers!"

"That's not so!" Lasheng rejoined seriously. "In the land where Chairman Mao leads, 'gold will come from barren soil.' The story that Kweichow is poor is a lie the reactionaries spread. The peasants here were poor because, just like everywhere else, those bastards squeezed them dry! . . ."

This stimulated a lively general discussion. The school principal quoted from textbooks to prove that the mountainous region of Kweichow had a splendid future. Dz-ping and the mayor animatedly told Lasheng all about the village's small-scale irrigation project, how they were improving the quality of the soil and the construction of the paddy fields, the afforestation scheme. . . . Only Jade remained silent, watching her mother's expression. The old lady's wrinkled face shone with joy; but a painful shadow kept fleeting across.

Jade leaned over to her mother's ear and whispered, "Ma, what do you think? They seem to have got it all settled."

Mama Yeh smiled with satisfaction. "That's good, isn't it? Ma has been here with you so many years—she can't leave you. Besides, all our old neighbors have gotten a fresh start in life. If I can spend a few more good years with our friends of the old hard days, I'll sleep in the ground happy! . . . Only one thing is bothering me a little. I'd like to go see your father's grave in Szechuan. . . . But now that I think of it, he died a long time ago, and I'm so old now; he won't mind if I don't come! . . ."

As Mama Yeh's voice rose, the conversation of the others became quieter, then stopped. She talked on and on until, abruptly, she addressed Principal Liu.

"Principal, I want to pick a very, very good day. Which one do you think is best?"

Liu laughed. "You see. Mama Yeh is still superstitious!"

The old lady lifted her head a little higher, and the smile left her face.

"This isn't superstition! I want to choose a very happy day so that I can stand before Chairman Mao's picture with my children and hold a fine family reunion ceremony! I want to tell Chairman Mao how he brought a new life to an old woman in these ancient mountains! . . . I'm getting on in years, and can't do much to repay Chairman Mao. I just want to tell my son and daughter in his presence—and I want everybody to hear it too—in all things, big and small, we have to listen to Chairman Mao. We must do everything he tells us! Anybody who holds back is forgetting what we've been saved from! . . ."

No one drank and everyone stopped eating while the old lady talked. All listened quietly; her words swept upon them in warm radiant waves.

Principal Liu took out a small notebook and wrote quickly with a hand that trembled a bit.

Jade pulled the book from him. "Principal, which day is best after all?"

"Mm," Liu tilted his head to one side and considered. "I think there's one day that's the most auspicious—October First, the day the People's Republic of China was founded! This year it'll be three years.... In just another month from now!"

There were cheers of approval around the table, and Liu went on to explain to Mama Yeh the significance of this great day. Moreover, he checked the date for her on the old lunar calendar, which most of the peasants were more accustomed to using.

Lasheng calculated, then nodded and said, "That's good. I can't get back here till a day or two before then anyhow. I've got to finish the autumn harvest, to say nothing of other odds and ends. And I won't feel right unless I deliver my tax in grain personally!"

Mama Yeh filled the wine cups all around and told Jade to serve the food. But the girl had something else on her mind.

"Dz-ping, why don't we change our date to the national holiday too? What do you say?"

Dz-ping had already taken up his chopsticks. Now he placed them back on the table. "Right! Exactly what I was thinking, only you've said it first!"

Fondly, Mama Yeh gazed at the two youngsters. "Fine. That will make it a full perfect day for the whole family!" She laughed heartily for the first time in many years, and the wrinkles seemed to be erased from her face.

In the deep hours of the night, the breeze is cool on the mountain slopes. The sound of it rustling through the trees and the corn, the cries of the wild animals on their nocturnal prowls, the shouts of the peasants keeping nightly vigil to protect the ripened crops from marauding beasts—as usual carried clearly through the stillness to the little thatch-covered house. Formerly, these noises annoyed the old lady and kept her awake. This night, she didn't even hear them, but she didn't sleep either. For her son was curled up on the wooden chest beside her bed, and mother and son talked on without end.

So that they could speak uninterrupted, Jade, lying at the foot of Mama Yeh's bed, pretended to be asleep. But her mind was like a bubbling spring, evoking one picture after another as her mother and brother discussed the events of their lives during the past twenty years. She thought of that landlord's family where she first saw the light of day; how she was unwanted as soon as she was born because she was a little girl. And that landlord who took a peasant's son in exchange and then cruelly mistreated the boy—he was ten times worse than Wild

Dog Liu! Angry blood rushed to her head and her eyes swelled in their sockets; she felt as if she was going to burst! . . . Then her mind drifted to Mama and Papa Yeh, how they cared for her when they were reduced to begging, when they had to work as servants, during the back-breaking period of opening the plot of wasteland; even when there was only half a bowl of thin gruel in the pot, they gave it to her. Jade's eyes filled with tears. Then came liberation, a new life; the dark clouds rolled away! From all the new changes in this tiny village, she was able to see the wonderful future. . . . Dz-ping. . . . The coming happy day, the National Day. . . . Two families with a new lease on life, Youth Leaguers, model workers, the tremendous Patriotic Production Drive. . . . All these stretched before her in a brilliant panorama. Her whole body felt soft and delicious, her eyelids grew heavy; she was overcome with drowsiness. Then she heard her mother's voice.

"Lasheng, don't forget—October First is nearly autumn festival time. When you come back, be sure to bring something nice for your sister. She's such a dear, such a good girl!"

And in the dark, Lasheng responded, "I think sister is fine. She's progressive and intelligent too! I thought it all over. I'm going to buy her a book—*Politics for the Peasant!* It's full of the things Chairman Mao and the Communist Party are teaching us peasants! . . ."

Jade rolled over, and with a little smile, sank into sweet and happy slumber.

