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EDITOR: Mao Tun
ASSISTANT EDITOR: Yeh Chun-chien

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The Blacksmith and His Daughter

Other township heads had got iron farm tools — spades, hoes, sickles and even modern ploughs — from the district government office, but Chhimed, head of our township, returned empty-handed. People felt put out. And could one blame them? Chhimed's father, too, grumbled about his daughter's handling of this matter.

Since the autumn harvest, people had been talking about nothing but farm tools. Their hearts were set on getting those tools and at long last they had arrived from the distant factories. When the district head Zodpa sent word to the townships saying that they could send to the district office for the tools, the news spread on wings to every mutual-aid team and household.

That night, Chhimed was too excited to sleep. The township planned to plant more grain and other crops next spring and to cultivate them better, and for this the new farm tools were essential.

Liu Keh, born in 1928, comes from Anhwei Province. His works include *Jangchan*, a collection of short stories, and *Gun-fire in* 1904, a play. He is now doing cultural work in Tibet.

They were a guarantee of success. Her father was so pleased with the news that he wanted to drink a toast to celebrate. Indeed, who more than he should know the worth of those tools of iron?

Yes, there was good reason for such general eagerness to get those iron tools. With the democratic reforms,* the land returned to the tillers. Poor serfs, landless for generations, suddenly owned land. Who would not want to plant and grow more? The few worn farm tools left over from the old times were clearly far from sufficient. Centuries of dark and backward feudal serfdom had left no lack of handcuffs and shackles, but they had not built a single farm tool workshop in Tibet. The serf-owners were not interested in farm tools. Why should they be? Did they care if the serfs were overworked? And the bitterly oppressed serfs and slaves were not interested either. Why should they be? Why should they produce more grain for the accursed lords? More or less made not the slightest difference to their fate for they lived at the bottom of the abyss.

All that, however, was now like sludge in the ditch, cleaned away by the storm of the democratic reforms. Now the people had their own land, the first thing they wanted was highly productive iron farm implements. Every mutual-aid team was waiting eagerly for those iron tools. They were worth more than gold to them.

But, alas, our township head Chhimed....

A girl in her early twenties, Chhimed was greatly admired for the way she had led the people in carrying out the democratic reforms and in organizing the mutual-aid teams. Why then had she shown such lack of judgement this time? She had acted in a way that left everyone aggrieved. She had let another take away the tools allotted to the township.

It was that "Old Goat" of Tsurpa township — in other words, Pasang, — Chhimed's father had given him that nickname and it suited him down to the ground. The two old men had been friends for scores of years. Now old bearded Pasang had taken those farm tools to Tsurpa where no *chingko* barley grew, only weeds. What did he

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*Democratic reforms in Tibet in 1959 ended serfdom and slavery and gave land to the farmers and livestock to the herdsmen.

want ploughs for? Was he going to plough up the sheep runs? Devil take him! True, Chhimed had explained. She said that Uncle Pasang had made a successful experiment. In the past they had also planted *chingko* in Tsurpa, but the frosts had ruined the crop so many times that they had given up. Then last season they had tried again on a small plot of land and had succeeded in reaping several hundred catties of *chingko*. That had decided them to try a bigger area next year. It was indeed extraordinary that Tsurpa was growing *chingko* too. It was a miracle, and all honour to them. If it were true, they should offer a *hata* of the finest silk to Pasang as a token of respect and admiration, but the "Old Goat" should not have asked for all the iron tools from Chhimed. The young girl was soft; how could she stand up to his talk? She had let Tsurpa have all the tools allotted to her own township.

Without sufficient iron tools, how were they going to expand production next year? There was so much wasteland to be reclaimed, so many ditches to be dug!

Chhimed knew people would talk and be displeased. When she rode to the district office for the farm tools she didn't know that Uncle Pasang, the old head of Tsurpa township, would butt in. She was no less excited than the others when she set off. Her only worry was that perhaps she would be late or had brought along too few horses. After the tools were distributed and others had gone back to their respective townships, Chhimed stayed to talk things over with Zodpa, the district head. They were discussing some questions concerning the mutual-aid teams, when in came Pasang.

Grinning, Pasang told the district head about Tsurpa's experiment and, screwing up his eyes, asked tentatively if there were any tools left. Since Tsurpa was rated as pastureland naturally no tools were intended for it, and it didn't matter so much if he could get none. Zodpa, however, felt very badly about it. There were not many iron farm tools in the first place. Secondly, they were already distributed. Yet such a new event as grain growing in Tsurpa should definitely be given every support. At that moment Chhimed said, arching her eyebrows:

"Take ours, Uncle Pasang."

"You..." the district head exclaimed in surprise.

"Tsurpa can grow *chingko*! And a few tools less won't matter to us," the girl exclaimed excitedly.

"Wait a bit!" Zodpa thought a while, his fingers drumming on the table. Then he asked, "What's in your mind?"

"Remember, Zodpa, my father is a blacksmith!"

"That was before the democratic reforms. Because of you he hated to be a blacksmith. Even now he still shuns the word 'iron.'" Zodpa looked at Chhimed significantly and the girl blushed. But as Pasang was there, anxious to get the tools, she simply said:

"Men will change; must change. Without the Communist Party, would I, a blacksmith's daughter, know anything? I would be roaming about and finally die on the road.... Uncle Pasang, take the tools." She raised her hand in the air resolutely to stop further discus-

sion and started to unpack the load of precious tools from the horses.

Pasang was simply delighted.

So, Chhimed had gone with three horses and returned with nothing else but three horses. People blamed their township head, but she smiled composedly and said, "Don't you worry; our farm work next year will not be affected. We'll have tools...." Then she dashed home and shouted, "*Ahpa*!"

Sodnam, her *ahpa*, was a blacksmith known far and near in the past.

Every year when the *chingko* was about to ripen, the people gathered for a festival and danced around the field to celebrate the harvest. Before the festival started a small faded tent was seen to be set up by the back wall of some house. When the bellows were set working, people knew that Sodnam, the blacksmith, had come. Then they would bring their broken spades, hoes and sickles to the blacksmith to be repaired. Or they would buy new ones from him. Sodnam was very dexterous, the tools he made were handy and durable. And he never haggled but asked a fair price. People liked to deal with him. But he was a quiet man, hardly uttering more than one or two sentences a day. Occasionally he would look up and smile, only in a forced and mirthless way.

It was said that he had never known either of his own parents, and had never had a house or even a room to live in.

Every year he came before the festival started and went away after it was over. Quietly he came and quietly he left. People did not know where he came from nor did they care where he went to. Why should they? Blacksmiths in the old society ranked the lowest; even their "bones were black." They were forbidden to cross the threshold of the serf-owner's house. A bowl used by a blacksmith was shunned as something contaminating.

One year, Sodnam came again with his small faded tent and blacksmith's tools. But this time a timid, beautiful woman walked behind him. He introduced her as his wife and, before everybody, he sang a melodious song and did a dance. So the blacksmith was also a singer and dancer.

Afterwards the blacksmith became father of one, two, three... finally, eight children. The children were as thin as straws; they looked as if they would be blown off by the wind. Hunger, sickness and cold unceasingly assaulted this small tent. But no lord ever took pity on the children. No lord ever said to Sodnam, "Come in, shelter the children from the wind." No, of course not. They were the lowest of the low; why, even their bones were black!

One winter, it was unusually cold. Cold and hunger like demons took the lives of the eight children at one stroke. They all died on the road as they wandered with their parents. A sudden snow-storm whirled up; the ground was covered with pure white; and they were swallowed up and disappeared as if they had never existed. They had passed like flitting shadows. All of a sudden, Sodnam aged terribly.

The next spring an infant's wailing was heard in the small faded tent again. Chhimed was born. The father held up the daughter in his trembling hands. He looked at her for a long time, afraid she would vanish like a dream. When he turned to look at his wife, she was dead. She had died silently, drained of all energy.

Of all worldly possessions, the blacksmith had nothing except the small tent, the small bellows and his few tools. The centre of his life was his infant daughter. He did all he could to protect her from hunger and cold. Without her, he would have had nothing to live for.

Chhimed led a wandering life with her father.

On their forlorn wanderings she had started to walk and talk. She grew up. She was able to help her father with the bellows and the tongs. The first time she took up the hammer she blushed a young girl's blush. Her father looked at her for a long time. Why, his daughter was already a slender young girl, beautiful, clever and charming.

It should have pleased the father. Yet Sodnam could not stop the shiver that passed through his limbs. The better his daughter, the heavier his heart. Life had treated him cruelly enough, now he realized the bitterness of the rule that a blacksmith's daughter could not marry like others.

All this he kept to himself.

One evening in late autumn, the sky was dark and cloudy and the leaves were falling from the trees. Only an occasional jingling of the bells on donkeys broke the silence on the road. Father and daughter came to a river. Sodnam made his daughter sit beside him on the bridge for a long time. He did not speak, his care-worn face looked ashy and his eyes dull.

"What's the matter, *ahpa*?" asked Chhimed softly.

His voice broke rasping from his throat:

"Heavens, why are you a blacksmith's daughter?"

Chhimed bent her head, understanding what her father meant.

Suddenly Sodnam jumped up and like a madman threw his bundle of tools — hammer, tongs, pincers — into the river and the small bellows after them. Chhimed, frightened, rushed to stop him. But it was too late. The deep blue river had swallowed everything up, it flowed on indifferently carrying the bellows, bobbing with it.

"You god who guard the law, come and strike me with your whip," the father cried in anger, tearing his shirt to bare his breast. "Strike, strike!"

Big tears ran down Chhimed's cheeks.

"What makes you do such a thing, *ahpa*? For my sake...."

"Child, I can no longer let you be a blacksmith's daughter. I'll take you far, far away. Nobody will ever know...."

But Pasang found out in time and, riding on a horse, caught them up. "Old friend," he said, catching hold of Sodnam. "Where could you go to? In this world is there a way out for you? A single blade of grass of the lord can crush you. Come, don't let Chhimed die on the road...." Then he told him that the People's Liberation Army had reached Lhasa. Their days of suffering would soon end.

So Sodnam was stopped from trying to take Chhimed "far, far away." The next day, Pasang helped him recover his tools and he started working as a blacksmith again.

Though still a blacksmith, he was no longer so sad-looking. Light entered his heart with the liberation that, indeed, came soon.

Much water had flowed under the bridge since then.

Now after the democratic reforms, his daughter was head of the township. Old Sodnam got his share of land and cattle. His wandering life came to an end for good. These tremendous changes hardly left one time to think things over. However, one thing he had kept fixedly in mind: he secretly hid away his tools. He would be a low blacksmith no more. That calling, he had firmly persuaded himself, must now be put behind him. It was not fitting for his daughter. For she was head of the township.

Even in conversation he always kept to his self-imposed taboo: never to mention the word "blacksmith," nor even the word "iron." Let people forget! Let the shameful past be buried for ever.

So Chhimed had given the farm tools to Pasang. Sodnam just muttered "Old Goat!" in a disapproving tone and let the matter go. It had never entered his head that he should take up the hammer again. That night, Chhimed cooked the leg of mutton left over from the festival. She bought some wine and prepared a dish of scrambled eggs. Then she invited her father to enjoy them.

"What are we celebrating, Chhimed?" he asked smiling, rubbing his hands.

His daughter too smiled and sat down.

Seeing her father looked so pleased as he ate and drank, Chhimed commenced:

"*Ahpa*, we have given Pasang all our farm tools...."

"You gave them away. But that's all right. Your Uncle Pasang is a good chap. It was a good act to give him the tools."

"True. It was right. But our people are short of farm tools now."

"We ourselves don't lack tools anyway."

"We mustn't think only of ourselves."

"Well, we have the mutual-aid teams. Let us share tools with one another as we have done before."

"These still aren't enough to go round."

"Whose fault is that? It's Zodpa who decided the matter. Just say that it was the district head's idea. Nobody can blame you."

"But it was my idea too. *Ahpa*, it is the winter slack season. Could you make some tools to tide us over?" Chhimed tried her best to speak naturally.

"What? Make some? Me?" Her father's eyes bulged.

"A blacksmith is no longer looked down upon, *ahpa*. That was only in the old society. Now...."

Sodnam stood up abruptly and went to the inner room. He walked unsteadily, holding himself up with his hand on the wall. Chhimed followed him. She sat down by her father and began to tell him again about the new ways of their new life. In spite of all she said, her father kept shaking his head. He was seized by bitter memories of the past. "Don't ask your *ahpa* to do anything humiliating," he said, irritated at last. "My days are not so many, not so many...."

"But, you know, the Communist Party had never said a false word to us, *ahpa*. And the Party says we can farm better with iron tools."

This, as expected, moved Sodnam. He lowered his head in silence.

For ten days and more Chhimed kept trying to persuade her father to change his mind and each time she raised this point. Meanwhile, people from various villages of the township kept dropping in to ask: "What shall we do when farm work starts again next year?"

Eventually, early one morning, Sodnam said in a low voice to his daughter, "Where can we get the iron, Chhimed?"

"Oh, *ahpa*!" Chhimed cried, delighted, and dashed out.

After Chhimed had gone, Sodnam dug up his blacksmith's tools. The rusty things looked strange and yet familiar. He took them up, his eyes wet.

In the search for iron, Chhimed went east and west, neglectful of sleep and food. She went from village to village and from one township to another. Zodpa, the district head, suggested that the handcuffs and shackles confiscated during the democratic reforms would provide enough material to make a few hundred farm tools. Besides, the county was soon to hold a big fair. They might be able to buy some more metal there.

"Splendid!" cried Chhimed happily.

Taking a letter of introduction from the district, Chhimed and several others went around collecting handcuffs and shackles everywhere.

Who could guess that Sodnam would suddenly change his mind again!

It happened at the fair.

The fair was held at the county town for five days. Chhimed and her *ahpa* rode there in happy expectation one morning. They set off early and by midday they arrived at the fair.

Tents were put up on the grassland. People were talking gaily. Chhimed jumped down from her horse and gave the reins to her father. "Have a rest and eat some *tsamba*, *ahpa*," she said. "Don't wait for me. I'll take you to see the iron when I find some." She made for the county council office.

Sodnam tethered the horses, then made a round of the bazaar. He was dazzled by the bewildering array of goods. All those things which had been available only to rich lords in the past were now arrayed invitingly before his eyes. He bought a gay apron and a pair of shoes for his daughter. Then he bought a few bricks of tea and even a water bottle. The bottle would be useful to his daughter when she rode to attend to public affairs.

Here he met Pasang.

"Old friend, I knew you would do it, I knew...." Pasang said laughing.

"Would do it" meant a lot. But mainly it meant blacksmith's work again. "All your doing, you Old Goat," Sodnam said, a bit ruffled.

"But for you, Old Goat would not have asked for farm tools from others so freely. Have you got the iron you want?"

"I don't know yet."

"If you can't get iron I will return the tools to Chhimed. But if you get the iron, well, no more cursing, please."

They chatted and laughed for a while, then the two old friends parted.

After tying his purchases to the saddles, Sodnam went to sit by a group of people, taking the bag of *tsamba* with him. A small pot resting on three stones was steaming above a fire. People were eating *tsamba* and drinking buttered tea around the curling smoke, chatting and laughing loudly. He nodded to those he knew and took out a wooden bowl from his pocket. Somebody poured tea for him and handed him a snuff-box. Such respect and friendliness he had never met before. Well, he owed these to the new life and to his daughter who was head of the township.

As he ate his *tsamba* he joined in the talk. At first they chatted about the weather, the land, the bumper harvest of the past year and their life after liberation. It was gay talk. Quite unconsciously they came to speak about Chhimed, as a township head. But when they began to speak of her as a girl of twenty-two, Sodnam noticed that they suddenly fell silent.

What an awkward silence!

Someone who did not know him said with a sigh, "... a blacksmith's daughter!"

Though the remark was uttered in a low voice, it was like a dagger thrust at Sodnam's heart. He felt the hurt as if he had been loudly cursed. Trembling, he hugged his legs as if he were cold. The sudden movement spilt the tea in his wooden bowl.

Poor *ahpa*, the pain buried deep in his heart for years was suddenly alive again. His daughter was already twenty-two. Such a fine girl, yet she could not marry normally. No! An invisible chain

hung around her neck. A blacksmith's daughter! The lowest of of the low, with black bones. Of course, he did not know that his daughter had already arranged for her own marriage!

He suddenly felt that everything was clear. It was true that the democratic reforms had done away with the old, dark system, but how could they end the shame of black bones? In the stifling silence Sodnam slipped away timidly.

Just then Chhimed came running towards him. "*Ahpa*, I've got it," she called out, still a good distance off. As she came near she saw how strange her father looked.

"What's the matter, *ahpa*, are you ill?"

"No."

"Then what's wrong?"

"Let's go home, child, go home...." His voice was hardly audible. He untethered the horses with difficulty.

"I've arranged to buy the iron, *ahpa*."

"Don't buy it, don't ..." her father murmured, climbing into the saddle in a daze.

Of course his daughter did not listen to him and bought the iron. But on their way home there was nothing left of the joyful mood in which they had come to the fair. Time and again Chhimed spoke to her father but he said nothing, his head sunk on his breast. Chhimed, usually very patient, became impatient.

As soon as they reached home, Chhimed built the fire and got the bellows working. The faggots crackled amid the smoke. She heard her father cough and say gruffly, "Let's go, Chhimed, far, far away. Nobody will know...."

"Where to?" Chhimed turned away her head, irritated. "What is the matter?"

"We can't stay here any longer."

"Why? Are there wolves here?"

"I can't let you go on like this," he said painfully. "You're already twenty-two...."

"Ah, that again.... Don't worry about me, think of others. Are you going to make the tools or not?"

"No! Must you remind everyone again that you are a blacksmith's daughter?"

"*Ahpa*!"

"I won't," he cried angrily all of a sudden.

"A devil must possess you!" Chhimed bit her trembling lips, her face pale with exasperation. People were waiting for farm tools; she had got the iron and everything was ready. But he had changed his mind. How could she help feeling exasperated?

"Better go, Chhimed," her father said more mildly. "Since we have the Communist Party now, we shan't starve to death on the road. We can make a living anywhere."

"You are dreaming, *ahpa*. How many times must I remind you?" she said, adding more faggots to the fire. "That was in the old society, the old society."

"No, child, the blacksmith is the lowest of the low, his bones are black."

"Whether he is low or not we'll discuss later. But I've told Zodpa about making the farm tools, and all the people too. You must not shame your daughter, *ahpa*."

"It is just because I don't want to shame my daughter that I won't be a blacksmith again. I would not make those tools for the world, even if you threatened to cut my hand off. I just can't do it. Can't."

"*Ahpa*!" Chhimed sprang up, angry.

"Definitely not."

"You must!" shouted the daughter roughly.

"So you give orders, now you are the township head!" The old father trembled all over, deeply hurt. "All right, I'll go, I'll go."

He turned, rolled up a rug, took a bag of *tsamba* and staggered out of the door. Chhimed stood dazed by a surge of emotion. Then torn by remorse and resentment she dashed out after him, crying, "*Ahpa*...."

Ahpa did not turn his head but staggered on in the dusk, disappearing into the dark of the valley. The wind ruffled Chhimed's apron.

Tears flowed down her cheeks. She wiped them off. "Well, I'll let you go. Let you think it over calmly. Your daughter will bring you back a few days later," she told herself.

Through all those years, ever since Chhimed was born, all those years of bitter suffering that father and daughter had been through together, they had never uttered a single harsh word to each other. Now people were living happily after the democratic reforms, but for the first time they had quarrelled, quarrelled so fiercely. In the twenty-two years since Chhimed was born, this was the first time her father had left her.

The next morning Chhimed went to the district head.

After listening to her attentively, Zodpa said solemnly, "You're to blame, Chhimed."

"What? I'm to blame?" Young Chhimed held her head high, not convinced.

"Well, I'm also to blame for not having given it due consideration. Who knows how powerful are the dark thoughts left by the old system!"

"I was thinking of the farm tools."

"The farm tools? But it's more than that. You know better than I how *ahpa* has suffered in the past. Go quickly to fetch him back."

"He can't have got far, I think. I'll go and fetch him back. But what about the farm tools?"

"Wait until we get him back."

Chhimed immediately set off to look for her father. She did not find him on the first day. The second and the third day, she still could not find him. She had looked over the whole township, but there was no sign of him anywhere. Chhimed was in a panic, realizing that she had done something very wrong. How could she ever have behaved like that to her *ahpa*!

Chhimed went to Zodpa to seek advice again. Uncle Pasang was there too. Zodpa, at a loss, looked to Pasang for help. Pasang with his rich experience gazed out of the window at the beautiful azure sky. Stroking his chin he said thoughtfully, "In the past there was no way out for you. Now there is a way but you have to know

how to take it. You've sunk in the mire left by the old society. This headstrong old man . . . I understand him. Set your heart at ease, Zodpa, we'll find him."

"Find him, quick, Uncle Pasang, help me to find him," Chhimed implored, her face pale with anxiety.

"I'll go with you, Uncle Pasang," Zodpa said. And they rode off immediately on horseback.

Zodpa was worried. Sodnam was an old man and in such a state of mind. Suppose he fell on the road? What's more, it would soon be spring. Once the thaw started, bright drops of water would seep into the rich black earth to wake it up. Then the glittering plough must bite deep into the earth, upturning the black soil. Zodpa was filled with anxiety. But the "Old Goat" Pasang was sullenly gazing ahead, gazing at the turn of the road that vanished into the depth of the grassland.

"Can we find him?" asked Zodpa. "I'm to blame for this."

"True, Zodpa," Pasang said meaningly. "I know what's been worrying Sodnam. You and Chhimed had better get married soon. Don't put it off any longer. I knew it all along. I'm happy from the bottom of my heart. You will be taking us with you along the road of happiness. Don't put it off. Let old man Sodnam live in happiness!"

They found Sodnam at last just before dark. He was striding onward on the grassland, his eyes staring ahead. The cold wind blew hard into his bearded face. Pasang hurried on to overtake him. Then he jumped down and blocked Sodnam's way. "You are making trouble for me, Sodnam," Pasang said, his voice hoarse with emotion. Sodnam's lips trembled for some time before he uttered the words: "Let me go, Brother Pasang. I must go far away for the sake of my daughter. Let people forget that she is a blacksmith's daughter. For her happiness."

Pasang laughed aloud. "Don't you worry about that, Sodnam. I've brought the man to you, have a look at him." He pointed at the man who was coming behind him. Sodnam saw that it was the district head. He was puzzled. He dared not believe it at first.

Pasang softly touched his arm and said, "No more worrying now, eh? He's the man who is the favourite of the whole district. What a good choice your daughter has made!"

The district head dashed forward and rolling off the horse took Sodnam by the arm, "Come back, *ahpa*. Everybody is waiting for you. The earth too is waiting for you."

Sodnam's tears flowed like a spring. He grasped Zodpa's hand. His lips moved but no word would come out. His body trembled with agitation. Pasang too shed tears of joy. Now Sodnam no longer resisted and was helped by four strong arms up into the saddle.

As soon as they reached home, Sodnam left his guests but pulled his daughter to him and demanded in feigned anger, "Why didn't you let your *ahpa* know, Chhimed?" Chhimed, blushing like a red flower, whispered to her father, "I was so busy, *ahpa*."

The next day, with Chhimed working at the bellows, old Sodnam's blacksmith's forge was blazing again.

Translated by Chang Su
Illustrated by Chang Li

The River Is Being Tamed (coloured woodcut) by Shen Jou-chien ▶

See the article on p. 117 about the artist and this woodcut.

A Spring with Many Flowers

The meeting had been called to discuss how to improve the quality of the mill's output and eliminate second-grade products, but unexpectedly Hsin Hsia-ying was silent. Since she was a model worker known for her high output and quality, her strange silence puzzled her fellow workers. Sitting at the front of the room and dressed in a blue tunic jacket and a white skirt, she looked like any other bobbed-haired, round-faced worker in her middle twenties. Only the firm set of her mouth indicated a streak of determination.

Since the mill installed electric looms three months ago she had not turned out a single inch of second-grade cloth. So everyone was eagerly waiting to hear how she worked the new looms. They also wanted to know whom she was going to challenge in the emulation campaign and on what conditions. Almost all the skilled workers had taken the floor, yet she still sat there quietly. What was she thinking of?

Li Teh-fu, born in 1932, comes from Hunan Province. He writes in his spare time and has published a collection of short stories, *A Typical Case*.

It was only near the end of the meeting that she walked composedly to the platform and described her working methods. As she said, they were nothing extraordinary. She stressed that the looms, though electrically powered, did not have a brain; so they still had to be looked after by human beings; one had to have confidence in oneself, work hard and conscientiously and master the new techniques if one wanted to produce high-quality cloth.... As she ended her speech she said excitedly, "Finally, in the campaign for better work, I want to challenge — Comrade Chu Pao-chin."

"Challenge... Chu... Pao-chin!" Her audience was surprised. Some, preparing to clap, put their hands down again.

"Goodness," others exclaimed softly. "That'll be a race between an aeroplane and an ox-cart."

These comments drifted to the ears of Chu Pao-chin who was sitting in a corner at the back. She flushed. She was a veteran of No. 3 workshop. When she came to the mill — a few years earlier than Hsin Hsia-ying and the others — the looms still had to be worked by foot. After a day's work at that time she felt as tired as if she had walked a hundred *li*. Even in winter her thin clothes were soaked with sweat. Chu Pao-chin, like the others in the mill, had longed to be liberated from the heavy labour. Now all their looms were electric, thanks to the state and the efforts of the workers. Tears had rolled down her cheeks the day the loom had started moving by itself at the flick of a switch and cloth had flowed out automatically. Her long-cherished wish had at last come true. But the following day, as she sat by the loom and started the machine she was dazed and dizzy, so nervous that try as she might she couldn't master the machine. Though she managed to handle it better later, the cloth she produced was always full of flaws. She so worried about this that she began to lose weight and doubt whether she would ever be able to master the machine properly. Was the new machine too difficult for her stupid hands? Soon the shop leadership sent Wang Hsing-chun, a skilled hand, to help her. They worked alternate shifts on the same looms. Wang, a mild but steady girl, never made any severe demands on the elder girl who made very little improvement. Wang usually turned out first-grade cloth on her shift, very seldom second-grade, while Pao-chin continued to produce second-rate stuff. Though Wang was one of the best weavers, their team was the most backward in the mill. And gradually Wang had given up hope in her.

Hsin Hsia-ying's challenge to Pao-chin had surprised Wang too. She was bewildered, for she herself had expected the challenge. Then Hsin's excited voice was heard again over the loudspeaker, "I request to be transferred to No. 3 workshop to team up with Chu Pao-chin."

The hall buzzed. Wasn't Hsin looking for trouble, asking to be teamed up with such a backward mate? The manager, who was chairing the meeting, leaned over for a short discussion with Ho Hsiu-ying, head of No. 3 workshop, then took up the microphone. The

hall quieted down. He announced: "The request of Hsin Hsia-ying is granted by the mill and No. 3 workshop!"

Thunderous applause broke out. Amid the handclaps there were cries of: "We call on Comrade Chu Pao-chin to accept the challenge!"

"Ah, she's gone...." somebody whispered.

Hsin Hsia-ying glanced at the manager and then hurried out of the hall.

"What made her do that? Why should she do that?" murmured Wang Hsing-chun to herself, gazing after Hsin.

II

Chu Pao-chin ran until she reached the little brook behind the mill, her heart thumping uneasily like the rippling water in the brook. At the meeting she had been thinking hard of how to catch up with the others. She had never dreamed that anyone would challenge her, still less Hsin Hsia-ying, the best worker in the mill. What did it mean? Why should she challenge someone who was obviously not her equal? Wasn't she making it hard for her?

"I must catch up," Pao-chin said softly to the brook. "But... how? Am I able to compete with her, am I?"

Dusk fell. Pao-chin returned to the mill as the moon rose above the hill in the east. Wang Hsing-chun, who shared her double-decker bed, handed her a note on a piece of red paper as soon as she stepped into their bedroom. It was written by the workers of the No. 3 workshop, including their head, Ho Hsiu-ying, encouraging her to accept the challenge.

"Where have you been?" Wang asked with deep concern after Pao-chin had finished reading the note. "Hsia-ying has been in several times looking for you."

"What for?" Pao-chin asked.

"She wants to talk over with you how you two are going to compete. She said she would come again."

"Ah!" Pao-chin answered non-committally. Should she consent when her challenger came again? Since she could not make up her mind yet, she walked out of the room.

The lights were out in the hostel, the workers all asleep. The quiet of the night reigned. Slowly Chu Pao-chin walked by the workshop. She saw that the lights over her looms were still on. Was anyone doing anything there? She walked up to the window and looked in. Ah, wasn't that Hsin Hsia-ying cleaning the Number 5 and 6 looms which were her own? A surge of warmth flooded her heart.

As she approached, Hsia-ying greeted her cordially, "Where have you been, Sister Pao-chin? I have been looking for you."

Pao-chin was at a loss for words. "Oh, you shouldn't clean the looms for me!" she protested.

"They are mine too now." Hsia-ying smiled. "Starting from tomorrow, you'll be on the first shift and I'll be on the second."

"But I haven't agreed to work on the same looms with you."

"Ha, you shouldn't back out before we start," Hsia-ying laughed.

"But I am going to lose, that's clear. You should have challenged Hsing-chun. She is your equal."

"Challenge Hsing-chun? Maybe later. But I want to compete with you this time. Besides, I want to learn from you."

"Learn from me?" In what way could she learn from me, thought Pao-chin. "Don't tease me. Do you want to learn to produce second-grade cloth?"

"No. I want to learn how you join broken warps."

"Join broken warps?"

"Right! You are one of our veterans, Sister Pao-chin. You are almost an expert and among the best in our mill at that. You can join more than thirty a minute while at most I can do thirty. I may be better in other ways such as avoiding flaws in the cloth I weave, but this is one thing I want to learn from you. Who else can I turn too?"

"That is an old trick...."

"But without it one cannot guarantee first-rate work."

Hsia-ying's warmth stirred her. "Sister Pao-chin, do you remember the year I came to the mill?"

"Of course! That was in 1958. You were only eighteen then; just a slip of a girl." A smile appeared on Pao-chin's face.

"We shared an old treadle loom then, remember? You were on the first shift and I was on the second."

"That's right," Pao-chin put in eagerly. "You cried because you couldn't weave fast and well enough."

"Yes. You encouraged me then," Hsia-ying continued. "You told me tears and worry were no use. That if I tried again and again with determination and confidence, I would surely succeed in the end. I took your advice and finally mastered the looms. Sister Pao-chin, these electric looms in our mill are like a new rifle to a veteran soldier. He may feel a bit nervous at the start when he doesn't know how to use it, but later he'll get the hang of it. Iron is made by human beings and looms are worked by men. Why are you scared of them?"

Pao-chin was touched. Why didn't she take a grip of herself and catch up and compete with Hsia-ying? She must not despair.

"I went to the examining room and looked at the cloth you wove," Hsia-ying went on. "Take the cloth you wove yesterday, for example. Some of it was very smooth and good. Yet some of it had many flaws and was not so good. You should study it yourself and find out the reasons."

"What, you have even made a study of my cloth?"

"Of course, I had to, if I mean to compete with you."

Hsia-ying was sincere after all. Pao-chin's heart warmed as she remembered the note her leader and comrades had given her. Wiping away the tears at the corners of her eyes, she said excitedly, "I accept your challenge, Hsia-ying."

"You really mean it?"

"Of course."

"We'll work on the same looms?"

"Yes, but you will have to help me."

"We will make progress together. You have helped me in the past. Now I want to do all I can for you. We'll co-operate ever after."

"It's settled then."

There and then beside the looms, glittering from Hsia-ying's polishing, they planned how they were going to run their competition. They pledged to carry on their emulation drive until neither of them produced an inch of second-grade cloth.

III

Pao-chin got up early next morning and worked conscientiously, joining up broken warps deftly and putting in the weft with great care. As the white cloth rolled out she seemed to see Hsia-ying and her fellow workers talking to her, encouraging her. That shift was especially smooth-going and happy for her. The looms gave no trouble and there were not many flaws in the cloth she made.

Wang Hsing-chun, who had been shifted to the neighbouring looms, was stirred to see Pao-chin so conscientious and in such high spirits. What had inspired her and made her so sure of herself? Why hadn't she been able to help her when they were team-mates?

Pao-chin left happily at the end of the shift. She had a wash up and a meal, then lay down on her bed. But she couldn't go to sleep though she was tired after a hard day's work. She couldn't close her eyes bright with excitement. Her room-mates crowded round, anxious to know how her emulation with Hsia-ying was going. A girl who had only recently come to the mill asked, "Do you find that model worker difficult to get along with?"

"Why, no. On the contrary, she's very kind."

"Kind? How?"

"You'll know when you work with her."

"Will you compete with her?"

"Yes. I will. I'll try my best."

"Did your first shot go off all right?"

"Who knows? Wait for the results on the notice board tomorrow." For months past Chu Pao-chin's name had invariably appeared on the list of third-rate workers. This time she might have made some improvement, she thought. She had used all her energy and all she knew in the way of technique that day.

Pao-chin was still elated. The others were showering advice and encouragement on her when Wang Hsing-chun came back from the weaving shop, looking very solemn and worried. "Hsia-ying wants you to go to the shop. You had better hurry," she said to Pao-chin.

"What has happened?"

Since there were so many others around, Hsing-chun whispered something to her. Pao-chin's face fell and she rushed out.

Hsing-chun was immediately surrounded by the girls clamouring to know what had gone wrong.

"You'll know soon enough," she answered simply.

When Pao-chin reached the workshop she discovered that Hsia-ying had made everything ready to start work. But besides that she had gone over the cloth Pao-chin had just woven and made a pencilled circle around every flaw. Even slight defects which would hardly rate as flaws didn't escape her. The length of white cloth was dotted with black circles which stood out as ugly as pockmarks. Pao-chin had been teamed up with many persons since she came to the mill but no one had ever been so hard on her.

"Ah, here you are," Hsia-ying looked up with a smile. "I asked Hsing-chun to look for you. You have done much better than yesterday."

"Better?"

"Why, yes! I looked in the examining room at the cloth you wove yesterday. You made forty flaws in the sixty metres you wove. But today there are only thirty. Ten flaws less. That's improvement, isn't it?"

"Is it really so!" Squatting down, Pao-chin counted the pencil marks. One, two... ten... twenty... thirty. So the cloth she had felt so satisfied with just now had turned out to be second-grade again. But Hsia-ying had even marked places where only a single thread had snapped. Those could hardly be called flaws. She felt as if Hsia-ying had drawn a big jeering turtle on her back and her anger rose, burning out all her good impressions of Hsia-ying. "You are not a checker, Hsia-ying!" she blurted out. "You have no right to examine my cloth."

"Why not, Sister Pao-chin, since we work on the same looms and you are my rival?"

"Even so, you have no right."

"Of course I have. Didn't we agree last night to help each other?"

"This is not helping each other."

"It is," Hsia-ying insisted. "I have examined your cloth and I want you to do the same to mine. We'll mark out the flaws with pencil to warn us where we have been careless or show where we lack skill, that way we will be able to improve...." Pointing at a flaw she said, "This was made by starting the machine too abruptly." Then she pointed at a smear. "This was caused by not washing your hands carefully." Next she pointed at a roughness which Pao-chin did not consider a flaw. "When you have not mastered the technique of weaving, flaws start like this. Sister Pao-chin, you must learn conscientiously and make stricter demands on yourself. Start from these small places."

"Start from here...." Staring at the younger girl Pao-chin cried indignantly, "You're much too exacting...."

"Too exacting? What's wrong with that? It will only make an expert out of you."

"Expert?" But Pao-chin wouldn't see the point. "You are just trying to find fault with me," she shouted. "I won't accept your challenge." She turned to go.

"Come back!"

The stern voice stopped Pao-chin in mid-stride. "Do you really need my help?" The severe reproof came from the determined lips of Hsia-ying who was flushing deeply. "Or do you want me to play up to you, only to mention your good points, skip your faults, and overlook the flaws you make? To cover up each other's shortcomings is not emulation and can only be harmful to you, to myself and to the mill."

"...can only be harmful to you, to myself and to the mill...." This scathing remark cooled Pao-chin down.

The bell for the second shift rang.

"Think it over, Sister Pao-chin. How can you want me to overlook your weak points, when we are going ahead together on the same

socialist path? I will definitely compete with you no matter what you say. We will compete till you turn out no more second-grade cloth and our two looms produce first-grade cloth on both shifts."

Hsia-ying walked up to the looms and started them. They began their rhythmic clatter. Pao-chin stood there, irresolute, pondering whether she should go on with their competition as they had agreed. Should she learn from Hsia-ying? Life is a struggle, not every forward step you take is going to be easy and a hard climb demands strong determination.

IV

That night Pao-chin turned and tossed on her bed. Troubled thoughts filled her head. At one moment she thought: Hsia-ying was right to make such high demands on her; since she had not mastered the new technique nor put the interest of the mill in first place, she shouldn't bear a grudge against Hsia-ying for criticizing her. At another moment she suspected Hsia-ying of purposely making a laughing stock of her, marking all her flaws and then weaving a whole length of cloth without a single flaw. Hsia-ying's pencil marks would stand out like pockmarks and catch the eye of the checker right away. Then she thought: the marks might be ugly but they showed a sense of responsibility to the mill and the state. They made it easier for her to find out how the flaws were caused and where her shortcomings lay so that she might improve. But then she began to miss Wang Hsing-chun who only criticized her lightly for doing second-rate work and who was so much easier to get along with, while this Hsin Hsia-ying was both harsh and hard. Their first day had proved a failure. How was she going to work with her in the future?

Tossing and turning with these thoughts she dozed off only at daybreak. When she woke up she was shocked to find that her shift was nearly over. How could she fail to go to work! She got up quickly and while dressing discovered a note on her desk. It was left by the weaving group of No. 3 workshop. "Comrade Pao-chin,

we know you didn't sleep well last night. Don't worry. Somebody will work your shift." Another note left by the person who had brought her breakfast said, "Please don't go out after you finish eating. Let's have a serious talk. — Hsia-ying." The two notes stirred her deeply. She hurried out. A crowd of workers stood around the notice board reading the results of the previous day's work. Somebody exclaimed, "Where's Hsin Hsia-ying's name?"

Well, she was usually the first on the list of first-rate workers, thought Chu Pao-chin. She glanced at the board. But the first name on the list was Wang Hsing-chun. Hsia-ying was neither second nor third. Where was her name?

Chu Pao-chin looked at the list of second-rate workers, but her own name was not there either. Not even among the third-rate workers where it usually was.

Then someone pointed at a foot-note printed below and read it aloud: Looms 5 and 6 of No. 3 workshop produced 125 metres of cloth with thirty flaws. Second-grade.

"What does this mean?" asked another worker curiously.

"Why, those are the looms I share with Hsia-ying!" thought Pao-chin. "And the thirty flaws were made by me. But I only wove sixty metres of cloth at most. How come that it says 125 metres? The checker must have made a mistake...." So thinking she ran to the examining room where the head of her workshop, Ho Hsiu-ying, was looking at a bolt of cloth with the checker Young Li. "You are just the one we want to see," cried Young Li at sight of her. "Who wove the cloth on the Number 5 and 6 looms yesterday?"

"I wove the first shift and Hsia-ying the second."

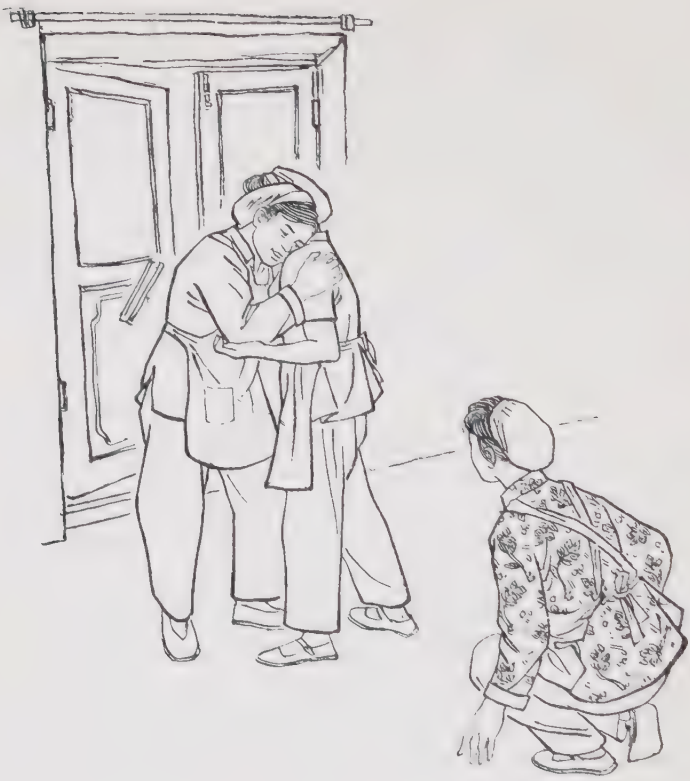
"Show me where you stopped."

"The line is usually drawn by the one on the second shift."

"Well, find it for me."

Pao-chin examined the cloth carefully. There were the thirty circles Hsia-ying had made but no line. Yet the next sixty-five metres must have been woven by her since there was not a single flaw. But why didn't she make the line? Had she forgotten?

"Have you asked Hsin Hsia-ying about it?" Pao-chin inquired.



"Yes," Ho Hsiu-ying cut in, her hand on Pao-chin's shoulder. "She asked us to record the quality and quantity of your work on the basis of the total produced on your two looms for the two shifts. We wonder whether you agree."

"Ah." Pao-chin was again deeply stirred.... Why did Hsia-ying challenge her and want to work with her on her looms? Why did she talk to her patiently, though sternly? Everything became clear to her, including why the leadership and her fellow workers felt such deep concern for her.... And she had suspected them of making things difficult for her on purpose! What unworthy thoughts those were!

"Where is Hsia-ying?" she asked eagerly.

"Don't you know? You didn't sleep well last night and didn't wake up in time. So she is working your shift for you."

"Oh! And just look at me!" Pao-chin flew to the workshop as the bell rang for the end of the shift and the mill hands poured out of the workshops. When Pao-chin reached the door her heart was beating so fast that she could not move a step further. Through the glass panel in the door she saw Hsia-ying cleaning the looms and Wang Hsing-chun squatting beside her talking.

"I didn't dare to make such demands on her and point out her shortcomings like you."

"Why didn't you dare?"

"Because she is an old hand. She came to the mill much earlier than we did. Aren't you afraid that people will think you have no respect for her?"

"It is precisely because I respect her that I expect so much from her. That's how it should be between sisters of the working class, isn't it?"

"Do you think she can catch up with you?"

"Of course she can. She may be lagging now. But she can be a top-notch worker if only she has the will and faith in herself," Hsia-ying said earnestly.

"You will have to help her then."

"A single flower does not make a spring, Hsing-chun. Spring must have a mass of flowers. Just a few of us can't make a success of our mill. Besides, what Pao-chin weaves is not her own property. It belongs to our mill and to socialism. Surely we can't just stand by and let her stay backward."

"You are right," Hsing-chun said softly, her head lowered. "I didn't help her properly in the past. From now on...."

"We will all help each other."

The door banged as Chu Pao-chin rushed in.

Translated by Yu Fan-chin
Illustrated by Tu Hsi-hsien

Ku Kung

Two Poems

Mother and Daughter

In Shanghai mother
a textile worker;
in Sinkiang the daughter
plants cotton, each piece
of whose fibre, ties their
hearts together.

Ku Kung, born in Shanghai in 1928, has served for long periods in the People's Liberation Army. His collections of poems include *At the Foot of the Himalayas* and *Distant Lands*. The two poems published here are about young people from Shanghai who leave their city homes for cotton fields of the Sinkiang Uighur Autonomous Region in China's northwest.

Remember that day of parting!
So much to say, yet no way to
say it all; hard to leave each other
yet somehow, both so happy.

The daughter packed her bags
tightly tying hair plaits,
telling how she would use snowy
waters of the Tienshan to irrigate
boundless grasslands.

Saying how she would sing in front
of the east wind, which would
carry the sound to her mother's ears;
how she would harvest with the sun
beating on her head, sending white
cotton down to her mother's mill.

With needle as if flying, mother
made a new dress for her daughter
saying how she would take the
white cotton her child picked,
weaving it into lovely cloth.

So now let the mother be
proud as Tienshan peaks!
Let waves of the eastern sea
thunderingly hail this daughter
on the Tienshan Mountains!

We are separated by millions
of flecks of white cloud; by
thousands of streams and rivers;
these all beautify our
fatherland; decorating socialism.

In Shanghai mother
a textile worker;
in Sinkiang the daughter
plants cotton, each piece
of whose fibre, ties their
hearts together.

The New Scene

Open the window from
this side, and there is
the magnificent Tienshan,
from that side and there
are broad cotton fields.

Leaning from the window
in meditation, wings of thought
fly high and far; the scene
reminding of her home down
the coast by Shanghai.

Open the window on this side
and the scene is like
rolling waves of the ocean,
then on the other, and lo!
There are white sails!

Which is most lovely?
Motherland, let me whisper to you
an answer that rises clear
from my heart.

Cotton fields are like the ocean,
Tienshan Mountains like white sails;
now have we raised anchor,
beginning our voyage of happiness.

Sunlight glints on the wild
waves of the eastern sea, and
it sparkles from Tienshan peaks;
both have the same brilliancy
glittering like quick silver.

Ah! Ah! Open the window and
on this side, we see the mast
of socialism, then on the other
the ocean peak of communism.

Translated by Rewi Alley

In an Old City

This novel reflects the struggle against the enemy and puppet forces during the War of Resistance Against Japan. In our last issue we published excerpts from Chapters 1, 2, 4, 5, 7 and 9 describing how Yang Hsiao-tung, a member of the Chinese Communist Party, goes to a provincial town in north China to carry on underground work. Chin-huan and Yin-huan, two underground Party members, and young Han Yen-lai join forces with him to harass the enemy. They help some leading cadres run the blockade to reach the resistance base, and distribute revolutionary leaflets during a New Year's banquet for officials of the puppet government. Then Yang Hsiao-tung takes Han Yen-lai to the base to receive instructions for further tasks. The extracts presented in this issue start with their return to the town to carry on more underground activities. See the author's article about this novel on page 106.

CHAPTER 13

Liang and the men of his armed work team, having fought their way out of the mountains, reached the Peiping-Hankow Railway at two in the morning. They could have halted at Pali Village not far from

the provincial capital, but all twenty-one of them were eager to press on. Another two hours' brisk marching across one railway and two blockade lines brought them to Chin-huan's home near the dyke. She promptly asked what she could do for them.

"We've left the mountains on a mission," Liang told her. "We're to create a diversion by attacking the enemy in the provincial town while our men up in the mountains defeat their 'mopping-up' campaign. I want you to take a message right away to Political Commissar Yang, asking him to help plan this attack. If he's not back in town yet, go and scout round the station. We're specially interested in the security forces. They're said to be thoroughly slack with no real fighting capability."

Realizing the importance of this, Chin-huan urged him to lose no time in writing a note so that she could set off before dawn. She put paper on the table and offered him her fountain-pen.

"My writing's no good," he said, grinning. "You're the scholar, won't you do this for me?"

"No, something so crucial must be in your own writing."

Since, as usual, there was sense in what she said, the team leader settled down laboriously to write. A cock crowed outside. Chin-huan hastily washed and changed. She and the letter were ready at the same time.

Chin-huan had prepared a small bundle for the road. Now she filled two bottles with date wine, hid Liang's note in the cork of one bottle, and started off. By the time she had walked seven *li* the sky was clear and blue, the countryside around was coming to life. Fruit trees surrounded Li Family Village ahead and a pale pink mist covered the boughs of the crab-apple trees, filling the air with fragrance. The whole village seemed embowered in flowers. As Chin-huan swung lightly through the scented orchard, it was hard to distinguish her pink and white complexion and light grey clothes from the blossoms on the swaying boughs. This enchanting scene and the importance of her mission thrilled her. The whole armed work team was waiting eagerly for the message she would take back. She, a Communist, was sallying forth alone through this glorious countryside like some

champion of the oppressed in an old romance, to march boldly into the enemy-occupied city. She felt as if walking on air as she left the orchard and set her feet on the highway leading to town.

At eight in the morning she reached the outer blockade line some ten *li* from the city. No difficulties were made here. The sentries waved her through after only a cursory glance at her residence certificate, while she thought, "You dogs are blind!"

The trench round the city itself was deeper and wider, and here a number of forts commanded the road. Behind these were the airfield and some puppet barracks, and behind them loomed taller buildings. If you listened carefully you could hear the muted din and hubbub of the town. At the half-open barrier in front of the trench people had to pass an inspection. This did not worry Chin-huan who felt, indeed, that the tightening up in the inspection here revealed a weakening in the enemy's fighting strength and morale. The delay irked her, however, as it might leave her no time to see her sister or to return to the dyke before night.

The first man in the queue ahead of her was a minor official who worked for the Japanese. He had only to say a few words and he was passed through. The pedlar with a crate behind him was not so lucky. A puppet soldier, dissatisfied with his answers, lashed out at him. Then came Chin-huan's turn.

"Residence certificate!" The soldier, his gun at the ready, eyed her suspiciously.

Chin-huan handed over her papers.

"Why are you going to town?" the man demanded.

"To see to a bit of business."

"What's in your bundle?"

She meekly opened it up.

"And in those bottles?"

"Just some date wine for a friend."

"Smuggling wine in is forbidden." The puppet soldier grabbed the bottles from her.

"Two small bottles — do you call that smuggling?"

"Not even one cup is allowed." He clutched the bottles tight.

"All right." She made an effort to keep her temper. "Why not, search me to see what else I'm smuggling in?"

He jerked his head towards the barrier. But instead of going through she lunged forward and snatched the bottles. Before he could retrieve them she banged them hard together, smashing the glass.

"Nobody can keep contraband goods!" she flung at the speechless soldier, holding the cork with the message tight in one hand. But as she picked up her bundle to move on, she was halted by a bellow from the gun tower:

"Stop that bitch!"

Looking up, she saw a man in a khaki uniform and dark glasses with white rims leaning out of an upstairs window. Since he appeared to be a puppet officer, she put down her bundle and waited. The soldier who had inspected her promptly seized her bundle, fuming, and ordered her to follow him into the fort for an interrogation. The thing that worried her now was the secret message. However, with so many soldiers watching her she gave no outward sign of trepidation. Concealing the cork, she followed the soldier in up the narrow stairs. At a bend in the staircase she glanced round to make sure that no one was behind, then whipped out the secret note and swallowed it.

The room upstairs was an office furnished with a sofa, four stools, a telephone on the desk, and a smoke-blackened map on the wall. Dark Glasses informed Chin-huan that he was responsible for guarding the trench round the city.

"You must be spying for the Communist Eighth Route Army," he blustered. "Why else should you come here so early from the east?"

"Lots of people have come in from the east this morning," she retorted. "Are they all Communist spies? Of course, if you want to call me a spy, I can't stop you."

"The others all submit quietly to inspection, not like you...."

"If I wasn't willing to be inspected, would I come up here?"

"Why did you make such a scene then?"

"Your soldier seizes people's things for no reason at all. Who could take that lying down?"

Dark Glasses pounded the table. "For resisting inspection you'll get three days' detention."

"Suits me fine. Free board and lodging."

Dark Glasses chuckled. "What a tongue! Fires back so fast." He turned to snap some orders to another soldier, who leered at Chin-huan and said, "You're getting off lightly, woman. You're to play a few rounds of mahjong here; then you can go."

Chin-huan glanced out of the window while mentally sizing up these puppet soldiers. She came to a quick decision.

"Mahjong is one way of killing time," she answered airily.

The men grinned. "That's the idea."

"Unfortunately I've no time to spare," she shot back. With that she reached out for the telephone on the desk and, before the officer could stop her, said into the receiver, "550, please."

This was the number of the military exchange. Dark Glasses stared, wondering whom she meant to ask for. Ignoring him, Chin-huan continued, "Put me through to the Special Police Squad."

"Wait a second," interposed Dark Glasses. "Who do you want in the special squad?"

"Interpreter Han."

Interpreter Han was well-known to Japanese and puppets alike.

"What's the connection between you?" asked Dark Glasses dubiously.

"No special connection. I'm going to ask him to pass on a message to tell the people waiting for me that I can't get there before ten, because you're keeping me here to play mahjong."

In the human tangle of the provincial capital, the officer knew, there was no telling what connections anyone had. This young woman had taken a tough line from the start, and if she could telephone direct to the special squad she must have powerful friends. Losing his nerve, he went off with a glance at his men on the pretext of some business.

"Our officer's a friend of Interpreter Han," one of the soldiers told her smoothly, for they were no fools. "That's all right."

"Does your officer mean to play mahjong or not?"

"Another time," they answered. "If you've business, we won't keep you."

Without any comment she turned to go downstairs.

"Don't forget your bundle," said the man who had searched her.

"You can take it back to where you brought it from," she retorted. They had no option but to carry her bundle down for her to the road, where they gave it back to her.

"What a lousy lot," she jeered. "Can't be led, only driven."

The men accepted this with sheepish smiles.

Chin-huan walked on past the power-house towards the new lock. Since pedestrians were being stopped there by the police, to avoid further trouble she made a detour to her father's house and sent word to Yin-huan to meet her outside the city.

Yin-huan recognized her sister's fine handwriting at the first glance. She admired her literary ability. Chin-huan had only studied for one term in middle school, where she failed in maths but was top of her form in Chinese. *Recollections of My Mother*, *A Girl's Diary* and others of her essays had been published by newspapers and magazines.

Chin-huan's note intimated that she had urgent business and would wait for Yin-huan under the willows by the moat outside the South Gate. And although Yang Hsiao-tung before leaving for the base had told Yin-huan to lie low and meet no one from out of town, she could hardly ignore this pressing summons. She asked half a day's leave from the hospital.

She found her sister at the place appointed.

"I didn't like to venture into town without legitimate business," explained Chin-huan after they had clasped hands eagerly. "I asked you to come to help me reconnoitre." She outlined Team Leader Liang's mission, what he wanted of Yang Hsiao-tung, and how she had been forced to swallow the note.

Then the sisters parted again, Yin-huan making for the station.

"If the whole armed work team can come out," she thought, "surely so can Yang Hsiao-tung and Han Yen-lai. They may already be back in West Swamp."

She had to stop by the level crossing outside the station as a whistling locomotive thundered past. Presently she saw the passengers who had alighted surge over the covered foot-bridge, and walking a

few yards further she thought she heard someone call her name. At first this seemed impossible, for who could know her here? But when the call was repeated she looked round. Two dusty travellers were striding towards her, waving. Her face lit up. It was Yang Hsiao-tung and young Han.

She led them without hesitation towards the park, passing on the message Chin-huan had brought from Liang.

Yang's spirits soared when he learned of the proximity of the armed work team. He was certain they could deal the enemy a hard blow. Not by attacking the police headquarters, however. He sent Han Yen-lai to see if all was well at home and told him, if it was, to come back for him at dusk. In the meantime he would see Chin-huan and discuss the most effective form of attack. Yin-huan accompanied him to the moat to meet her.

"Let's not waste time," said Yang when they had exchanged greetings. "Here's my proposal. For the time being we'll stop gathering information and postpone our plan for sabotaging the railway station. We must make the most of this opportunity, and strike the enemy where it really hurts. Go straight back and tell Team Leader Liang I can meet him, if necessary, to talk it over...."

"Very good," agreed Chin-huan. "I'll go and ask Old Liang to come to town."

"Can he do that safely?"

"I've a contact in Pali Village. We should be able to get him past the blockade." With that she left Yang and her sister.

Yin-huan now reported that during the enemy assault on the Tiao Mountains, Kuan Ching-tao, commander of the First Regiment, had been left in charge of the city's defence and the command headquarters. Delighted by this news and bearing in mind the number of men at Liang's disposal, Yang thought of a daring scheme. To make sure that Yin-huan's information was reliable, he asked her where she had heard it. The girl hesitated for a second. But it seemed to her that if she kept silent any longer about Kao Yzu-ping's attitude towards her and Yang, she would be condoning his mistake and committing one herself. She therefore repeated frankly young Kao's pessimistic view of the situation in the bases and the length of time that the stale-

mate would last, as well as his prediction that Yang would not come back.

"I don't think it's just wrong ideas," she said. "His morale is low too. I suggest you send him to the base. If he can't be spared because of his contacts here, can you get someone else to keep in touch with him? I want to steer clear of him."

"You're right," replied Yang gravely. "Up in the hills this time, when we discussed the question of cadres, we decided to transfer young Kao to the base for study. Department Head Hsiao is going to send someone politically stronger to work with Councillor Kao. Until he comes, though, you'll have to go on keeping in touch with young Kao, not simply to pass on assignments but to help straighten out his ideas." During this speech Yang's eyes had kept straying to a refreshment stall not far away by which someone was selling griddle cakes and sausages.

"Did you have any lunch?" asked Yin-huan.

"Lunch? No such luck. No breakfast either."

At once she hurried off to buy him something and, following her with his eyes, he murmured:

"That's a girl in a thousand."

Swift yet careful investigations by Yin-huan and Han Yen-lai revealed that the puppet security headquarters was not well guarded. Yang decided this should be attacked the next day at midnight, with the main attack directed against Kuan Ching-tao's First Regiment. He would command the operation himself.

The two lamps above the gate of the security headquarters cast a brilliant light for some distance around. The two guards on each side of the gate were fully armed. Fully alert too, having just come on duty at midnight. The mounted bayonets on their rifles glittered, and they kept such a sharp look-out that not even a rat running past could escape detection.

They immediatedly spotted the two men approaching them on the brilliantly lighted road. They were Fatty and Chang Hsiao-shan, two members of the armed work team suitably disguised. Fatty

staggered like a drunkard and hit out at Chang, bellowing that he would drag him to the police station. Chang managed to elude him and, looking terrified, whined, "You won't pay me back, and now you're beating me up." He dashed towards the guards as if to seek protection.

The guards had watched these strange antics suspiciously. They were raising their bayonets to challenge Chang when he pulled out two pistols and covered the pair of them. The next thing they knew, their guns were knocked out of their hands and Fatty had twisted their arms behind their backs. That same instant Team Leader Liang bounded out from the shadows.

"First and second groups — charge!" he cried softly, waving them forward and leading the way himself.

The five men of the second group rushed towards the barracks occupied by two squads of the Eighth Company. Since it was the end of the week some men had sneaked off, some were washing their clothes; those going on duty later had turned in early, those just off duty were having a game of mahjong. All their guns were stacked up neatly on the rack. It had not even crossed their minds, while their officers were boasting of a victory in the hills, that there could be a night raid on command headquarters. When the guerrillas covered them with guns one fellow swore, "Quit fooling. Come and join the game." It took the order "Hands up!" to awaken him to what was happening.

Meanwhile Liang had led his first group to the office on the second floor of the central building. This office was between the conference room and Kuan Ching-tao's temporary bedroom. A faint yellow light was visible through its frosted glass windows, but nothing inside could be seen distinctly.

Kuan Ching-tao had been to the cinema that evening with his wife, coming back to headquarters in low spirits, bored and lonely. But being a conscientious officer, he put through calls in person to the chief military units to check up on the situation; and the aide who came to make a routine report at ten announced that all was quiet in the provincial capital. His aide's report for the day included this passage: "...As a result of our mopping-up operations, the Red troops in the

mountains have run out of grain and ammunition and are losing their last foothold. The security of the provincial capital is now impregnable."

Reassured, Kuan looked up at the motto he had written for himself: "Never leave till tomorrow what can be done today." He emitted a long breath and yawned. It had been a nerve-racking day and that meant, he knew from experience, a sleepless night. Therefore since it was useless for him to go to bed, he leaned back in the swivel chair and closed his eyes. It was already midnight.

The unusual commotion outside when Liang led the charge made Kuan sit up with a start. He pressed the bell to summon a messenger.

Liang bounded upstairs as the bell shrilled. As he pounded across the conference room Kuan knew this was not his messenger and remembered the hostile eyes that had watched him in the cinema. He might have to fight for his life. He jumped up to grab for the pistol under his pillow. That same instant Liang burst in and pointed a gun at his head.

"Hands up!"

Kuan raised his left hand and with his right put out the light. In that split second Liang saw him seize something from the desk and heard it whizz towards him. As he ducked, this missile crashed into the man behind. Liang had enough experience of hand-to-hand fighting to tell that Kuan was unarmed. He leapt forward like a tiger, only to smash into an empty chair. At once he swung round to the bed, exploring the top with his hands, underneath with one foot. The discovery of Kuan's pistol gave him fresh confidence. Now one of his men switched on the light, but they saw no sign of their enemy, only an open window. Leaning out, Liang looked down on a lively scrimmage below.

Kuan Ching-tao was, in fact, a wily, powerful and experienced fighter. After plunging the room into darkness and hurling a clock at Liang he had jumped out of the window and slid down the banisters of the outer stairway. Since the courtyard was lit up, Chang Hsiao-shan spotted him as soon as his feet touched the ground and saw from his serge officer's uniform that here was their chief quarry. The

youngster thought gleefully: "This fat duck has dropped out of the sky for me!" While his unarmed opponent was regaining his balance, Chang tackled him with a running dive, but Kuan gave him a shove which sent the lad staggering backwards. When another man charged, Kuan dodged and tripped him up so that he somersaulted through the air.

These encounters emboldened Kuan. He was fighting in his own headquarters, where he knew his adversaries dared not fire or make too much noise for fear of rousing other troops nearby. The messengers' room was barely ten yards away. Once there, he had only to grab a gun and he could hold off these opponents. While the two guerrillas were still sprawling on the ground, he darted into the shadow of the wall and started to scuttle crab-wise. Then he taunted himself, "Why be afraid of this riff-raff? Weren't you commended by Commander Okamura?"

He was straightening up to dash for the messengers' room when his arm was seized in the dark. Grappling with this new adversary, he discovered that the man's muscles were like steel; yet when he exerted pressure the other let himself be led like a lamb.

"He's afraid," thought Kuan. "And no wonder. I learned wrestling in the officers' training school. These Reds are no match for us." But even as he was exulting, the "lamb" changed into a "tiger." Two vice-like fists shot out. One seized Kuan's hands, the other his leg. Like a pig being skilfully prepared for slaughter, he was toppled to the ground.

"Just the man I was waiting for," grunted Han Yen-lai.

By the time Liang brought his men downstairs, Kuan Ching-tao was trussed and bound. The guerrillas promptly surrounded the last building. The messengers' squad was called on to surrender and its men's nerve failed when they saw their commander captured. But he yelled:

"They're only a handful of bandits, men. They can't put up much fight. Open fire, and not one of them will get away."

"What about you, sir?" called one of the messengers.

"Never mind me. Fire!"

"You double-dyed traitor, you!" Fatty swung a blow at Kuan. Normally a blow from his fists would have broken Kuan's nose; but Fatty's chest was still bleeding where the broken glass from the clock had pierced it only three minutes earlier. This added fuel to his fury.

The messengers' squad resisted. The shots they fired rang out clear and sharp through the stillness of the night. Liang knew time was running out. He ordered the second group to march the prisoners off while he took the first to burn the granary, after which they would join the third at the blockade bridge. But they were not far from command headquarters when the enemy Eighth Company came after them. Since the odds were too uneven, Liang gave up the plan to fire the granary and the three groups withdrew together to the bridge.

The armed work team carried the prisoners back in triumph to Pali Village.

Team Leader Liang set a guard over the captives in a wood. Then he and the cadre responsible for dealing with enemy soldiers went to a nearby house in search of Chin-huan and Yang Hsiao-tung and quickly discussed how to deal with the prisoners.

Liang and the other cadre went back then to interrogate the twenty-five captives, including Kuan Ching-tao. Those who looked out-and-out scoundrels were simply asked their names and jobs before being roped together again in the wood. The simpler, more honest-looking fellows were quietly taken aside.

Meanwhile Fatty marched Kuan to the house where Chin-huan was boiling water in the outer room. Fatty took the regimental commander straight into the east room.

"Squat down," he ordered. "The Communist Eighth Route Army is good to prisoners. We won't kill you or settle scores with you. If we did settle scores, I'd have bumped you off already. But your lot have such addled brains, you'll have to reform your ideas." He stopped at the door on the point of leaving to add, "The mistress of the house is asleep in the west room. So don't make any noise. Stay here quietly while I fetch the political commissar to see you." With that he tramped away.

Kuan was wondering what would become of him when the portière was raised and in came a bright-eyed, handsome young woman of medium height, dressed in grey. He took her to be the mistress of this house, and therefore under the puppet jurisdiction. To sound her out he asked, "Can I have a drink of water, sister? I'm parched."

In silence she fetched water from the outer room. Since his hands were tied behind his back she held the bowl to his lips.

Kuan shook his head with a look of despair and pleaded, "Can you save me, sister?" Her continued silence induced him to try the effect of a bribe. "Help me get away, and within three days I'll send you two thousand dollars. I swear it."

"Money doesn't interest me," she answered coolly. "In times like these you can't keep money even if you have it. It's either stolen by the Japs or confiscated by your security forces."

"If you don't value money, what do you value? I'll agree to anything. Just say the word."

"I value an honest Chinese conscience. Have you a conscience?"

"Conscience?" He gaped at her and shuddered, reduced to silence.

"I hate them, the Japs and the traitors in the security forces! They killed my husband. They've no conscience, none of the devils."

"So that's how it is." Kuan saw a ray of hope. "Yes, they're a vicious lot, sister. But I'm different. I do have a conscience."

"You have a conscience? Well, we certainly hope so." In walked Yang Hsiao-tung with a white towel tied peasant-fashion round his head. Kuan knew that this was the political commissar. His hair nearly stood on end and he broke into a cold sweat at the realization that the spruce young woman must be on the side of the Eighth Route Army too. A cautious glance at Yang revealed that this simply dressed political commissar had a pleasant, cultured manner and looked a thoroughly intelligent, well-educated man.

"We know all about you," said Yang. "Although you've committed crimes, you've a little more sense of what's right than most officers in the puppet army. If you'll take steps to atone for your past crimes, the people are willing to let bygones be bygones. You claim to have a conscience. Very well, show it now by answering these questions. You know the Japanese adviser, the puppet pro-

vincial governor Wu Tsan-tung and Commander Kao Ta-cheng. Are they good men or not? What do you say?"

"Upon my conscience, they're scoundrels."

"All right. And the Communist Eighth Route Army, is it working for the interests of a few or for the whole people?"

At first Kuan would not answer this, but eventually he nodded.

"Good." Yang stepped forward and untied his hands. "Sit down and let's talk. The last few years you've sold yourself to the enemy, you're guilty of a great crime. We've every right to punish you on behalf of our country. But you're by no means the worst in the enemy camp, and you're beginning to admit some basic truths. That being so, we've enough faith in you to let you go. I hope you won't forget the assurance you've given me. Try to behave like a real Chinese with a conscience. In the name of the Communist Party, I'm letting you off this time. All right, you may go."

Kuan Ching-tao stared in amazement from the political commissar to Chin-huan. As if waking suddenly from a deep sleep, he staggered to his feet and lurched towards the door. At the threshold he turned to scan their faces again. "It's true," he whispered to himself as he slunk out.

After dealing with Kuan Ching-tao, Yang went off to decide how Liang's men should run the blockade, leaving Chin-huan to handle the rest of the prisoners.

The next to come in was Black-pan Chao, an old cook from the puppet command headquarters. Asked about his family, he said he was all on his own and cooked for the puppet troops so as not to starve himself. His wife and only daughter had been killed by enemy planes the year that the Japanese took the provincial capital. His sad story prompted Chin-huan to tell him that her husband too had been killed by the Japanese (this was true), and her only son bayoneted by the puppet troops (this was a fabrication). They shed tears of sympathy for each other, after which it was easy for her to win him over.

"If I can get back safely, I swear to help the Communists," promised Black-pan Chao. "Not just to thank you for saving my life, but because I want to get even with those swine." The old fellow's heart

was beating fast as some of the work team escorted him out of the village.

The last prisoner to come in was a lad of seventeen, Tang Erh-kou, who had worked for two years as a messenger for Kuan Ching-tao. Braver than most grown men, he was a good soldier and would deliver Kuan's orders through a hail of bullets. His passion for gambling had led to his being captured while playing mahjong with the security squad.

Gradually Chin-huan overcame young Tang's reluctance to give any information about himself. He confided that he had been orphaned while still a child and lived as a homeless waif. The sufferings of others always touched Chin-huan's kind heart and there were tears in her eyes as he finished his story.

"What was your parents' social status?" she asked. "Why should a poor boy like you risk your life for those traitors? The Communists stand up for the rights of the great mass of toilers. Are they really your enemy?"

Tang Erh-kou could not answer a single one of these questions, but Chin-huan felt that some glimmering of the truth was dawning on him. Having fed him and promised to send him back, she gave him all the money in her pocket.

CHAPTER 14

The attack on the puppet security headquarters staggered the enemy. Tada hastily made a fresh disposition of his forces. Inside the city, the whole police force and secret service were mobilized to strengthen the sentry posts; the inspection of travellers was tightened up; a strict check was made of residence certificates; Crooked Nose Li was repeatedly cross-examined; and Kuan Ching-tao, who claimed to have escaped from his captors, was put under house arrest. Outside the city, two regiments were recalled from the mountains. With the smaller contingents in the provincial capital they made up a force nearly five thousand strong which carried out punitive forays every day in the neighbouring countryside. During these frenzied enemy activities,

Yang Hsiao-tung and Chin-huan kept on the move for two whole days and nights with the armed work team, till they approached the mountains.

The third night, Yang and Liang called a meeting of cadres to sum up their experience and write reports for Department Head Hsiao and Political Commissar Yuan. They handed over their prisoners to the local cadres and decided that the armed work team should strike east in light marching order to harass the enemy, while Yang returned to the city. He was afraid that his absence, even for three days, might already have aroused the authorities' suspicions.

Team Leader Liang approved Chin-huan's suggestion that she should escort Yang back.

The armed work team left at midnight, and Yang and Chin-huan took to the road before dawn. At breakfast-time they came to Southbridge, where the road forked. If they went to Tsaochuang, they would have to return by train; if to Yuan Family Village, they could walk back. Chin-huan chose the latter course, so that she might enlist Doctor Chao's help to escort the political commissar into town. To be on the safe side, she persuaded Yang to let her go ahead to reconnoitre. It was only six *li* to Yuan Family Village. She promised to be back within two hours.

Two hours passed and still no sign of Chin-huan. Yang imagined she was having trouble finding the way. But when nearly three hours had gone by he told himself, "Impossible for her to miss the way. She keeps all her wits about her." He started after her, hoping to meet her on the road. After going one *li*, however, he decided not to venture any further and sat down in the shade of a willow to wait. Another fifteen minutes went by. Then a shot rang out from Yuan Family Village.

"What can have happened?" he wondered in great dismay. "Shall I wait? No, I've no right to take such a risk." His heart heavy with foreboding, he strode off in the other direction.

He bought a ticket at Tsaochuang Station and soon a train was carrying him towards the town; but his heart was still on the road to Yuan Family Village, that shot was still ringing in his ears. He did not notice when the train drew in, and was the last of the passengers to

alight. He looked round the station, hoping against hope that Chin-huan might be waiting for him there. But of course there was no sign of her.

"The delay doesn't matter if only she's safe," he thought as he left the station and started down West Gate Street. This road leading straight to the puppet security headquarters was a busy thoroughfare, showing no trace now of the fighting four days earlier. Halfway down the road Yang decided not to enter the city just yet. For once inside there would be even less chance of finding Chin-huan again.

He turned into West Road, a road which he had avoided since working in the underground.

This road, normally noisy and bustling, seemed unnaturally quiet today. Not that it was deserted, but all the passers-by appeared to be dumb. At first Yang thought he was having a fit of nerves; for underground workers feel safest on familiar ground and insecure in strange surroundings. Then it dawned on him that everyone was heading in the same direction — towards the city. People had lined up, two deep, on the road ahead, and others were standing on tables and stools behind or had climbed up the sophora trees by the road. Heads were craning out of all the upstairs windows.

His curiosity aroused, Yang went to investigate. When he reached the crowd of spectators, he heard two men say softly:

"Here they come!"

"It shows there are still brave people in China."

He forced his way through to look.

A troop of arrogant Japanese and puppet cavalry was galloping up with a great cracking of whips. Some distance behind weary infantrymen were trying in vain to keep up. They were followed by a motley crew of armed secret-service men, swaggering along with no attempt to keep rank as they shouted and joked in a disorderly way. If photographed from above they would have looked like a pack of mongrels trotting forward. In the midst of this rabble was a black horse, ridden by a prisoner whose hands were tied behind her. She wore a grey tunic with a snow-white collar. As she approached you saw that she held herself proudly with her shoulders back, her head high. A little closer and you could see the hair loose over her shoul-

ders, her large eyes staring straight and scornfully ahead. She sat erect in the saddle, the personification of indomitable pride.

"It's her!" In his consternation Yang stepped forward. His sudden movement attracted Chin-huan's attention. Their eyes met. She started as if stung and nearly lost her seat, but with an effort mastered her emotion.

As Yang stepped forward, others pressed after him. At once the guards keeping order rushed over and savagely forced the spectators back. Yang slipped to the side of the road and climbed on to a table, but by this time Chin-huan had been carried into the town.

He went straight to Han Yen-lai's home and told them what had happened.

"Everything else can wait," he said. "Hsiao-yen, no, both of you, go and warn Yin-huan. She must leave the hospital at once. There's not a moment to lose."

That evening two armed enemy agents marched Chin-huan into an underground room for interrogation. She had just sat down on a bench when the door at the other end of the room opened to admit Lan Mao of the puppet secret service. With his hairy hand he switched on a table-light, which threw his livid face into relief.

"Well?" he demanded ominously. "For two hours in Yuan Family Village you fed us a pack of lies. Now we've invited you here, you'd better come clean."

"You'll succeed no better here than at Yuan Family Village."

"Big talk! I can make the toughest man cave in, I tell you."

"You're wasting your time, trying to frighten me."

Lan Mao put Chin-huan to the torture. When she came back to the interrogation room, there were more people present. On the sofa in the middle sat the Japanese adviser Tada, flanked by two Japanese aides. The swivel chair behind the desk was occupied by Fan Ta-chang, the new chairman of the Communist Suppression Commission. Lan Mao had taken a back seat in one corner behind a table used by the recording secretary.

At sight of Chin-huan's haggard face and blood-stained clothes, Tada gave Lan Mao a public dressing-down. He made Chin-huan sit down and himself poured her a cup of tea. After another baleful glance at Lan Mao he assumed a confident, complacent smile.

"You come from the Tiao Mountains, miss?" he asked.

Chin-huan could hear that he was a Japanese. She did not yet know that he was Tada, but it was clear from the set-up that he was someone important. She said nothing, wondering what was behind this question. Tada took her silence as a sign of weakness. His face brightened.

"Don't be afraid, miss. Tell me now, you get your orders from the mountains?"

The Tiao Mountains were a resistance base area and therefore safe from the enemy. It flashed through Chin-huan's mind that here was a chance to mislead her interrogators. She closed her eyes by way of answering "Yes."

"Good girl." Tada stuck up one thumb. "You help us settle problems, we look after you."

Chin-huan missed this remark for, her eyes closed again, she was thinking with a pang of her comrades outside.

The forlorn look on her face encouraged Tada. "You help us, very good. We have a man from the Tiao Mountains here. You must know him. Like to meet him?"

Chin-huan's heart missed a beat. Could they have caught Yang Hsiao-tung? Surely not. Well, she would know when she saw the man. She nodded.

Now Tada had long been trying to get to the bottom of the Kameyama case. He suspected that Crooked Nose Li had murdered Kameyama for money, and that Li was also behind the attack on the puppet security headquarters. A careful investigation had been made of Crooked Nose Li's whole history; but there was no real evidence against him. Since Chin-huan struck Tada as naive and easily intimidated, he hoped to get the evidence he wanted from her lips, or from the expressions of the prisoners when they confronted each other.

Crooked Nose Li was brought in.

"Section Chief Li," said Tada, pursing his lips. "One of your people has come. Would you like to meet her?" He was carefully watching both prisoners' reactions. When Crooked Nose Li made no reply, the Japanese turned to Chin-huan.

"Miss, tell the truth. You know him?"

Crooked Nose Li at once understood Tada's design. He flung himself on his knees and kowtowed, swearing that he had nothing to do with Kameyama's murder and protesting his utter loyalty to the Japanese adviser.

Chin-huan of course knew that it was Han Yen-lai who had killed Kameyama; but the complications arising from this were new to her. Now she understood that she was in the presence of the notorious chief adviser Tada, who wanted to use her to avenge Kameyama.

And since Crooked Nose Li was a traitor, she nodded decidedly in answer to Tada's question.

Li rounded on her in a frenzy.

"I know you through and through, you swine," said Chin-huan sharply. "Don't worry. I'm ready to take the consequences."

Li realized that she had signed his death warrant. Beside himself with terror, like a drowning man ready to clutch at any straw, he kowtowed first to Tada and his Japanese aides, then to Fan Ta-chang and Lan Mao, loudly protesting his own innocence. Fan Ta-chang, after many years in the secret service, was well aware that Crooked Nose Li had nothing to do with the Communists but that Chin-huan's identification would cost him his life. However, it was to his own advantage to let Tada avenge Kameyama and ruin Crooked Nose Li. He hastily signed to the other Japanese, who were in league with him to acquire what remained of Li's property, and they urged Tada to give this traitor short shrift.

Tada reflected for a minute. Then he barked out the order for Crooked Nose Li to be dragged off and Chin-huan taken to rest in another room while he sent for a second suspect.

Upon her return, Chin-huan found Crooked Nose Li's place taken by Kuan Ching-tao. "What's he doing here?" she wondered. "If he's in trouble...."

"This man," said Tada. "Know him?"

Her mind was already made up. Looking Kuan full in the face she answered, "Yes!"

Kuan Ching-tao had paid no attention to Chin-huan at first. When he recognized the young woman he had encountered that night at Pali Village, he kept a poker face to hide his sudden panic. Now that she identified him he glanced at her, biting his lips. The look in his eyes was neither appealing nor angry. He appeared resigned to his fate.

After Kuan Ching-tao's return from Pali Village he had stuck to his story of having escaped, and the messengers who had not been captured testified to their regimental commander's courage. Tada had his suspicions, however, and was now keeping Kuan under secret arrest

until the matter could be clarified. Chin-huan, knowing what she did about Kuan, held his life in her hands.

"Yes, I know him."

Astonished by her unequivocal answer, Tada could not decide whether to be pleased or dismayed. Foxy as he was, he looked blankly from one to the other of the prisoners, trying to judge their relationship from their expressions.

Chin-huan seized this chance to take the initiative.

"Has *he* broken your laws too?" she asked. But the Japanese refused to give her a clue. "Let me just say a few words to him," she continued. Trembling as if with fury, she leapt at Kuan and started slapping his face. When he defended himself she bit his hand. Fan Ta-chang and the others hastily intervened.

"You devil, Kuan!" hissed Chin-huan, her face white. "I know you. Even if you rolled three times through ashes I'd still know you. After Kao Ta-cheng's traitors burned my home, it was you who killed my husband. You...." Before she could spring at Kuan again, Tada signed to his men to remove her. They could still hear her screaming in the other room, "If you go on committing such devilish crimes, all Chinese with a conscience will punish you."

A halt was called in the interrogation. Tada ordered Kuan to be kept under house arrest until Commander Kao came back to deal with him. Then he turned to Fan Ta-chang and Lan Mao.

"That woman can be very useful to us," he told them. "Keep her locked up but don't chain her or torture her. Treat her well. I'll question her further when I have time. With this thread in our hands, we'll pull out the whole network of underground Communists."

As soon as Yin-huan received Yang Hsiao-tung's instructions, she handed in her resignation and left the hospital. For eight days now she had been staying in her friend Yeh's home, hardly able to eat or sleep for anxiety. Twice she called on young Kao to ask for some word of her sister, but each time he was out. The interpreter who knew Chin-huan had no news of her either. Yin-huan decided to go home and see if her father had heard anything.

She reached the village at dusk and was approaching their house when she noticed someone darting up to it. Yin-huan stepped into a neighbour's gateway, afraid this was an agent come to make an arrest. When she saw that it was a girl, she peered out to watch.

The slim figure ran up to the gate and raised her hand to knock, but thought better of it. After glancing hesitantly from side to side, she took something from her pocket and slipped it through a crack in the door. Satisfied that this was no enemy, Yin-huan stepped out to accost her, but the girl had hurried off.

Not daring to call out, Yin-huan ran after her and overtook her near the outskirts of the village. There were no street lamps here.

"Stop!" cried Yin-huan softly.

The other looked round with a start.

"Was it you who slipped something through our door just now?"

"What relation are you to the woman prisoner?" countered the girl.

"Her sister."

The girl caught hold of Yin-huan's arm and said eagerly, "I live near the Shrine of Learning in the northeast corner of the city. But why waste time telling you this? Go home quick and get that letter. Mind you don't lose it."

"Wait for me here," cried Yin-huan, hurrying home. She managed to unlock the padlock with a twig and, having picked up the letter, examined it in the starlight. On the envelope was written: "Yin-huan, take this at once to Mr. Yang." Not stopping to lock the gate, she stuffed the letter into her pocket and ran back to find the girl, but the latter had vanished. Further on, however, she met Hsiao-yen carrying a small paper package.

"Do come back with me to see him, Yin-huan," begged the girl. "He ate some uncooked food and is hot and cold by turns. Now he's delirious, burning with fever. It's frightening! My brother's keeping him company and sent me out to buy some medicine."

They went into the room formerly occupied by the Miaos. Yen-lai was pouring Yang a drink. At sight of Yin-huan, the patient put down the bowl.

"Didn't I tell you to meet me at four p.m. on Wednesdays and Saturdays by the Temple of the God of War?" he protested. "You mustn't run unnecessary risks. Well, is there any news of her?"

Yin-huan opened the package of medicine and offered him a pill, saying, "Yes, there is. A letter for you from my sister."

"Where is it? Show me. No, read it out." He put the bowl aside and sat up abruptly.

Dear Yin-huan,

The moment you get this, take it straight to Political Commissar Yang. Tell him, through carelessness, I failed to carry out the task the Party gave me. As soon as I reached Yuan Family Village that day, plain-clothes agents held me up to ask my business, and I was spotted and nabbed by Lan Mao, that agent wearing black-rimmed glasses.

The greedy dogs wanted to catch someone at least as important as Comrade Yang. They questioned me for two hours. Of course I told them nothing. But I was fearfully worried about Comrade Yang, waiting at Southbridge. If the enemy had sense enough to search the road I'd come by, they'd surely find him. So I managed to grab one of the scoundrels' guns and force him to fire into the air by way of warning.

The enemy mustered all those troops to escort me to town, not for fear I'd escape, oh no. I was their excuse for a display of strength. Naturally I wasn't going to look afraid. I tried to thwart their scheme by showing the townsfolk the stuff Communists are made of.

Since the day I started working for the revolution I've been longing for the time when we liberate the city, when I could lead our soldiers to those traitors' houses and point them out one by one. Catch the whole lot!

I've been tortured and shed blood, I won't hide it from you. But you can be sure of this: I'll do nothing to shame the working class that brought me up, the Party that educated me, and the dear comrades who have helped me.

There's nothing too vicious for the enemy to do. They may knock out my teeth, tear out my tongue or even cut out my heart. But they'll never get any information from me.

Not that I refuse to talk. I have talked, using my discretion. It's for you to judge whether I did right or not. First I settled the hash of that traitor Crooked Nose Li, and did my best to cover up for that regimental commander we captured. When the enemy asked if our Party headquarters was in the Tiao Mountains, I said Yes. I told them I was the one responsible for distributing pamphlets, spying on them, and leading soldiers in to attack the city. I did this expecting to be tortured again but they haven't done anything to me since. I'm detained in a private family. There's a decent girl here, who's willing to risk her life to deliver this letter.

I'm sorry I can't do much here. Tomorrow I'm to have a private interview with the chief adviser Tada. A strange interview, between an enemy big shot and an ordinary Communist! He wants something of me, and I have designs on

him. I don't know if I'm going the right way about it or whether I shall succeed. But I want to do this last thing for the Party.

Yin-huan saw that the letter was dated three days previously. In other words, three days ago Chin-huan had still been alive. What had happened since? Had her scheme succeeded or not? She held the envelope up to the light and saw another folded paper inside. She pulled this out. The paper was identical with that used by Chin-huan, but the writing compared with hers was a childish scrawl.

Dear comrades in charge of underground work,

Let me add a postscript to your comrade's last letter. I don't know her name, so I'll just call her Sister. She didn't write any more after meeting Tada, but she behaved rather strangely. She wanted to borrow a hairpin. When I gave her one of my mother's, it didn't suit her. She asked me to buy her a strong, pointed bone pin, and was very pleased when I did.

Two days later, her plain-clothes guards took her off in the morning. Before leaving she whispered to me, "Keep your ears pricked up. You may hear some good news today." None of them came back that day. The next morning the agents came to fetch their bedding, saying they'd be going back to their unit as their job was finished. When I asked what had happened to her, this is what they told me.

First Tada asked Sister to tell him all she knew about the underground; then he said he just wanted her to break with the Party. To begin with she refused, but later she agreed. Tada promised her a good life. He gave her smart clothes and jewellery and wanted her to have her hair waved and go to a banquet. At that banquet he would announce her submission to the "Imperial Army." Then he'd send her to work in the Japanese sponsored New People's Association. He had other designs on her too, for afterwards.

Sister refused. Refused to go to the banquet or take a job. But she said if Tada would meet her somewhere quiet for a talk, she might agree on certain conditions. Tada arranged to see her in the Red Villa north of the city which belonged to the Kuomintang provincial governor who fled. Tada's been a secret agent for Japanese imperialism for so long, he's very experienced in dealing with people. He was prepared for two eventualities when he received her.

Sister was carefully searched at the Red Villa before they let her in.

One agent said, "That girl had guts but she was too hasty; besides, she's no proper weapon. Maybe the Japanese wasn't fated to die just yet. Because if she'd rammed that hairpin straight through his gullet, he wouldn't have needed to go to hospital in Peking." The other agent said he admired Tada. Even after being so badly wounded, he managed to draw his pistol and put five bullets through her....

The room started whirling around Yin-huan. She trembled convulsively. Seeing the tears glittering in Hsiao-yen's eyes, she flung herself into her arms and the two girls sobbed together. Han Yen-lai bit his lips and stared fixedly at the wall. Yang Hsiao-tung swept aside the thin quilt over his knees and stepped up to the light, resting both hands on the table.

"Chin-huan was a true Communist, a fine revolutionary comrade," he said. "She fought the enemy to the very end. We must keep her last letter and belongings carefully. Once the city is liberated, they can be displayed in the martyrs' memorial hall."

Yin-huan and Hsiao-yen stepped forward to support him for fear he might collapse, but he waved them aside. Moistening his parched lips he continued:

"A comrade like Chin-huan wouldn't want us to grieve or shed tears for her. She would want us to summon up all our strength to wipe out the enemy. Yin-huan, you must be braver, more determined. Try to win over Kuan Ching-tao and his wife. If necessary, I'll talk to Kuan myself. Yen-lai, since you've already got a job in the puppet headquarters, you must keep in close touch with the men we released, raise their political consciousness, and try to find a job for Chang Hsiao-shan so that he can help us with liaison work. Nothing can daunt us. We shall never retreat. What has the enemy to boast about? Firing five bullets? Do you gloat over the blood shed by one of our comrades? I warn you, our strength is inexhaustible. Just you wait. Soon the day will come when we deal you a knock-out blow."

CHAPTER 18

The third time Yin-huan tried to find the girl who had delivered Chin-huan's letter, she searched the northeast section of the city only to find that there were quite a few places from which one could see the Shrine of Learning. Her directions were too vague. Searching a city of this size for a girl whose face she hadn't clearly seen, whose name and address she didn't even know, was like looking for a needle in a haystack.

She plodded on without much hope towards the northwest, looking up at the Shrine of Learning all the time, till she reached a florist's in a quiet street out of which stepped a girl laden with a bunch of flowers. She seemed an ordinary city girl, simply dressed; but her eyes widened at the sight of Yin-huan.

"Have you come to buy flowers?" she asked.

"No, I'm looking for someone," replied Yin-huan without thinking.

"Can you tell me who?"

Yin-huan answered more guardedly, "The fact is, I'm looking for a girl who brought me a letter."

"Do you know her name?" Her eyes shining with excitement, the girl stepped right up to Yin-huan.

"She didn't even tell me her address."

"Did she take a letter one evening to the east suburb from a young woman to her younger sister?"

"Yes! So it was you...." Yin-huan took her hand.

"Let's go over there." The girl led her further on to where no one was about. "My name's Pu Hsiao-man," she said. "I didn't dare wait for you that evening because some puppet troops came down the road. But listen, I mustn't stay out much longer, so I'll make this short. I've been wanting to find you on some urgent business. The enemy has someone important of yours shut up in our home, and she's not been able to get word to the Party. Could you go and see her?"

Pu Hsiao-man smuggled Yin-huan into the compound where she lived, which had been taken over by the enemy for the detention of political prisoners. The girls entered a smaller courtyard at the back and tiptoed down a veranda overshadowed by the tall building in front.

A sudden clap of thunder made Yin-huan start. Then she whirled round, hearing a creaking close beside her. A window in the east wall had opened, and a fearfully haggard old woman seated just inside was looking out eagerly for her visitor.

The sight took Yin-huan's breath away. She stepped forward and threw her arms around the woman.

"Gracious heavens!" she exclaimed. "You here, aunty!"

Dazzled by the brighter light outside, the old woman, Yang Hsiao-tung's mother, did not see for a second who it was. When she recognized Yin-huan, her son's trusted comrade-in-arms and the girl she had taken such a fancy to, the staunch mother who faced up so boldly to the enemy gave way to her grief.

"You don't know how I've been longing to see you, child!" she cried.

Hot tears sprang to her eyes but she made haste to wipe them away.

"You must go," she whispered. "Go quickly. Those brutes arrested me just so as to...." Her words were drowned by another clap of thunder. A cold, moist wind brushed their faces and the rain started pelting down. The room grew darker. The sudden realization that Mrs. Yang might meet the same fate as Chin-huan wrenched at Yin-huan's heart. She saw that the place seemed deserted and no one was likely to come in the pouring rain. In a tumult of emotion she climbed through the window and took the older woman's arm.

"Don't talk now, aunty. Come away with me."

Before Mrs. Yang could answer, another woman stepped in from the doorway where she had been keeping watch. She darted over to Yin-huan and cried:

"Don't just think of saving her, lass. Do you want my girl and me to lose our heads?"

"Are you Hsiao-man's mother?" asked Yin-huan. "Don't do things by halves. If you really want to help us, don't be afraid. The two of you can come with us. We'll see that you're all right outside."

All the blood drained from Mrs. Pu's face, terror left her speechless. But Mrs. Yang shook her head reassuringly while Hsiao-man pushed her mother out again to keep watch.

"You're too hasty," she protested to Yin-huan. "Our lives don't matter, but you'd never get out of the city. See, the old lady can't even stand. She's one mass of wounds. Don't attempt the impossible. Mum and I will keep out of the way while the two of you talk. But hurry!" She joined her mother outside under the eaves.

Yin-huan saw how unrealistic she had been. Her heart aching for Mrs. Yang, she said soothingly, "Don't be too upset, aunty. As soon as I get back, Hsiao-tung will think of some way to rescue you. Tell me quickly now, what advice and news you have for us."

"Go back and warn my son, there's a traitor among us. Be very, very careful. A traitor in our midst is worse than the enemy."

"I'll remember. What else shall I tell Hsiao-tung?"

The old woman closed her eyes as if her thoughts were far away. "Hsiao-tung is twenty-eight now," she said at last. "All these twenty-eight years I haven't known a moment's peace of mind. When he was a little lad the landlord hounded us from home; when he was studying in the normal school he joined the revolution, and I was afraid the Kuomintang would kill him; since he's come to work for the underground, I've been nervous over what the Japanese devils would do to him. The worry I've had over that boy.... The evening that he came to the city he promised me, once the whole country was free, he'd take me to Peking to see the sights. If only I could live to see that day! But now.... You tell my boy, he must give the love he owes me to the people of all China."

Mrs. Yang broke off and sighed.

"If there's anything else you have at heart, aunty, tell me."

"Dear child, there is. But this is no time to talk of such things."

"Hsiao-tung isn't here, aunty, but you can consider me as your own daughter. Tell me, and we'll do the best we can."

"My dear, after Hsiao-tung you're the nearest to my heart. Ever since that day I first met you...." Mrs. Yang broke off again and looked out of the window where the rain was pouring down like crystal chains. Suddenly heavy footsteps were heard and there was knocking at the kitchen door, which Yin-huan had bolted.

"Bolting the door in broad daylight!" swore a rough man's voice. "Are you all dead inside? Is there no boiled water?" The door quivered under his kicks, it would soon give way. Yin-huan and Mrs. Yang held their breath while Mrs. Pu ran in from the rain to smooth things over, promising to take the guards some hot water at once. The man only swore more viciously and tried to force his way

in. She was powerless to stop him. Yin-huan thought it was all up with them when a blinding flash of lightning and two crashes of thunder made plaster rain down from the ceiling.

"Blast it!" cried the secret-service man. "Heaven's angry!" He pounded off down the veranda.

The downpour which followed the thunder plunged the room into deeper gloom. Yin-huan took Mrs. Yang's hands again.

"Go on, quick, aunty. Time's short."

"Well, as things stand, I'll risk offending you." From the middle finger of her left hand she took a silver ring set with a red stone. "Hsiao-tung's dad gave me this when we married," she said. "For years I've been hoping to pass it on to my son. It's been the dearest wish of my heart to slip this ring on to the finger of the girl he loves. Dear Yin-huan, please take it, won't you?"

"Me, aunty? Oh, no. Hsiao-tung wouldn't dream...." Confusion was making Yin-huan incoherent. She took a grip on herself. "I'll give him this myself. As for me, aunty, I hardly know what to say. You've no daughter, I've no mother. Let me look on you as my own mother."

She was sinking to her knees to kowtow when Hsiao-man burst in with a raincoat and clutched her arm.

"The coast's clear. Let me see you out."

"Just let me say one last word to her, there's a good girl." Mrs. Yang's face was working. "Do you have another fellow?" Her voice broke.

The old woman's distress touched Yin-huan to the quick. She could not bear to leave her in such anguish or add to the sufferings of a comrade whose life was in danger. Cost what it might, she must comfort her.

"All right, Yang Hsiao-tung, I know you're high-minded," she thought. "You can call me the ugliest names you like. I'm not brave, I know. I can't help being soft-hearted."

While Hsiao-man was helping her into the raincoat, she held up her ring finger to Mrs. Yang and nodded.

CHAPTER 19

After leaving Mrs. Yang, Yin-huan's one thought was how to rescue her. She was due to meet Yang Hsiao-tung in the Temple of the God of War at four that afternoon. Meanwhile she decided to go and see Councillor Kao, who might be able to think of a way out. On the road she met Kao Tzu-ping and went into a snack bar with him, having no idea that a few days previously he had sold out to the enemy. Having told him of Mrs. Yang's arrest and her appointment with Yang Hsiao-tung that afternoon, she begged him to help. Kao Tzu-ping immediately made an excuse to go to the telephone. Too late Yin-huan discovered that he was passing on this news to Lan Mao. Her fury and determination to save Yang gave her such strength that with one blow she felled young Kao to the ground. Before he could scramble up she had rushed out.

She ran as fast as her legs would carry her. Once round the next corner she would be in sight of the Temple of the God of War. Hope filled her heart and she put on a spurt. It was only a hundred yards away now. But just then the temple gate opened. Armed secret-service men pushed a prisoner down the white steps and hustled him to the left where an army truck was parked. She strained her eyes in that direction as, its horn sounding, the truck rolled away in a cloud of dust.

Although Yin-huan had not seen the prisoner's face distinctly, she knew what must have happened. She fell down in a dead faint.

The truck drew up in front of a tall building with a veranda, and Yang Hsiao-tung was pushed into a cell. This was more like a converted storehouse than an ordinary jail. He guessed that it must be Kao Ta-cheng's headquarters not far from the West Gate.

"Never mind where it is. Rest while you can," he told himself, lying down on a wooden bed.

Some time later he heard the padlock removed and in came Lan Mao.

"Thanks to Buddha!" swore Lan Mao at the sight of Yang. "I've been looking forward to this, Your Excellency. Last time you bluffed me. Today I shall get my own back."

With a look of contempt Yang turned his face to the wall.

"All cases involving Communists stink, besides being hard to crack. But your case, let me tell you, is to be handled by Commander Kao himself. So watch your step. Anyone who tries any funny business with him will get his bones smashed or be flayed alive. Here! Take him out."

Guards took Yang into a room where all was ready for his interrogation. Kao Ta-cheng was seated in the highest place. Yang strode swiftly into the middle of the room and stood there with shoulders squared, not uttering a word.

Kao Ta-cheng pounded the table. "Who are you trying to impress, striking an attitude like a big shot? This is a court of law, so stop swaggering. Lower you head."

Yang remained motionless as a statue, deaf to this tirade.

"Where do you live? What is your name? What have you been up to? Out with the truth now."

Yang had intended to keep quiet so as to carry out a long, persistent struggle in the enemy's court. This vicious attack at the very start was more than he had bargained for. To accept it in silence would be unworthy of a Communist. With a glance round the room he said coolly:

"Try to behave with a little more self-restraint. Are you a mad dog?"

"Who do you think you are?" bellowed Kao. "How dare you speak as if we were equals? What a nerve!"

"Equals, did you say? Don't insult me."

"That's enough from you. I've no time to argue with him, Adjutant Tien. Take him out. Put a couple of bullets through this stinking Red."

Adjutant Tien drew his pistol and yelped, "Get going!" The guards shoved Yang outside. Tien walked a few paces ahead of him and then suddenly, without any warning, fired two shots just past his ears. Realizing that this was meant to break his nerve, Yang snorted and threw a scornful look at Tien. When they returned to the court room, Fan Ta-chang hurried frantically forward.

"Thank goodness I came," he cried. "Do you know who this is, Commander Kao?" He whispered something to the commander, who made a great show of astonishment.

"There's been a misunderstanding. How could such a thing have happened?" After this perfunctory apology Kao loosed a flood of foul abuse at his subordinates, then insisted on shaking hands with Yang, whom he ordered the guards to take away to rest. "Here ends the first act," thought Yang.

Early the next morning four or five orderlies brought in a pile of stuff: a teapot and bowls, a tooth-mug and basin, cigarettes and tea, papers and magazines, and even a new quilt. Yang looked superciliously at this bait and waited grimly for developments.

That afternoon Fan Ta-chang called. This old fox asked solicitously after Yang's health and proceeded to chat as if they were old friends.

"If you've something to say, out with it," urged Yang, tiring of this play-acting. "If not, go."

Then Fan divulged that Kao Ta-cheng had invited a few friends to a feast to make amends for the discourteous treatment Yang had received.

"What's the idea?" demanded Yang.

"Just to show Commander Kao's respect for you. He wants to be friends. Commander Kao will make a short speech of welcome before this small gathering, and you may care to say a few words."

Yang curtly refused to walk into their trap.

Since persuasion had failed, Fan Ta-chang gave a cough. This was the signal for five or six policemen to enter and prepare to lay rough hands on the prisoner.

"Keep your hands off him!" barked Fan. "What did Commander Kao say? If we can't induce him to go, he'll come in person."

Yang saw this clash was not to be avoided.

"Quit fooling about," he said. "I'll go."

"Would you be willing to say a few words?"

"We'll see when the time comes."

The others looked exultant.

"I'll leave you to rest," said Fan. "I must ring up Commander Kao. I'll come back this evening to fetch you."

In the evening Kao Ta-cheng was the first to arrive at the Yenlo Restaurant, where he proposed to stage a splendid show with himself as the chief actor and some puppet army officers and civil officials as his supporting cast. The bright fluorescent light in the central hall shone on tables lavishly spread with drinks, delicacies and an imposing array of wine-glasses. On the main table stood a microphone between two vases of flowers. The guests arrived punctually, as did the press photographers who took up their positions and fixed up their arc-lamps. Kao had practised the speech drafted for him by his assistant a couple of times, underlining in red the words he did not know and marking their pronunciation. All they were waiting for now was the Communist guest. If he was willing to appear they would print a statement in his name, put his photograph in the papers and show shots of him in newsreels. He would be hooked then, whether he liked it or not.

Yang arrived, apparently in a good humour. "Everyone likes status and comfort," thought Kao. "The Reds are no exception." He greeted Yang politely in the lounge and explained that he had invited him to meet a few prominent men to show his regret for the unfortunate incident the previous day.

Yang made no reply, still waiting to see just what was in store for him. Kao took his silence to mean consent and cheerfully announced that the feast would start. He ordered the doors to be opened and led the way into the central hall.

All the guests stood up to greet him. The arc-lamps went on and the two photographers knelt down to focus. Some subordinates folded back their sleeves the better to clap, watching with astonishment as, instead of clumping up to the microphone, Kao picked his way towards it with unnatural restraint. Once there, turning round, he saw that Yang was missing.

"Won't you come this way?" Kao beckoned with the script in his hand.

"Not until you kick out those two photographers."

Yang himself was out of sight, but the guests turned in surprise at the sound of his voice.

"He's got a nerve for someone who's come over."

"He obviously doesn't know Commander Kao's temper."

"Kao will flay him alive for that."

To their astonishment, Kao Ta-cheng's first skirmish with Yang had taught him "moderation." After a barely perceptible pause he signed to the photographers, who slunk off carrying their apparatus.

"Turn off those damn lamps. This place shouldn't be brightly lit."

This order was addressed to Adjutant Tien by the door, and he hesitated. But yesterday Yang had proved a hard man to cope with; besides, Commander Kao had obediently dismissed the photographers. Without waiting for Kao's permission Tien switched off the arc-lamps.

Yang Hsiao-tung strode into the middle of the hall.

"What do you think you're playing at here?" he demanded. "Let's have some plain talking. Is this a civil or military gathering? If you want to use force there are enough of you to kill me, but you'll never make me give in. If you want to argue things out, you'll have to be more polite. Threats will get you nowhere."

Fan Ta-chang hastily stepped forward to save the situation.

"Who talks of using force?" he protested. "I told you, Commander Kao has invited everyone for a meal because he wants to say a few words."

Kao Ta-cheng, although glowering, still had his script in his hands. Apparently he meant to go through with his scheme. So Yang, to forestall him, went up to the microphone.

"In that case, let me say a few words first. We Communists make no secret of our views. We're never afraid to say just what we think. All you gentlemen hold influential positions in the provincial capital. In the eyes of the Japanese, you have 'courage' and have rendered 'conspicuous services.'" Yang, speaking calmly, made a natural pause here.

Kao Ta-cheng started exulting at what he believed to be Yang's change of heart. Lan Mao, Adjutant Tien and the rest were reassured too by the mild tone he was taking, which seemed to promise that all would be well. The only man not to share the general relief was Kuan Ching-tao. He had not wanted to attend this feast at all, having heard in his headquarters that a leading Communist cadre was capitu-

lating. It struck him as strange that a high-ranking cadre should prove weaker than two women. He had come, therefore, in a sceptical frame of mind. Yang's entrance made him quail, for he remembered him from Pali Village. Each time Yang looked round the room, Kuan took cover behind burly Pockmarked Wolf; but he listened intently to every word Yang said.

"What do these 'conspicuous services' consist of? You've helped the Japs to invade China, to trample over our land all these years, to hold the highways and towns. To the Japs, short as they are of cannon-fodder, of course these count as 'conspicuous services.' Your 'courage' is considerable too. The Chinese people hate Japanese imperialism, but first you call Japan a friendly neighbour, next a brother country; and finally that arch traitor Wang Ching-wei comes right out to acknowledge Japan as his fatherland. He hopes to become the Emperor's adopted son. This 'courage' you've shown in betraying your own country and your ancestors has never been equalled, no, not by the most treacherous officials in all our long history...."

"Shut your mouth!" bellowed Kao Ta-cheng. "I was doing you an honour but you start raving. You don't appreciate my generosity."

"If I appreciated your 'generosity,' I'd lose my own self-respect and lose face for the whole camp of resistance to Japan." With that Yang kicked over the table. Crash! Plates and glasses smashed, food and wine spilled over the floor, flowers scattered far and wide. The hall was in an uproar.

"Drag him off!" yelled Kao Ta-cheng.

Pockmarked Wolf and some other officers swarmed forward. Half a dozen guns pointed at Yang's chest. Fingers tightened on the triggers.

Calm and unruffled, he scoffed, "Foxes relying on the tiger's might. Those few paltry guns of yours would hardly scare a child. My case isn't one your petty security headquarters can settle. No, not even if you trotted out all your puppet heads — they'd be afraid to take the responsibility. If you doubt that, I dare you to fire!" He pointed to his heart.

Pockmarked Wolf and the others exchanged covert glances, then made way for Kao Ta-cheng.

Kao took the pistol from Adjutant Tien's hand and flourished it at Yang. "Who do you think you're bluffing? I don't fancy killing you just yet. If I did, one pull on the trigger and you'd be done for."

"And how would you square that with your Japanese bosses?"

"I wouldn't have to. Your life is in my hands. One word from Kao Ta-cheng and you're a dead man."

"You can only murder Communists and progressives in secret. When we arrest you later on, we'll try you out in a public square in the sunshine, where thousands of people will pass judgement on you."

"Empty talk is all you Communists are good for."

"This isn't empty talk. History will punish your crimes just as I've said."

Kao suddenly burst out laughing. "I'm not a little schoolboy with a satchel. Don't talk to me about history and geography. I'm the commander with power of life and death. You brag about passing judgement on me. I'm about to pass judgement on you. Brigade Leader Lan! Take this big-mouthed bastard away and teach him a lesson."

When Yang Hsiao-tung came to, he saw from the iron grille in front of him and the heavy lock on the grille that he was back in his original cell.

After Kao Ta-cheng had put him to the torture, Fan Ta-chang tried to win him over with bribes of money and beautiful girls; but he held out inflexibly. Finally the enemy tried a last trick.

"All right," said Fan Ta-chang. "You don't mind what becomes of you, but you ought to have more consideration for your family."

"My family?" Yang hesitated a second. "The whole people can be called my family. Equally well, you might say I've no family."

"Really? Please come with me."

Fan Ta-chang led the way past the rockery and flower beds to two new storeyed buildings. They went into one of these. Fan led Yang to an upstairs window and pointed to the opposite house, twenty yards away.

"You say you have no family, Mr. Yang. That's a lie. To prove it, look at that window over there." Fan pressed a bell, and the next minute the lights came on in the other house, showing a figure silhouetted against the window. At the first glance Yang recognized his mother. Unspeakable anguish wrung his heart and made his brain reel. His eyes misted over, his knees buckled, and he sank hastily on to the window ledge.

"Communists have a father and mother like everyone else. If you don't care what happens to you, you should at least have pity on an old lady...." Nothing pleases agents better than to torture a victim through his love for his dear ones. Fan loosed a flood of eloquence which lasted well over ten minutes. This ended with the assurance that if Yang Hsiao-tung would give them a list of the underground workers' names, his mother would escape torture and gain her immediate release. Mother and son could be reunited and live in comfort, wanting for nothing. Fan harped on this theme until his throat was dry.

Yang reflected painfully. At last he answered gruffly, "You can kill me, and my mother too. But if you've a shred of human decency, kill us separately. Don't let her know about me...."

"How can you accuse us of having no human decency?" countered the crafty traitor. "Since fate has brought you together, of course we'll let your mother see her son."

In vain Yang protested. Two guards dragged him to a balcony on the third floor of the other house. His mother was sitting on the next balcony, barely three yards away. The hazy moonlight revealed how much she had aged. Her hair was white, her face pale, with dark circles under the eyes. But despite her exhaustion she sat there on tenterhooks, her eyes fixed on the path below, as if longing for yet dreading his arrival. With a bursting heart Yang leaned over the balustrade and called to her:

"Mother!"

She turned at the sound of the familiar voice, torn between joy and anguish. Her lips trembled. At last she faltered:

"Hsiao-tung. Son...."

"Mother! We shan't have long together, and we're not at home now. Whatever you want to say to me, choose your words carefully."

"Don't worry. I understand." She was making a supreme effort to keep her voice steady, not wanting to shame her son by any display of weakness.

"There's no need to explain how we got here, mother. It would only waste time and upset you more. Let's have a cosy chat as we did in the old days."

But a cosy chat was impossible under those conditions. Neither found anything to say. It was Yang who broke the silence.

"Let me tell you something, mother. As a fighter in the resistance, a Communist, I've done nothing to disgrace the revolution or the people. But when I think of all you went through to bring me up and what a bad son I've been, when I realize I'm the one who's involved you in this, it's almost more than I can bear."

"Don't say such things, I won't listen." The sudden blare of a klaxon below was the signal for all the lights in the building to come on. The bulbs above their heads lit up. Tramping feet entered the room behind the balcony where Yang was standing, and out swarmed a crowd of thugs headed by Kao Ta-cheng, Lan Mao and Adjutant Tien. Yang signed to his mother and she said no more.

Fan Ta-chang stepped out on to the balcony and announced, "I've been listening to this moving exchange between mother and son. Let me repeat what I told you an hour ago. Communists have a father and mother like everyone else and should show a little filial piety. Here's Commander Kao come specially to see you. If you give us that list of names, he promises to free you both right away."

"What? Betray my comrades? You're dreaming."

Kao Ta-cheng strode forward and gripped the balustrade. He was tempted to lash out at Yang but thought better of it.

"It's out of pure kindness I'm allowing you to see your mother, Yang," he said. "I'm doing you a favour. Why be so stubborn? We respect a man with your guts. Recant and that car down below will take you and the old lady out. All right, I'll make it even easier for you. I won't ask you for a list of Communists, just for your signature."

"Shut your dirty mouth, you dog. Spare me this tomfoolery."

"How dare you insult me!" Kao's eyes were nearly starting from his head. "That's quite enough. I've given you every chance. Take him out and shoot him down by the rockery."

Yang turned to the next balcony. "Don't grieve for me, mother," he cried. "Dying this way is better than living on." Drawing himself proudly erect, he followed the guards.

Fan Ta-chang thought quickly and whispered something to Kao. The commander listened with a scowl on his face, but as soon as Yang reached the stairs he called, "Wait a bit. Bring the prisoner back." He walked up to Yang and swore, "You'd like to die and be done with it, I know. I'm not letting you off so lightly. I'll have you and your mother tortured turn and turn about — while the other one looks on. If your mother wants to save you, she'll talk. If you want to save her, you'll talk. We'll see whether I get that signature or not."

Mrs. Yang was nearly frantic. She had no intention of giving away the fine youngsters in the underground, but how long would the enemy torture her and her son? How could she bear to see Hsiao-tung tortured or subject him to such an ordeal?

"Out of my way!" she cried, standing up and clapping her hands. "Let me talk to your Commander Kao."

She stepped to the edge of the balcony and caught hold of the balustrade.

"Think this rabble of yours can frighten my son?" she demanded. "You'd better think again. My boy always does as I tell him. If you know what's good for you, get out of our way. Let me talk to him in private."

Kao Ta-cheng eyed her suspiciously and said nothing.

"We can't fly away. What are you afraid of? Don't you want his signature?"

Kao and Fan exchanged glances and dubiously gave their consent. The sentries withdrew while Mrs. Yang was helped to the balcony where her son was. The moment they were alone, he put his arms round her and said urgently, "A signature isn't a small matter, mother. There's so much at stake. Surely you understand that?"

"How can you misjudge me so?" Her lips trembled at the unjust implication. "Raise your head, son, and look into my eyes."

He did as she said.

"Do you understand now?"

"Yes, mother." He nodded, hardly able to speak. "What have you to say to me?"

"What can I say? You mustn't think, Hsiao-tung, that I hold this against you. No, I'm proud to have a son like you. Proud and glad. I'm not going to make it harder for you. Oh, there's something I forgot to tell you." Her thin, ravaged face lit up, but she kept her voice down so that no one else could hear. "I've chosen you a girl who'll make you happy. I gave her my red ring, and she didn't refuse it...."

The door to the balcony opened and Lan Mao came out to part them, claiming that what they were discussing had nothing to do with signing a confession. The other secret-service men crowded out to the balcony too. Lan Mao raised his voice to ask Kao Ta-cheng:

"Shall we take the son first? Or first beat up the mother?"

"Have them both strung up," ordered Kao.

"One minute!" begged Mrs. Yang. "Let me say one last word to him." She took her son's head between her hands and stroked his hair, bathing his cheeks with her hot tears. But when she saw the pity and grief on his face, she pushed him abruptly away.

"I'm not going to make things harder for you, Hsiao-tung, son. For the victory of the War of Resistance, for the happiness of future generations, mind you hold out to the last!"

In two swift steps she reached the balustrade and slipped over. She flung herself down, head first, from the third floor.

It was midnight when Fan Ta-chang sent Yang back to his cell.

"This is your last chance," he threatened. "If you haven't given us a list of underground workers by this time tomorrow, you'll be shot."

Yang spent the whole night trying to think of some way to escape. He could see no chance, however, of breaking out.

When morning came, the padlock rattled and the door opened. A different cook, one with a black moustache, had brought his breakfast. Carrying a tray of steamed buns and congee to the grille he said:

"However desperate things look, you must keep up your strength."

The sympathy in his voice made Yang look at him more closely.

"Everyone knows Black-pan Chao has a soft heart," said the cook, as if to himself. "I've taken special trouble over these steamed buns."

Taking the hint, Yang reached out quickly for the one indicated, recalling as he did so that this Chao was the cook they had set free.

As soon as both guard and cook had left, Yang split open the bun and found a wax pill inside. In the pill was a screw of paper. He straightened it out and read:

> Don't worry. We're going to break into the jail and rescue you. So be ready. If you've any ideas, let us know.
>
> Liang and Han

This obviously came from Team Leader Liang and Han Yen-lai, and the concern of his comrades outside stirred him deeply. When Fan Ta-chang came back at noon to apply more pressure, Yang had two requests to make. First, he asked to be killed at once. Secondly, if the enemy refused, he demanded better treatment, freedom and a longer time to think things over. He absolutely rejected the twenty-four hours' ultimatum. He must have a week at least. After consultation with Kao Ta-cheng, Fan agreed to letting him have wine and meat as well as books to read. He was to remain confined in this cell, however, and only allowed an extra two days' grace.

Yang made full use of these concessions and sent word through Old Chao to Liang and Han outside.

Now only two hours were left. Could his comrades rescue him in this short time? Even if they succeeded in getting in, they would fail unless he himself co-operated. He stood up and paced his cell. Hefty, on guard in the outer room, called out:

"Well? Did you have a good supper?"

"It was lousy. I bawled them out."

"No grog?"

"A whole bottleful, but I don't feel like drinking."

Hefty became more expansive and hinted that he could do with a drink himself. Yang agreed but the other guard Squint-eyes objected. However, Hefty took a key out of his pocket, unlocked the cell door, switched on the light and came in. He was reaching out towards the grille when Squint-eyes caught hold of his sleeve; but Yang passed him out the bottle to see what would happen. Squint-eyes tried to snatch it away.

"If you won't listen to me, I'll report you to Adjutant Tien," he threatened. "Then you'll catch it."

"Who the hell is Adjutant Tien?" demanded Hefty. "Commander Kao's pansy boy. I could shoot with two hands before he could load a gun." He tilted the bottle and swigged half at one draught. While Squint-eyes swore at him, he emptied the bottle. Then, forgetting to lock the door or switch off the light, they went out squabbling and cursing.

"You bastard!" Yang heard Squint-eyes fume presently. "You're pissed."

When Hefty only grunted by way of reply Yang guessed that he had pretty well passed out. He was acutely on edge. If only his rescuers would come while his cell door was unlocked! Then he heard Squint-eyes shout:

"Hey! Come here, will you! Give me a hand. This fool is plastered."

Footsteps approached.

"I couldn't even have handled one, and now there are two of them," thought Yang ruefully.

"Which unit are you?" asked Squint-eyes.

"Fourth Company of the First Regiment."

"Aren't you stationed by the mill?"

"We were transferred the day before yesterday to guard the storehouse in the front yard here."

Yang's heart leapt up, for he recognized Han Yen-lai's voice.

"What's your name?"

"Han Ta-yen."

"Well, Han Ta-yen, go and tell them, will you, this fellow here has passed out. Ask Adjutant Tien to send two replacements."

"I don't know the higher-ups yet. You'd better go yourself."

"All right, if you'll stand guard and keep an eye on this drunkard. I'll be straight back."

"Can do. Just give me the key."

"The key? Heavens! We haven't locked the door."

Squint-eyes took the key from Hefty's pocket, put it in his own and started towards Yang's cell to lock the door. Han Yen-lai could have kicked himself for messing things up. He was wondering what to do when he heard Yang call:

"Lock them both while you're about it. The grille's open too."

As Han darted in to look, Yang signed to him. Young Han was quick in the uptake. "Hey!" he exclaimed to Squint-eyes. "How did your prisoner get out?"

Appalled, Squint-eyes was stepping in to investigate when Han gave him a great kick from behind which sent him staggering over to the grille. There a bottle caught him on the head and knocked him out.

Han Yen-lai darted in with his duplicate key and unlocked the massive padlock. Yang was out in a flash, but before the two men could leave they heard a voice outside.

"Who's that lying there? What does this mean?"

It was Fan Ta-chang's voice. Yang signed to young Han and they made ready to fight. When Fan discovered Hefty in a drunken stupor, he knew something was wrong and ordered his bodyguard to search the cell. As the man came in, gun in hand, he revceived a crack on the head from the big padlock. Fan took to his heels to spread the alarm, and although Han tried to grab him he got away.

"Let him go," cried Yang, stopping Han from giving chase. "We must get out."

"Run south through the side gate. Old Chao's waiting for you."

"There's a guard at that gate."

"I dealt with him on my way in." With that he pushed Yang off and they rushed away. Once through the side gate, Han pointed east to the high prison wall.

"Old Chao is waiting by the manhole there," he said. "Run for it! If the enemy come, I'll hold them up."

"No, don't wait. Let's go together."

"I'll hold them up, I tell you, while you get well away. I'm all right in this uniform. Hurry."

Yang raced across the lawn to the clock tower, where a dark figure was lurking. It was Old Chao.

"So you made it!" he exclaimed excitedly. "Get down there quick. I tried it last night, you can get through. Watch out for the sentry on the river bank."

"As soon as I'm down," said Yang, "run and tell the comrade holding the side gate. He must leave at once." Still worrying about Han Yen-lai, he crawled quickly through the sewer until he found himself at the river bank. He heard a great commotion and several shots in the courtyard of the puppet command headquarters. It was Han holding up the enemy to cover his escape. There was no time to lose, but which way should he go? Impossible to enter the city, and to both south and west were enemy strongholds. Bending low he ran northwest.

When Old Chao delivered Yang's message, young Han remembered that Team Leader Liang and the others had decided that after Yang's escape they should send him to Pali Village. While Han Yen-lai entered the command headquarters Chang Hsiao-shan would wait by the bridge near the mill, Liang, Fatty and the rest by the moat. But in his eagerness to get Yang out, Han had forgotten to give him this crucial information. It was too late now. He urged Old Chao to get under cover while he held the enemy for a while so that Yang might get further away. When they charged the side gate he fired several shots at them and then, taking advantage of the general confusion, he dropped his gun, climbed the wall and sped away.

CHAPTER 20

For a week Yin-huan had lost all appetite and lived like one in a trance, hardly knowing what she was doing.

She had fainted when Yang was arrested, and when she came to the army truck had vanished. At her wit's end, she went to make a clean breast of this to Han Yen-lai and his sister. Leaning against their back door, she confessed remorsefully that the information she gave the renegade had led to Yang Hsiao-tung's capture. Han Yen-lai was so enraged by this fearful news that without a word he thrust her out of the house. She went back, conscience-stricken, to her friend Yeh, explained the situation to her and urged her to leave the hospital at once before Kao Tzu-ping could have her arrested too.

Next Yin-huan went to Aunt Hsing who kept a tea-house. There she sat up all night writing a detailed account of Yang Hsiao-tung's arrest for Department Head Hsiao, as well as a request for disciplinary action against herself. She begged the Party to punish the renegade and rescue Yang. Writing this gave her some relief, until it occurred to her that it would be hard for the Party to deal with Kao Tzu-ping while he was still under enemy jurisdiction; and Yang's rescue must depend on the resistance workers in town, yet there was very little they could do. The next day she appealed to Kuan Ching-tao, but it appeared that he was powerless too. A few days later he told her:

"Six hours from now they mean to shoot Yang Hsiao-tung. You'd better get ready for his funeral."

In utter despair she wandered out towards the country, walking along the railway embankment.

"You're my most beloved and respected teacher and comrade," she murmured, as if uttering a prayer. "How could either of us ever dream that I, who would gladly have given my life to protect you, would be responsible for your arrest? If someone takes the wrong road, it's possible to turn back; but I shall never be able to atone for this mistake, not even if I work for the Party to the end of my life. Unknowingly I've done irreparable damage, because I was deceived by a renegade. And there's no one I can tell how wretched I am. Chin-huan's dead, Han Yen-lai can't forgive me. If only Mrs. Yang were still alive! I'm utterly on my own, and no one trusts me."

"The Party trusts you." This assurance from overhead electrified her. Summoning up all her courage, she looked up through the

gloom at the speaker who was barely a yard away. Not daring to trust her eyes, she whispered:

"Who are you?"

"The one you've just been talking about."

"Alive?"

"Of course."

"I'm not dreaming?"

"How could you be? Here we are talking quietly by the railway tracks."

Shaking off all her fears, she overcame her normal reticence and seized his hands.

"Hsiao-tung! What you've made me suffer! No, you're the one who's suffered because of me. Let me tell you just what happened."

"Another time. It's dangerous to stay here."

"Come with me, then."

They walked swiftly away and slipped into the Hsing Family Tea-house. Having bolted the door Yin-huan suggested that instead of disturbing the Hsings, who were in bed, they should have a good talk while all around was quiet. But Yang knew they were still in danger and insisted on waking the old couple, to be prepared in case of an enemy search.

Aunt Hsing was so terrified by the arrival of an escaped prisoner, she dared not light a lamp. She groped in the dark for some of her son's clothes and made Yang change out of his dirty garments, which she hid in a stack of fuel. They were discussing the story they should tell if challenged and what their relationship to each other should be, when a tumult broke out in the south. Presently horses galloped past from the east, while motor-bikes roared past the railway. Their dazzling lights shone through the western window of the tea-house, making the room inside as bright as day and revealing the tense expressions of everyone there. Once these lights had passed they began to breathe more freely, but then knocking and shouts by the West Gate broke the silence, striking dread into all who heard them so late at night. Yang knew that this large-scale search was for him, but he was cut off here with nowhere to hide. All he could do was to urge the rest to keep calm, remember their stories, and not lose their

heads under enemy interrogation. Although Aunt Hsing was a shrewd, experienced woman, she had never been in such a tight place before.

"May the gods preserve us!" she prayed again and again. "We're all honest folk here. Spare these two little rooms."

The resolve to protect Yang gave Yin-huan unwonted courage. "If we come through this, we'll go to the base together," she thought. "If we're caught, I'll go to jail and die with him."

The thunderous knocking was steadily drawing nearer. It would soon be their turn. Sure enough, there now came a pounding on the gate.

"Open up there!"

"Open the gate!"

Curses followed in a variety of accents. Aunt Hsing waited for Yin-huan and Yang to get set in the annexe before opening the gate. But by the time she stepped into the yard, the bamboo fence and wooden gate had been smashed. In poured a mob of puppet security troops. When she tried to stop them, no one paid any attention. Roughly and contemptuously they swept her aside. Once in the little tea-house, the puppet troops jabbed everything in sight with their bayonets — a technique they had learned from the Japanese. The portière was torn up, the bellows trampled on, empty teapots tossed into the air and smashed. Old Hsing, squatting trembling on the *kang*, received a few blows for no reason, and Aunt Hsing squeezed her way in through the soldiers to explain that her husband was a deaf mute. The puppet platoon leader had just ordered his men to push the old man out when he discovered the annexe, and this aroused his suspicion. At a signal from him, a dozen men with mounted bayonets converged on the doorway.

Asked who was in the annexe, Aunt Hsing could not speak for fright. But at this point Yin-huan stepped out. Confronting the glittering bayonets and blocking the doorway she asked:

"What d'you think you're doing?"

"Searching for a bandit," answered a squad leader, leering at her from over the platoon leader's shoulder.

"There are no bandits here."

"Out of our way! Let's see who you've got on that bed." The platoon leader raised the portière and prepared to shove her aside.

"That's my husband. He's very ill with typhus. You can't go in." Once more she blocked the way.

"You're lying. If he were ill he'd be in hospital. Drag that fellow out."

Just as the soldiers were forcing their way past her to carry out these orders, the puppet troops outside made way to admit a tall officer — Kuan Ching-tao. Yin-huan rushed up to him, protesting:

"Commander, can't you keep your men in order? My husband's ill, but they're taking him away. Is it against the law to come to town to see a doctor?" Her eyes held another message: "It's up to you now, Kuan. Which side are you on? Here's your chance to prove yourself."

Kuan Ching-tao grasped the appeal in Yin-huan's eyes without understanding the whole situation. He strode into the annexe. The puppet troops stood to attention while the eyes of their officer and the prisoner met. Kuan recoiled abruptly.

"Who is he?" he asked to cover his confusion, addressing the room in general.

"My husband," replied Yin-huan curtly.

"He's our son-in-law," faltered Aunt Hsing. "Come into town for treatment."

"He's a suspicious character, regimental commander," insisted the platoon leader. "Let's arrest him."

"We're after an important Red who's broken jail," snapped Kuan. "What's the use of arresting a sick man? While we're wasting time here the real criminal may get away. Come on, let's go."

The troops clattered out, Kuan bringing up the rear. With a glance at Yin-huan he called to Aunt Hsing, "If your son-in-law has typhus, he should be isolated. Don't keep him at home."

Yin-huan and Yang knew from this warning and the commotion outside that it was out of the question to stay there long. But since the enemy were sure to have tightened up the blockade, they decided to

go to the hospital outside town where Yeh was now working and get her to hide them.

Yeh was overjoyed by Yang's escape.

"You've come to the right place to weather this storm," she told them. "I've just the hide-out for you. It's a private ward very close to my room, and empty."

Having settled them in, she left.

"Have something to drink," said Yin-huan, pouring Yang some water.

As he turned to take the cup, the light made the ring on Yin-huan's finger sparkle. Forgetting his thirst, Yang stared at it in amazement.

Yin-huan looked down to see if something was wrong. When she knew that he was staring at his mother's ring, her hand trembled so that the water spilled and she had to put down the cup.

"Where did you get that ring?" he asked.

"It's...." She hung her head in confusion and was silent for several minutes. But what need was there for concealment after all that had taken place? She took a deep breath and told him the whole story.

"... How could I refuse your mother anything at a time when her life was in danger? Could I add to her distress? But now I'll return it to its rightful owner." She pulled off the ring and handed it to him.

Yang took it, immeasurably touched by his mother's love and the goodness of this staunch, warm-hearted comrade-in-arms. He stared at Yin-huan in silence as if seeing her for the first time, until the girl began to blush and lowered her eyes. At that he made a decision and, stepping forward, repeated what she had said:

"Now I'll return it to its rightful owner. Please give me your hand."

"But you can't. You've a wife already."

"When did you hear that?"

"Last time you went to the mountains."

"How news travels! Yes, Department Head Hsiao did propose I should marry—you."

"Comrade Yang...."

He slipped the ring on to her finger. "You have some feeling for me, haven't you? The fact is, I fell in love with you long ago. The first evening I came to the city and you lent me your cardigan, I was drawn to you by your sweetness and kindness." He took her in his arms and stroked her hair.

Yin-huan, looking up at his pale face and unkempt hair, thought with infinite compassion, "How war ages a man! Those traitors in town who don't care what becomes of our country look sleek and young even when they're ten or twenty years older than he. He isn't thirty yet, but how he's aged." Still, she knew how war tempered men too. War was a mighty furnace, subjecting fighters to sharp yet simple tests which showed up a man's essential character.

With a very full heart she gazed at Yang's thin, haggard face. It was her fault that he had suffered this fearful ordeal. And in this tumultuous struggle their destinies had been joined. Too carried away to maintain her usual reserve, she flung her arms around Yang as if to support him or prevent anyone from snatching him away. There was no need for words, she was content to cling to him in tranquil silence. Presently, however, she raised her head again to look into his eyes.

"You don't just belong to me," she said softly. "You belong to the Party. I must see you safely back."

"Just what exactly do you mean?" He gently released himself.

"Never mind. You must have a good rest. When you've got back your strength, I'll escort you to the base and hand you over to Department Head Hsiao. You can't stay in town after this."

"What's come over you, Yin-huan? Did I come here as a traveller for the fun of it, that I can leave whenever I please? This is our battlefield, comrade, the post to which the Party sent me. Hurry up and find Yeh, and devise a way to get me back into the city. It'll soon be light. Our struggle with the enemy is only just beginning."

After some argument, Yin-huan promised to do as he said. The two girls agreed that he must rest all that day and they would smuggle him into town in disguise that evening, in the hospital's ambulance.

CHAPTER 23

While waiting by the moat for Yang Hsiao-tung, Team Leader Liang had been captured. Yang and Han Yen-lai decided to disguise themselves and hold up the enemy convoy of prisoners to rescue him. After this they would try to persuade Kuan Ching-tao, who had been virtually won over by Yin-huan, to come over to their side with his whole regiment.

The prisoners were rescued late at night, and Yang quickly held a discussion with Liang and his comrades. As soon as his wounds were dressed Liang organized the fifty-odd prisoners into two platoons, headed for the time being by Fatty and Chang Hsiao-shan and equipped with the weapons captured. They rounded up the five puppet squads, ready to follow Yang and run the blockade.

Yang had laid his plans in advance. He ordered young Tang, Kuan's messenger who had been working for some time for the underground, to ring up the regimental commander and announce that big trouble had flared up in the First Regiment's defence area and he should go at once to the First Battalion to cope with the situation. When the call was put through they discovered that Kuan was already at First Battalion headquarters, giving Commander Liu secret instructions: If it was the Eighth Route Army that had attacked the convoy, he was to take no action but shift the blame to the Third Regiment.

Kuan's presence there suited Yang down to the ground. He promptly gave orders for all the men to be driven in the captured trucks to the First Battalion headquarters in Changteng.

Changteng, barely eight *li* from the Luwei River gun tower, was a large village of some four hundred households. The battalion headquarters and two companies occupied two large compounds opposite each other in the middle of the main street. As the trucks drew up there, Team Leader Liang sent Fatty and some of his men to cover the entrances of both compounds with machine-guns.

Yang, escorted by Han Yen-lai and a few others, dashed straight into the battalion headquarters office.

Kuan Ching-tao and Battalion Commander Liu were just receiving telephoned orders from Commander Kao to find out the reason for

the shooting near Luwei River. Yang, marching in, told them to ring off and shook Kuan's hand. Before shaking hands with Battalion Commander Liu he whispered his underground number. Liu's face lit up, for he too was in the resistance; but Yang signed to him to say nothing. He went on to explain the whole position, to Kuan's growing consternation.

"If it were just a question of helping your men get away, we could fake the despatch," said Kuan. "But you've killed Japanese troops in our defence area — that's a monstrous calamity."

"Do you call it a monstrous calamity?" fumed Han. "To us it's the finest thing that could happen. Have you no conscience? The Eighth Route Army's let you off lightly, yet you're still sitting on the fence. We've machine-guns trained on your gate, I don't mind telling you. Come over, and there's an honourable future for you. If you refuse, we'll capture you here and now."

By now Team Leader Liang had joined them. Yang had told him Kuan Ching-tao's position on the way, but Liang remained sceptical. He followed up Han's threat by calling Chang Hsiao-shan and young Tang to tie Kuan up.

Staggered to find that his own messenger took orders from them, Kuan proposed that he and Yang work out a compromise.

"All depends on you now," said Yang. "If you won't make up your mind to this, the Eighth Route Army will have to stop being polite. In any case, even if we let you off lightly, you can imagine what Kao Ta-cheng and the Japanese would do to you."

His head in his hands, Kuan did some painful thinking.

"Frankly, it's too late now for a compromise," said Yang. "You've got to choose sides. If you choose the honourable course, we'll help you solve any problems you may have."

Kuan turned to sound out Battalion Commander Liu. "I said all along it would come to this," he remarked.

"Of course," was the reply.

Waking up to Liu's political stand, Kuan added, "I'm all for it. But what about the men?"

"That's no problem," Yang assured him. "Call a staff conference and order the men to assemble in front of the Second Battalion's barracks."

"It's easy to call a staff conference. But quite a few of them have their families to think of. You've sprung this too suddenly."

"Don't worry about your families," replied Yang. "They're all being taken care of. I don't just mean Madame Kuan either, but Battalion Commander Liu's wife, Battalion Commander Shen's wife, and the wives of all your company commanders. I reckon they're well out of the city by now."

What happened next was like magic. In came an orderly to deliver a letter addressed in Yin-huan's hand to Kuan, but with a note from Mrs. Kuan inside. She said that she and several officers' wives, bringing their valuables and necessaries, had left town by truck with Yin-huan. By the time he received this they should be at least twenty *li* away. In conclusion, she hoped she would be able to stand among the cheering crowd on the Tiao Mountains to welcome her husband's return to his country's arms now that he had chosen this honourable course of revolt. This letter effectively cooled Kuan's fevered brain.

Just then a call came through from the puppet command headquarters. Battalion Commander Liu announced that it was for Kuan from Kao Ta-cheng, but Kuan was reluctant to answer the telephone. Yang reached out for the receiver.

"Hullo. Commander Kao? Is it about the shooting? Yes, there's been trouble in the Luwei River district. Communists disguised as our men attacked the convoy.... We counter-attacked successfully and captured the whole lot. Yes, the leader too. He's that fellow Yang who escaped from the jail in your command headquarters. We've brought them all to Changteng, yes. We're cross-examining them carefully. Yes, sir. Yes.... We hope you'll come yourself, commander. I? I'm the staff officer on duty. You want the regimental commander? Hold on...." Covering the receiver, Yang handed it to Kuan. "Kao Ta-cheng wants to talk to you. Don't hesitate. Just confirm what I said."

Kuan had no choice but to comply. After ringing off he asked, "Suppose Kao Ta-cheng really comes?"

"Don't worry," said Team Leader Liang. "Let him. We're ready for him."

They were interrupted by the entry of Commander Shen of the Second Battalion, who announced that the officers had assembled and were waiting for the regimental commander to start the meeting. Liu took Shen aside for a whispered consultation, after which they approached Kuan and Yang.

"There shouldn't be any problem with our two battalions," they said. "We'll follow the regimental commander. But Commander Kou Chang-hai of the Third Battalion is a ruffian who's always been thick with Kao Ta-cheng. We'll have to watch out for him at this meeting."

"That's all right," said Yang. "Go ahead with your conference, Regimental Commander Kuan. Put a bold face on it."

The dozen or so staff officers seated in the conference room had no idea of the purpose of this meeting. Some guessed that they must be setting off on a mission, as the troops had all been mustered. Commander Kou Chang-hai of the Third Battalion was lolling back in an arm-chair opposite the door, his head resting against a pillar, sleeves rolled up and legs astride. From time to time he propped his feet on the table. Having just smoked several pipes of opium, he was chain-smoking in an attempt to clear his head. At Kuan's entrance he removed his feet from the table and nodded, without troubling to stand up. Kuan, ignoring this discourtesy, plunged straight into his speech.

"I wish to consult you, gentlemen, on a most serious subject." He spoke briefly of their duty to their country, the crimes of the Japanese, and the fact that there was no future for traitors, concluding, "I have made up my mind to take the honourable course of resistance. I want the whole regiment to rise in revolt."

This said, he scanned each face in turn to judge their reactions.

Battalion Commander Liu cleared his throat and cried, "I agree."

Battalion Commander Shen had hesitated at first to express an opinion. Now, encouraged by his company commanders' smiles of approval, he nodded agreement too. Kuan turned, emboldened, to the Third Battalion commander.

"Tell me, Regimental Commander Kuan, have you discussed this with Commander Kao?" asked Kou Chang-hai with a frown.

"I can reach a decision without consulting him."

"Well then, do all the officers in the regiment agree?"

"This conference is to collect everyone's opinion."

"If you want my opinion, here it is — I don't agree! Think, brothers, what this means." He too launched into a speech. "This means betraying the Imperial Army. It means selling out Commander Kao. I tell you what. Those who don't mind having their heads cut off by the Japanese, go with him to sweat it out with the Communists. Those who want promotion and wealth with Commander Kao, follow me...."

He was cut short by Han Yen-lai, who whipped out a knife and flung it at Kou Chang-hai's head. The traitor fell from his chair. Han glared at the company and cried:

"All who choose Kou Chang-hai's way, give me your names!"

While the officers were still petrified Han signalled to Kuan, who announced:

"I declare this meeting over. Battalion Commander Liu will lead the troops. The rest of you will follow the regimental command. Get ready to set out immediately."

As the officers were dispersing, young Tang remembered that the 9th Company leader of the Third Battalion was Kou Chang-hai's brother-in-law and the 10th Company leader his fellow provincial. He proposed that both men be disarmed and mounted guard outside while Battalion Commander Shen saw to this. Kuan was beginning to feel more at his ease; but since Changteng was only fifteen *li* from town they could not delay too long. He ordered the First Battalion to abandon all heavy equipment, just taking rifles. They were on the point of setting out when a messenger reported the approach of motorcycles from the Luwei River.

"We're too close to town here," said Kuan anxiously to Yang. "I propose we set out at a run. Kao Ta-cheng is a tough opponent. If he overtakes us...."

"That's all right," said Yang. "We'll be waiting to swallow him up." He ordered Team Leader Liang to withdraw the guards at the gate and let the motor-cycles enter the village.

"A few motor-bikes are no problem," said Kuan. "What if a large force follows?"

"Take it easy. It's barely an hour since the clash by the river, they can't be too clear yet about the situation. Here's a grand chance to pit ourselves against Kao Ta-cheng." In fact, Yang also saw much to be said for setting out immediately, to keep his comrades out of danger and march Kuan's troops off in safety. But the thought of the enemy's viciousness, the blood shed by the underground workers in town and the need to aid the bases in their fight, made him determine to seize the tiger by the tail. Here was a chance to deal Kao a heavy blow.

The motor-cycles arrived. Shouting that they were from command headquarters, the riders did not even stop at the gate but rode arrogant-

ly and recklessly into the yard of the battalion headquarters. The first three to dismount were Fan Ta-chang, Lan Mao and Adjutant Tien, followed by a squad of men. They said they had come to arrest the escaped criminals. Kuan invited the three men round to the back and ordered his aides to entertain the squad in the staff officers' room.

Once they reached the battalion office, Fan Ta-chang said in a lordly way to Kuan, "Didn't you capture the escaped prisoners? I've orders from Commander Kao to take them back." While he was still speaking Yang walked into the room.

"What's this?" cried Lan Mao. "Why haven't you tied him up?"

"Is that necessary?" asked Kuan. "Very well. Tie them up!" A handful of men charged in and bound Fan, Lan and Tien, Team Leader Liang himself trussing up Lan Mao.

Kuan rounded fiercely on Fan Ta-chang. "You damn spy for the Japanese and Kuomintang! How did you plot with the Jap adviser to ruin me?"

Fan muttered some inaudible reply.

"Don't worry about that now," said Yang. "Let them tell us their real purpose in coming here today."

Fan and Lan replied together that they had come to arrest the Communists.

Yang wheeled on Adjutant Tien and swore, "Tell the truth, quick, you! Or I'll have your head."

"I'll tell you," stammered Tien, breaking into a cold sweat. "Commander Kao, I mean Kao Ta-cheng, ordered me to bring a squad of men to see what Regimental Commander Kuan was up to. If he'd really captured the escaped prisoners, we were to take them back to

headquarters; if that convoy was ambushed in the First Regiment's defence area, we were to take Regimental Commander Kuan back for the Japanese to court-martial."

"The devil you were!" swore Kuan. "You always had your knives into me. I've quit just in time. It may interest you to know that I've left the puppet army and chosen a more honourable course — revolt."

At this Fan and the others trembled.

Yang rounded on Tien again. "If you value your life, ring up Kao Ta-cheng and tell him all the prisoners have been captured, but the entire Japanese escort is dead. The regimental commander hopes Commander Kao will come to deal with the matter."

Since Tien dared not disobey, they loosed one of his hands. As he stretched out trembling fingers for the receiver, Yang growled, "Make it sound natural. No stammering or whining."

The adjutant did as he was told, but barely had he asked Kao Ta-cheng to come to Changteng when two shots outside the gate made him drop the receiver in fright. Young Han fetched Kuan and Yang out to report that the puppet squad had been dealt with. When some of them tried to resist, young Tang had run over to help; but in the general confusion the 9th Company commander of the Third Battalion had jumped out of a window and made off on a motor-cycle. Chang Hsiao-shan had fired a couple of shots after him.

"Hunters risk their lives in the hope of bagging a tiger." Yang shook his head and sighed. "We've had bad luck and only caught three wild cats. You see to the prisoners, Team Leader Liang. Regimental Commander Kuan, we must set off now."

Kuan made his favourite First Company lead the way, followed by the battalion command and orderlies. The platoon which had been disarmed by Luwei River was issued now with rifles for every man except the platoon leader. Liang brought up the rear with his newly formed company. They set off at a run to join the Second Battalion.

By the time they reached West Horse Village, Liu had led his force to Yuan Family Village and drawn it up in order. With the whole Second Battalion, the two companies left of the Third Battalion and

the troops led by Kuan, nearly the whole regiment was assembled. While the troops rested in the wood north of the village, Han Yen-lai approached Yang and said softly:

"Comrade Yang, you should remember this village. This is Yuan Family Village, where we met the enemy the first time when we escorted those leading cadres across the line."

At once Yang thought of Chin-huan and said with feeling to Kuan, who was just beside him, "You were impressed by that woman comrade, weren't you? Her name was Chin-huan, and it was she who started the work in this village. It was here, too, that she was captured."

"Comrade Yang," replied Kuan, deeply stirred, "when I think of the blood shed by the revolutionary martyrs, I feel cut to the quick with remorse and guilt. It's because they gave their lives that I'm able to take this glorious path today. To commemorate Chin-huan, I'd like to announce our revolt here to the whole regiment."

"Yes, do say a few words." Yang nodded. "But make it brief. We must push on again in five minutes."

Kuan walked up a hillock in front of the wood and said in ringing tones, "Brother officers and men! I have an important announcement to make to you. I am leading you now on a glorious path to join the great camp of resistance to Japan. All your battalion and company commanders have met to discuss this and support my decision. Though we haven't consulted all of you, I am confident that this is in your interests. I am confident that all of you are with me. Because we are going to join hands with the Communist Party, the Party which stands for the truth."

After this speech the troops set out again. Not far from Yuan Family Village they heard scattered shots from the direction of Chang-teng, and Yang ordered Liang to stay behind with his new company to cover their withdrawal while he and Kuan's troops pressed on quickly to the mountains. The sound of gun-fire made the men speed up. Soon they had covered seven *li* and were far enough from the city to find better organized mass support. It gave them fresh confidence to discover part of the armed work team of the suburbs

waiting for them here, having heard of this revolt. Yang asked these guerrillas to lead the way and Kuan agreed to his going back with Han Yen-lai and seven or eight other men to reinforce Liang's company at Yuan Family Village and bring out their three chief prisoners.

Translated by Gladys Yang
Illustrated by Chiu Sha

A Woman Pilot (Traditional Painting) by Chen Cho-ting ▶

Chen Cho-ting was born in Yungchuan County, Szechuan Province in 1922. He is now working at the Seamen's Cultural House in Wuhan.

Chi Chi-kuang

Friendship Power-station

Picks make bright arcs, horses and men flash past,
Reflected in the stream before the village;
And the piercing blast of whistles
Disturbs the peace of the stream.

The sun is rising in the upper reaches —
A red balloon trailing an emerald ribbon;
Two weeks' hard fight and we've written a grand slogan:
Friendship Power-station Is Finished Ahead of Time!

Chi Chi-kuang is a young worker in the Changchun Automobile Plant. His published works include the collection *Song of the Furnace.*

Fast as races the blood in our veins
The rushing stream keeps the wheels spinning round and round;
In time with our quickened heart-beats
The generator roars its rousing song.

The good earth breaks into a smile of greeting,
The green crops wave a welcome;
The electric mill starts turning on its own
And the radio brings us singing from Peking.

Every face in the commune is beaming with smiles,
This mountain village is bubbling over with joy;
The head of the commune invites us to have a look round,
Each fold of the hills is bright below the red sun.

Between golden boughs and green leaves run electric wires,
A net-work close-knit as our comradeship;
And the children press their ears to the telegraph poles
To hear the footsteps of the fine harvest soon to come.

Translated by Yang Hsien-yi

Akhutanpa is a legendary Tibetan figure, noted for his cleverness and sympathy for the ordinary people. There are many tales about him, two of which we print below.

Dream of a Gold Brick

The grand lama of Tsedrag Monastery was treacherous and avaricious. Akhutanpa decided to play a joke on him.

One day Akhutanpa saw a young monk taking a plate of steaming dumplings to the lama for breakfast. He followed him in. At the sight of Akhutanpa the lama pushed the plate aside and asked leisurely, "Is there something you want?"

"Living Buddha," Akhutanpa said, flattering him with this title, "while opening a plot of wasteland on the hillside west of the village, my hoe struck a heavy yellow object. I took it home. The neighbours assure me that it is a gold brick."

"A gold brick?" The grand lama handed Akhutanpa a dumpling. "What are you going to do with it?"

Eating the dumpling Akhutanpa replied, "I'd like to give half of it to you."

The greedy lama was intrigued. He handed Akhutanpa another dumpling. "Are you serious?"

"That was my original plan. But my mother and others suggest I sell it and donate the money to the monastery."

"Not a bad idea." The grand lama expressed his approval by again handing Akhutanpa a dumpling. "What's your opinion?"

Relishing the dumpling, Akhutanpa replied thoughtfully, "It seems to me that since we're going to make a donation, it would be better just to give the brick to the monastery and save the trouble of selling it."

"Clever, clever." The lama nodded in appreciation, handing Akhutanpa yet another dumpling. "What do the others think?" he asked concernedly.

Akhutanpa shot a glance at the plate and saw that only one dumpling was left. Frowning, he replied regretfully:

"They don't agree. In fact, they argued with me so hotly they awakened me from my dream...."

The Man with No Head

Once there was a ward chief who thought himself very clever. He used this "cleverness" to bully the poor. A glib talker, he often went to the court as "solicitor" for rich people.

The ward chief's servant was a middle-aged man. Being honest and simple, the servant was often taken advantage of by his master.

One day, the ward chief was sitting at home with nothing to do. When the honest servant entered the master said:

"Listen, what's that noise outside?"

"A horse neighing," replied the servant.

"Listen carefully. Are you sure it's a horse?"

"No mistake, it's a horse all right." To convince his master, the servant added, "I saw a man leading it as I was coming in. Perhaps the horse is ill, neighing like that."

"I think you're wrong. It's not a horse, but some other animal."

"Believe me, master, I swear...."

"No need to swear. We shall go out and see. If it's a horse, I'll give you five silver dollars. If it isn't, I'll cut your head off."

The ward chief went out, dragging the servant with him. A neighing horse was being led past the gate.

"Didn't I tell you it's a horse, master? Look," the servant said.

Confronted by the facts, the ward chief should have had nothing more to say. But he retorted, "What? You still insist it's a horse? Very well, let's ask the old man who is leading the animal."

So saying he hurried over and, pointing at the horse's ear, asked the old man:

"What's this?"

"An ear," replied the old man.

Pointing at the horse's eyes, he asked, "What are these?"

"Eyes."

Pointing at the animal's hoofs, he asked, "What are these?"

"Hoofs."

Never once had the old man used the word "horse."

The ward chief happily went back to his house and said to the servant with a false smile, "Now you will let me cut off your head." And he proceeded to draw out a shining sword from the sheath hanging at his waist.

"Spare me, master," the servant pleaded.

"No, I stick to my word. If that were really a horse, wouldn't I have lost five silver dollars?"

The servant saw it was no use to beg for his life, so he said, "If you must kill me, please wait two days. Let me go home and see my wife and child for the last time."

After much pleading by the servant, the ward chief finally consented.

The servant went home and told his story. His wife and child cried as though their hearts would break.

Akhutanpa happened to be passing by and heard the crying. He went in and asked what was wrong.

The servant told him what had happened. Akhutanpa patted his shoulder and said, "Don't worry. You shall not die, I assure you."

The servant thought he was only trying to soothe him and cried more bitterly.

Seeing that the man wasn't convinced, Akhutanpa said, "When Akhutanpa promises something, you can rely on it."

The man brightened up immediately on hearing his name. "So you're Akhutanpa. How can you save me?"

"The day after tomorrow — didn't the ward chief give you two days? — I'll go with you."

Two days later, Akhutanpa and the servant went to the ward chief.

"I hear that you want to cut off his head, is that true? Tell me why," Akhutanpa said as soon as they entered.

The ward chief gave him a short account.

Nodding, Akhutanpa said, "Right, you should cut off his head."

The ward chief drew out his sword and raised it.

"Stop!" shouted Akhutanpa.

"Why?" asked the ward chief, startled.

"You can cut off his head, but nothing else," Akhutanpa declared solemnly.

"Wasn't I aiming at his head just then?"

"No, that wasn't his head. Can't you see? Let's ask him."

Akhutanpa pointed at his hair and asked the servant, "What's this?"

"Hair."

Pointing at the servant's nose, he asked, "What's this?"

"A nose."

Pointing at the servant's neck, he asked, "What's this?"

"A neck."

Turning to the ward chief Akhutanpa said, "You see, he has no head at all. What are you going to cut off? Put your sword away."

The ward chief was non-plussed.

When the honest servant thanked Akhutanpa for saving him, Akhutanpa laughed and said:

"Don't thank me, thank this fancy talker. I learned the trick from him."

Translated by Chang Su
Illustrated by Li Yu-hung

A New Worker

Inside, silver swarf strews the ground
Like a fall of snow;
Outside, snow-flakes fill the sky
Like whirling swarf;
Swarf inside, snow outside,
Hard to tell the two apart.

An inner circle
And an outer circle,
So many workers
Press round the milling machine.

Wang Fang-wu is a young worker in the Changchun Automobile Plant. He has published a collection of poems, *Red Rivet*.

They hear the motor's steady hum,
The cutters' even whirr;
Swarf flies like snow-flakes in the wind,
Belts, shafts and pulleys race like shooting stars,
And the youngster's swift-moving hands
Seem an eagle's outspread wings.

All eyes are sparkling,
All faces beaming with smiles;
And on the edge of the crowd,
His pipe in his mouth,
Content lighting up his face,
Stands Old Chang, grey-haired master worker.

Translated by Yang Hsien-yi

Li Ying-ju

An Episode from the Years of War

I was born in the countryside in Hopei Province. Before the outbreak of the War of Resistance Against Japan in 1937, I studied in a provincial town, living in a small circle out of touch with the masses. My chief interest in those days was literature and I wrote some essays and poems in the old and new styles for newspapers and magazines, but these writings were rather remote from real life, expressing for the most part my personal indignation and discontent in the old society.

The War of Resistance which lasted for eight years brought about a great national awakening; for in this fight for freedom and national liberation the Chinese people determined to throw off their chains and become the masters of an independent country. This war served as a furnace in which all patriotic Chinese were steeled and tempered. By that time I had gone to Peking. When the Japanese aggressors occupied Tientsin and Peking I was among the many patriotic young intellectuals who bitterly and indignantly left the old capital to go to the democratic anti-Japanese bases in the countryside which were

under the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party. There I plunged whole-heartedly into the War of Resistance.

I shall never forget my war experiences. The Eighth Route Army led by the Chinese Communist Party had advanced into the provinces of Shansi and Hopei which were occupied by the enemy, converting the enemy rear into a battle front and setting up bases in the parts of the occupied areas which had been abandoned by the Kuomintang. Living with the peasants and waging guerrilla warfare, in the space of a few years I marched through most of the provinces in north China and stayed in hundreds of villages. During one period my work involved travelling in disguise between the hills and the plains and passing through many enemy-occupied towns. In addition to my own varied experience of fighting the Japanese aggressors and Chinese traitors, I witnessed many stirring incidents and met a great number of fine characters. At recruiting rallies I often saw mothers and wives sending their sons or husbands to the front, and brothers or fathers and sons joining the army together.

Many episodes in my novel *In an Old City* were drawn from my own experience. For example, Yang Hsiao-tung's mother was based partly on my own mother, partly on several old women who protected us in their homes at the risk of their own lives during the Japanese "mopping-up" campaigns. Again, Chin-huan is like many of the warm-hearted, splendid young women I met in the central Hopei countryside, devoted to their own people, brave and resourceful in coping with the enemy. I remember such characters clearly even today.

While the Japanese tried to carry out their policy of "kill all, burn all and loot all," the armed forces and civilians in our resistance bases combined fighting with farming. The savage enemy was no match for our fearless, ingenious, indomitable people, who often gave their lives to preserve one sorghum field or sack of grain, and would fight a fierce battle for one uniform or round of ammunition. Many times a whole family was killed or a whole village mown down by machine-guns because they refused to reveal the whereabouts of a wounded Eighth Route soldier.

I recollect other moving incidents. For instance, a patriotic county magistrate was captured and taken to the provincial capital, where the enemy wanting to overawe the people paraded him through the streets. He seized the chance to call on the masses to resist the Japanese and save the country, exposed the crimes of the aggressors and so discomfited them that they had to put him straight back in jail. The next day they tried again. The puppet provincial governor and the Japanese adviser invited him to a banquet in the hope of winning him over; but as soon as the puppet officials had taken their seats he kicked over the table.

When the enemy were thwarted by these heroes of the resistance, they often resorted to most inhuman tactics, arresting and torturing women in an attempt to break the spirit of their sons or husbands. However, all these women were true heroines. One mother leapt thirty feet down from a city wall to strengthen her son's determination to fight to the end. Another fought to her last breath just like her husband and son. Another mother cursed the enemy from the time of her capture until her death, remaining firm and unyielding to the last. Another refused to say a word after her arrest and starved herself to death in jail. Their boundless love for their country gave them the strength to fight resolutely to the end.

I am glad and proud to have gone through this war in the best years of my life, to have been sustained by the patriotism and heroism of the Chinese people. I owe so much to those who gave their lives that I have written stories about the dangers we shared in the common struggle, as well as the two novels *Fighting on the Huto River* and *In an Old City*. The former describes the fight put up by soldiers and civilians in the Huto Valley of Hopei Province, the latter the underground struggle to weaken and demoralize the Japanese and their puppets on a secret but none the less vital battle front.

The cadres and soldiers of the Eighth Route Army in *In an Old City* came for the most part from peasant families. Led by the Chinese Communist Party they formed the main strength in the War of Resistance. Living on millet and armed only with rifles, they defeated Japanese imperialism with its aircraft, artillery and tanks. One of the heroes of the novel, Yang Hsiao-tung, was a student from

a poor peasant family who passed through many arduous tests to become a conscious revolutionary fighter. This able revolutionary has noble ideals. Defying death in prison, he refuses to capitulate. He always puts the needs of the revolution before his own private life and love. Chin-huan and Mrs. Yang are based on the peasant women whom I met in the struggle. In different ways they are equally resolute. In depicting Yin-huan, I tried to show how a young naive girl grows to maturity. Emotional and gentle, enthusiastic about her work, with implicit trust in the Party leadership, she cannot mature overnight and inevitably makes some mistakes on account of her youth and inexperience.

Kuan Ching-tao and his wife are positive characters too; for although they belong to the enemy camp they are able to choose the right path. In their case the decision to join the side of the people is partly voluntary and partly forced on them by circumstances. In describing a struggle, of course, one has to depict the enemy on the opposite side and introduce characters like the puppet commander Kao Ta-cheng, who must also be true to life and convincing to show the heroic characters to advantage. Chinese folk-lore tells of brave men who vanquished dragons and tigers. If we make the opponents so powerless that our fighters are only vanquishing pigs and dogs, we are doing an injustice to these heroes.

This novel's title in Chinese translated literally means "Wildfire and spring wind contend in an old city." I used the image of wildfire to describe the enemy, that of the spring wind to symbolize the strength of our resistance. In ancient Chinese poetry we have the lines, "No prairie fire can burn the grass utterly, for in the spring wind it will grow again." However fierce the flames kindled by the aggressor, they cannot destroy the resistance of a people who fear no hardships or dangers. The final victory of the Chinese people and the defeat of Japanese imperialism afforded good proof of this. And this holds true of all wars against aggression waged by the peoples of the world today.

Ma Ko

Hsien Hsing-hai the Composer

Early in 1940, while still young students, a few friends and I ran the Kuomintang reactionaries' blockade and made our way to Yenan, the centre of the revolution. One day I was told there would be a concert that evening at which the well-known composer Hsien Hsing-hai would conduct his latest work, a cantata. I walked into the concert hall in a state of pleasurable anticipation. Those evening gatherings in Yenan were always extremely lively. Groups of people would be singing in different parts of the hall so that you felt immersed in a sea of exhilarating music. After the curtain went

Ma Ko, a noted composer, is vice-director of the Institute of Chinese Traditional Music and director of the China Opera Theatre.

up, young people from the auditorium filed up to the stage. Since there was not room enough there for them all, some of the chorus fanned out on either side down below, making it difficult to distinguish between the performers and the audience.

A man in shirt-sleeves, shorts and straw sandals mounted the stage with a baton in his hand — that was Hsien Hsing-hai. For conditions in the revolutionary base were so hard that even well-known figures dressed like poor peasants. He looked about thirty, bronzed and vigorous. In reply to a great ovation from the audience he saluted us with a smile and then turned slowly round. An actor launched into an impassioned recital of the prologue to the *Yellow River Cantata*, carrying us with him in imagination into the world conjured up by the composer.

Friend, have you ever seen the Yellow River? Have you ever crossed the Yellow River? Do you still remember how the boatmen there pit their lives against the angry waves? If you have forgotten, listen!

That same instant Hsien Hsing-hai's arm swept up and the chorus nearly lifted the roof with their singing:

Row, row; on we go! Forward now, row on! Row on!...

The exultant tone and dramatic rhythm of this song so stirred the audience that some of us could not stay in our seats. The music expressing the battle with the rushing torrent made us feel as if we too were struggling against the river. When at last the boatmen won through the storm, the chorus broke into laughter and the audience stood up to cheer.

The *Yellow River Cantata* was composed in Yenan in 1939, with words by the well-known poet Kuang Wei-jan. It consists of eight parts with the heroic struggle of the people living on both sides of the Yellow River as its theme, effectively reflecting the spirit of the age in a distinctive national style. This music stirred the hearts of the people during the years of hard fighting against Japan, and has remained an inspiration to us.

The powerfully dramatic boatmen's song was followed by a baritone solo of immense depth and passion expressing the Chinese people's love for the mountains and streams of their country and its splendid history. While the strains of this song still lingered in our hearts

Hsien Hsing-hai conducting a Choir in Yenan

there came fresh proof of Hsien Hsing-hai's rich experience of life and virtuosity: first a simple folk melody for a peasant dialogue about the War of Resistance, then a surging crescendo conveying the invincible spirit and might of a people in arms.... In short, this work gave us great satisfaction and aesthetic enjoyment. That was an unforgettable experience, a red-letter day.

As we left the hall everybody was discussing the concert. While listening to them, I decided I must learn music from Hsien Hsing-hai to serve as a weapon in the War of Resistance; for a composer who could produce compositions like this would make a great contribution to the cause of liberation. Before long my wish was granted. I joined the music department of the Lu Hsun Academy of Arts, and our department head was Hsien Hsing-hai. I felt tremendously privileged to be able to meet this brilliant composer and study under him.

At first I thought that since he was such a maestro it would be difficult to follow his teaching. However, on meeting him I found him most approachable, so candid and simple that at times he even seemed a little naive. We were all living in the loess caves common in northwest Chinese villages, and the first time we met he asked me to his cave as if we were old friends, to have a long chat. He produced the draft of a symphony and explained how he had conceived

it. There was no piano in his cave but he used simple, figurative language to describe the images in his music, and I realized that I was having an important lesson — learning that music was not something mysterious or unfathomable.

If we students raised one or two points or criticisms based on our own limited understanding, he gave them serious attention and sometimes took up his pen at once to alter the score, humming both versions and comparing them until each side was satisfied. In other words, he regarded himself as an ordinary person and kept close to the masses in order to profit from their collective wisdom.

No one living in Yenan had a moment to spare. Our time was packed with study, work and productive labour to solve the wartime shortage of food and clothing. Hsien Hsing-hai was in charge of the music department, taught composition and conducting, and supervised the academy choir. At the same time he had many other social duties. He often walked into town to take part in various activities in Yenan cultural circles, or to teach new songs and train musicians for the Anti-Japanese Military and Political College, the Chinese Women's College, the North Shensi Public School and other schools and organizations. His own output under these conditions was amazing. He came to Yenan at the end of 1938 and left in May 1940, yet during this period he composed six cantatas including the *Yellow River Cantata* and the *Production Cantata*, the operas *March of the Army and Civilians* and *Fuyang River*, as well as hundreds of songs, besides writing several important articles. When he was composing he would forget sleep and food. The score and accompaniment for the *Yellow River Cantata* were completed in less than one week.

One evening a student asked him how he came to study music. He was silent for a few minutes and then, his voice charged with emotion, he gave us an account of his life which lasted most of the night. He was not a good speaker in general, but his life story was so gripping and dramatic that we felt we had the hero of a novel before us.

Hsien Hsing-hai was born in 1905 on a small boat in the South China Sea. He was the son of a newly widowed fisherwoman, and since she dreamed before his birth of stars and the sea he was named Hsing-hai (Star-sea). Mother and son had a hard life of it. When

she was too old to manage a boat any longer, she worked as a hired hand in Canton. She brought her son up to work hard, and as soon as he was old enough he did what he could to help her. Then he found a job as a servant in a school, which enabled him to study at the same time. Of course, he was despised by the other students, but that only spurred him on to work harder. So he worked his way through primary and middle school and entered university. While in middle school he became passionately fond of music. By the time he entered university he was a fairly well-known clarinet player and a competent performer on the violin. Several music societies engaged him to teach them, but he was far from satisfied with his own proficiency. He finally succeeded in going to Shanghai, and once there he studied in the newly established Conservatory of Music.

This was the time of the 1925-27 Revolution and Canton, the centre of the revolutionary movement, had its impact on Hsien Hsing-hai. Whereas previously he had studied music out of personal interest, he now wanted to develop Chinese music and raise it to new heights. As a patriot he was naturally dissatisfied with the mismanagement of the schools under the reactionary government, and he was expelled for opposing his school authorities. But the stubborn young man did not give up his music — far from it. He determined to take it up seriously and made up his mind to go to Paris to study composition under one of the famous masters in the conservatory there. Not having any money to pay for his passage, he found a job as a stoker on a foreign steamer and worked his way to Paris.

In Paris he had to contend with loneliness, contempt and hunger. He was reduced to beggary and more than once fainted for hunger on the road. He hunted everywhere for a job but met with nothing but scorn, until finally he got taken on as a waiter. After ten hours' work every day he would practise hard on his violin and read up musical theory. His health suffered. When he fell down in a fit of dizziness and broke some plates, he was sacked. For two more years he lived from hand to mouth, taking a series of temporary jobs but feeling increasingly frustrated because he had failed to find a way to study music. The gates of the Conservatory of Music stood open — but not for him.

One day he went to the Overseas Chinese Trade Union office to see a documentary film recording the sufferings of the Chinese people since September 18, 1931, the date when the Japanese imperialists started invading northeast China. The Chinese residents in France were moved to tears by this film. On his return to the sixth-floor attic where he lived, Hsien Hsing-hai was too upset by the misery of his motherland and his own misfortunes to sleep. The cold winter wind blowing through the ill-fitting window made him shiver. He got up from bed while the wind howled round the attic and wrote some music to express his bitter anger. That night he finished *The Wind*, an orchestral score with a solo for a female voice. He submitted this work when he took the test for the Conservatory of Music in Paris, and the celebrated composer Paul Dukas was sufficiently impressed by his talent to admit him as the first Chinese student in his senior composition class.

In 1935 Paul Dukas died and Hsien Hsing-hai returned to China after an absence of six years, eager to pass on what he had learned in Paris and train good musicians to raise China's prestige. His arrival in Shanghai disillusioned him, however; for China was then a semi-colonial country and Shanghai was under joint imperialist control. He saw foreign seamen swaggering along the wharfs while his own compatriots bent their backs and toiled like cattle for the colonialists. This made him start wondering how to link his music with the fate of his country.

That winter he went to Peking, in time for the December 9 demonstration of Peking students against the Kuomintang reactionaries' policy of actively waging civil war while not really resisting the Japanese. Hsien Hsing-hai wrote the march *Song of National Salvation* for this demonstration and took part in it himself, teaching the marchers songs and conducting their singing. Seeing the use music could be put to as a weapon in the struggle, he realized that he had found the right path and started working for the national salvation movement.

After the outbreak of the War of Resistance Against Japan he accompanied a propaganda team to the interior to popularize revolutionary songs. But the Kuomintang reactionaries, who took a capitulationist line, disbanded most propaganda teams and forbade

the singing of resistance songs; thus Hsien Hsing-hai found himself closely watched and restricted. When the Lu Hsun Academy of Arts in Yenan invited him to head the department of music, he accepted without any hesitation.

Of his work in Yenan he said, "Here life is stable and I feel so good that I can devote all my energy to composing. The melodies just seem to flow from my pen.... The conditions here are wonderful and the people's enthusiasm stimulates me — at last I've found the real audience for my music. I myself went through a lot of suffering, but I didn't understand why so many people had to suffer nor why their voice was so powerful. Now I know we must create music that really belongs to the workers and peasants. From now on I mean to devote all my energies to doing this."

He worked tremendously hard in Yenan until he went to the Soviet Union on a new assignment, while staying there he wrote many vocal and instrumental works. Before long, however, the German fascists invaded the Soviet Union; and as our own War of Resistance was being waged even more fiercely, our communications were interrupted. For five whole years we received no news of him. Then, just as the Chinese people were celebrating the victory of the anti-Japanese war, news came that Hsien Hsing-hai had died of illness in Moscow. We were stunned by this fearful news. He was only forty at the time of his death and had just been drafting his private twenty-year plan. However, the work he left will always be remembered along with everything else we owe to him.

Hsien Hsing-hai was a revolutionary musician. He used music as a weapon and threw himself whole-heartedly into the struggle for national liberation. His most important lesson to us is: We must not write music for music's sake; the only way to develop music successfully is to make it serve the revolution. Virtually all his works deal with the life of the masses, using forms loved by the masses; hence they combine a popular style with a revolutionary content. Hsien Hsing-hai studied traditional Chinese music seriously, although he was no traditionalist who clung to the past; and at the same time he also absorbed and adapted the useful elements of Western music to develop Chinese music. In this way he succeeded in making his music both modern and revolutionary.

My Experience As a Woodcut Artist

I first tried my hand at a woodcut in 1940, after more than two years of art work in the New Fourth Army led by the Chinese Communist Party. In the thirties the great Chinese writer Lu Hsun did much to popularize the woodcut art, and the woodcuts he published had a great influence on me. However, I took up this work because of the special circumstances of that time, the fact that our troops were carrying on guerrilla warfare in the rear of the Japanese aggressors. Under those conditions wood-block prints were about the simplest form of art we could use to reinforce our political work in the revolutionary war. A black-and-white woodcut could be finished in one or two days, less than twenty square centimetres of wood was required for the block, and this would print enough copies for the wall-newspapers used to educate our revolutionary fighters and the masses. After our anti-Japanese bases became extended and consolidated,

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Shen Jou-chien was born in 1919 in Shaoan County, Fukien Province. In 1938 he joined the New Fourth Army as a cultural worker. Now he is vice-chairman of the Shanghai branch of the Chinese Artists' Union.

properly printed newspapers and other propaganda material were available in the army; but as we still had no way to make photographic prints of paintings we went on inserting woodcut blocks among the type when printing newspapers or pictorials. Naturally, under those difficult wartime conditions many art workers learned to make woodcuts.

Later on in the war I also used lithographs to make New Year prints in the folk style.

After liberation the facilities for art work improved enormously. The cultural life of the people became much richer and there was a greater demand for art. Then I began to make coloured woodcuts to depict life during our socialist revolution and socialist construction. In recent years this has been my main work.

In the fourth year after liberation, millions of our people responded to Chairman Mao Tse-tung's call, "Harness the Huai River!" Relying on their own ingenuity and industry, they set to work to tame the Huai River which had for centuries caused untold damage. Mountains were levelled and valleys filled up in the middle reaches of the river to construct China's first huge, modern water-conservancy project. At the beginning of 1954 I went to this construction site. My first impression of the arched dam more than seventy metres high across the river was that here was a great memorial to our revolutionary heroes. The sight of men of the People's Liberation Army at work suspended on ropes or dynamiting rocks with the people seemed very familiar and yet totally new. During the war I had known these men fairly well, but this was my first encounter with them in socialist construction. These soldiers who fought like heroes against the enemy were now proving their capabilities in construction. They were truly both fighters and toilers. Their determination, energy and fearlessness in the face of hardships moved me deeply. I tried to express these qualities of theirs in my first coloured woodcut *Men of the Liberation Army Fight the Huai River.*

I did many sketches from life at the time, but none of my drafts for a woodcut satisfied me. There was no lack of things to present on that vast site, yet I could not convey the great spirit which so impressed me. Unable to bridge the gap between the form of expression

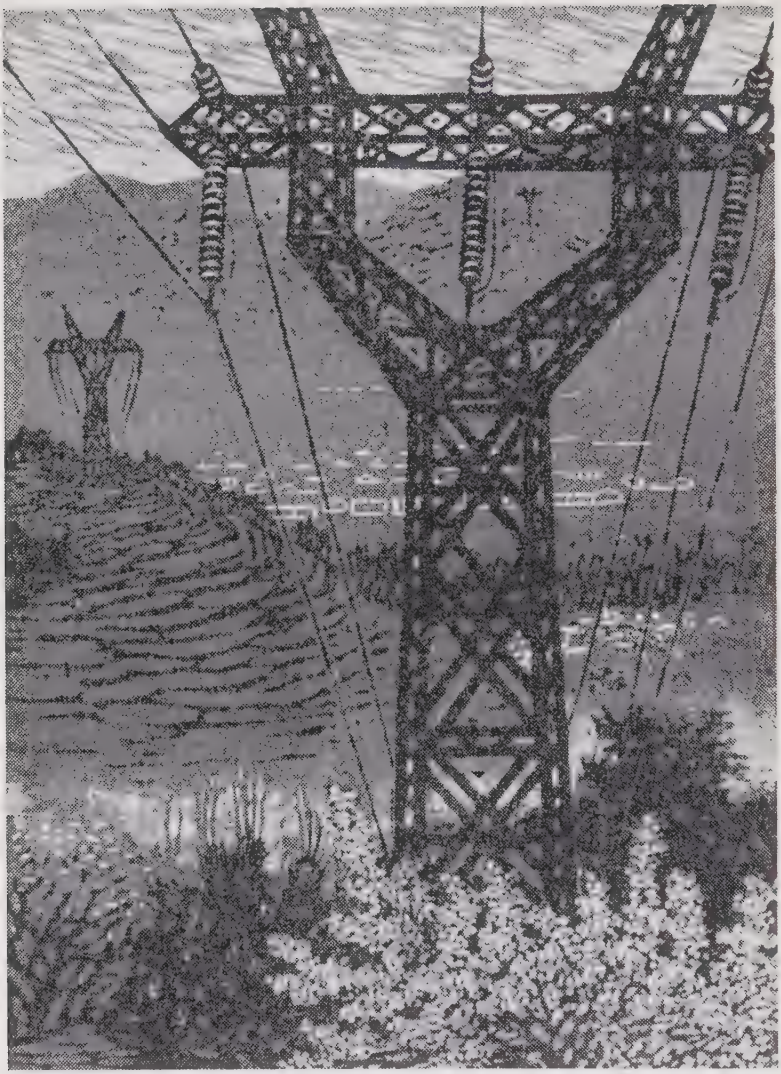
and the content, I shelved the project for the time being. I returned to it in 1958 during the Big Leap Forward in socialist construction, when my earlier ideas and plans had matured and grown clearer under the stimulus of the revolutionary enthusiasm of that time. I realized that the scene of construction which I wanted to depict must reflect the spirit of our great age, and I began to look for a central theme to link up the different sketches I had made. I decided to present the construction site at dawn to show the enthusiasm of the builders as they raced against time. Abandoning my original idea of presenting a comprehensive picture, as the effect of that would have been weaker, I chose to depict one corner of the dam, emphasizing the rushing waves and whirling foam to show the dynamic energy put into the Huai River project. This was how I conceived my woodcut *The River Is Being Tamed.*

When an artist generalizes from real life, there are certain things he must keep, others he must reject, certain necessary cuts or additions to be made in order to find the most appropriate and vivid means of expression. One important principle of visual art is that when trying to grasp a whole scene and present it in depth we must show the greatness in little things, show the whole through individual images. Traditional Chinese painters used to say, "The more sights are hidden, the wider the view; the more sights are shown, the smaller the view." This hints at the dialectics of the treatment of space. Akin to this is the traditional Chinese method of laying out gardens, also designed to convey a sense of infinity in a limited space and present scenes like that described in these lines by the Sung dynasty poet Lu Yu (1125-1210):

> Where hills bend, streams wind and the pathway seems to end,
> Past dark willows and flowers in bloom lies another village.

The idea is to leave something to the imagination, to supply a hint and let people fill in the rest. I learned this when making *The River Is Being Tamed.*

Later I spent some time on a larger construction site, that of the Hsinanchiang Hydro-electric Station in Chekiang. This water-conservancy project has transformed once desolate mountains and plains



Electricity Comes to the Mountains

into thousands of fertile fields. Already they are reaping record harvests there, with a yearly increase in output. Terraced fields climb like storeyed pagodas all the way to the top of the hills, the smiling

countryside seems a fairyland. These sights stirred me to make the woodcuts *Electricity Comes to the Mountains* and *Mighty Arms Move Rivers, Rock the Earth.*

Different subjects naturally call for different techniques and different uses of colour. The central feature of *Electricity Comes to the Mountains* is the high tension pylon exemplifying progress, surrounded by terraced fields, new villages, flocks of sheep and wild flowers, all depicted in rather bright and simple colours. *Mighty Arms Move Rivers, Rock the Earth* shows the giant jib of a crane reaching out over our socialist land to conquer nature. The crane is emphasized by being set high up on the dam above a section of the construction site. Here the combination of solid objects with empty space called for somewhat thick, heavy colours.

I have also been privileged to work with coal-miners, who are living examples of the tremendous contrast between the old society and the new. In the old days considered as the lowest of the low, they lived no better than cattle, constantly exposed to the danger of pits caving in or explosions of gas. Now "safety first" is the rule and every precaution is taken to see that safety measures are observed. The miners show a keen sense of responsibility now that they are working for themselves. They wield their pneumatic picks as if fighting some stubborn enemy. They are friendly people and I learned a great deal from their talk. Before liberation miners found it hard to get married. What girl wanted a husband who risked his neck every day, who did not know when he went down the pit in the morning whether he would come out alive or not in the evening? Sometimes both father and son died in the pits. All this has changed since liberation. From conversation with several old miners I grasped something of their wretched conditions in the past and was able to share in their pride and joy today. This gave me the idea for my woodcut *Working in Safety.* I decided to show the men in charge of safety precautions turning round with a look of satisfaction after their inspection. I placed these central figures, who have lamps in their hands, behind two miners to bring out the meaning of the theme in a graphic way.

Since 1949 I have made many woodcuts dealing with industrial construction, but I often found myself unable to express the things

that moved me most or to depict them in such a way as to reveal their inner significance. I know from my own experience that the process of understanding and expressing what one has seen involves linking theoretical understanding with concrete images. This is the unity of opposites; and unless these opposites are integrated a work of art will be stereotyped, lacking in profundity. An artist who wants to merge these opposites in an organic whole and transform the truth in real life into a true work of art must use his initiative to choose suitable images, doing his best to generalize and concentrate his impressions. To convey what is essential in his impressions, what is general in individual phenomena, he must emphasize certain things through specific images. *Multum in parvo* is the relationship between life and art. Art's prerequisite is an abundance of life, for only on the basis of wide experience and deep feeling for life can art express a great deal in a small compass. Art comes from life just as honey comes from flowers, and the bees have to suck nectar from many flowers to produce their pure, thick honey. The artist's mind is like a processing plant in which the raw materials of life are processed and concentrated. Only when the essence is kept and the dregs are discarded can these materials be sublimated into art; and the decisive factor here is the artist's ideology.

My experience leads me to believe that if a work is successful it is usually because the artist has followed this rule. If a work is not successful, the artist has probably not applied this rule well enough.

Chinese artists today are engrossed in the important task of creating something new, characteristic of our socialist age both in content and form. For our new life must find expression in new ideas, new feelings and new artistic techniques reflecting a new spirit and style pleasing to the people of a socialist age. To achieve this the artist must strive incessantly to raise his level and deepen his understanding of ideology, life and technique. He must plunge into real mass struggles and share the thoughts and feelings of the masses.

Like other forms of pictorial art, coloured woodcuts have their own characteristics and limitations. In general, it is best not to have too many colours or too complex a colour scheme in one woodcut. Three or four colours should be enough, but these must be effectively

used. The use of colour in woodcuts is basically a contrast between dark and light; it should show rich tonal variety combined with clarity and simplicity. In my view, this characteristic should be fully exploited. On the other hand, the limited number of colour blocks makes it impossible to use colours as freely as in painting. By taking full advantage of the woodcut's potentialities and overcoming its inherent limitations we can produce a distinctive effect, making what is simple richer than what is complex.

The bold use of colour in Chinese folk wood-block prints and decorative designs has helped me in my own work. Sometimes two or three colour blocks produce a rich and powerful effect, whereas the use of too many colours may have the opposite effect. In *Shanghai After a Snow*, *South Sea Coast*, *Early Spring*, *Chicken* and various other woodcuts I basically restrict myself to three colours. Sometimes I make the empty space serve the function of colour or achieve dramatic and satisfying effects by colour combinations.

Shanghai After a Snow

In portraying industry I not infrequently come across complex or uniform constructions in the background which are difficult to handle in a woodcut. Here I find the techniques of traditional Chinese painting helpful. For instance, there is the convention that lines should be bold but not static, fluid but not weak, combining subtlety with apparent spontaneity to create an impression of solidity and satisfying texture. The art of showing the "wrinkles" in mountains and rocks with a Chinese brush can also be used in woodcuts to depict hard, massive objects like iron or steel, varying their monotony and increasing the effect of solidity. Chinese painters and calligraphers have always stressed the need for flexibility in brush-work. "Hold back before letting go; resist the movement before following it." This again is in order to convey weight and strength, to give added variety and subtlety. And this method is equally effective for woodcuts.

The Cloud-capped Peaks in the Distance (traditional painting) ▶

See the article on p. 125.

Ku Kung-ta

"The Cloud-capped Peaks in the Distance"

New techniques developed in Chinese painting during the Southern Sung period (1127-1279). These are exemplified in the landscapes by the Ma family painters who worked in the Imperial Painting Academy.

During the Hsuan-ho period (1119-1125), the court painter Ma Fen from Hochung in present-day Shensi Province was celebrated for his paintings of a hundred wild swans, a hundred monkeys, oxen, sheep and deer; but as none of his work is extant we have no way of studying his tradition and style. His son Ma Hsing-tzu went to Hangchow and joined the Imperial Academy in the temporary capital; and he had two gifted sons, Ma Kung-hsien and Ma Shih-jung. We still possess a painting by Ma Kung-hsien entitled *A Dialogue Between Li Kao and the Monk Yao-shan* from which we can see that, with certain modifications, he followed the tradition of the famous court painter Li Tang. The composition is concise and simple, the brush-work angular and abrupt. This style was continued and further developed by his nephews Ma Kuei and Ma Yuan, sons of Ma Shih-jung. It became the main trend in the landscape and figure painting of the

Academy school in the middle of the Southern Sung dynasty, influencing painters outside the Academy too.

Ma Kuei was not as well-known as Ma Yuan, but their styles were apparently much the same. A small painting by Ma Kuei on a silk fan shows a man standing alone under a cliff; the brush-work is as spirited and sparing as that of his uncle and brother; the use of ink is also masterly and the man has immense vitality. Since few of Ma Kuei's paintings remain, it is not easy to distinguish his work from that of his brother Ma Yuan.

The Cloud-capped Peaks in the Distance has been attributed to the Southern Sung artist Hsia Kuei, who also had a terse and vigorous style. Judging by the brush-work, however, it is more likely to be the work of one of the Ma family artists, most likely Ma Kuei.

This painting shows a few men standing on a promontory in autumn, looking across in a leisurely way at the towering peaks in the distance. Some pavilions can be seen among the trees in the valley, white clouds lap the lower slopes of the hills, and the whole scene has a tranquil dignity. Angular strokes are used for the rocks and the men's clothes, but the effect is fluid as well as strong, not rough or unpolished. The mellow splendour of the colours also shows a high level of virtuosity. Scenery of this type can be found in the western parts of Chekiang Province, in the Yentang Mountains for instance, and differs from the steep, high mountains of northwest China presented by the court painter Li Tang with powerful "axe-strokes." Whereas Li Tang's work impresses by its grandeur, this painting is the quintessence of gracefulness. This difference in style stems from the different places in which the painters lived and their different experience.

Small paintings of this kind were commonly used as decorations on screens. This is one of the best small Sung paintings in the Palace Museum collection in Peking.

"Tibet Today," a Documentary Film

Tibet Today, a long documentary in colour made by the Central Newsreel and Documentary Film Studio, has recently been shown in various parts of China. It presents the progress made in industry, agriculture, communications, culture, education and hygiene in Tibet since the democratic reform in 1959. The beautiful, fertile plateau yields good harvests of *chingko* barley and fine crops of melons and fruit, and the emancipated serfs work hard to greet the seventh bumper harvest after the democratic reform. On the boundless grasslands, scientific methods are used to grow pasturage for the rapidly increasing herds. More than thirty electric power stations have been built where no electricity was produced before. Industry is developing fast and the autonomous region now has 67 small and medium-sized factories manufacturing farm implements and building materials. Lhasa, where so many people suffered fearful hardships or starved to death in the past, today has splendid new buildings and wide streets which are thronged during holidays by Tibetans on their way to or from the new department store. This film gives a comprehensive picture of Tibet today, showing the changes in the people's life by contrasting the past and present of certain individuals or families.

Amateur Art Activities in Tibet

There are over 500 amateur song-and-dance groups and Tibetan opera companies in Tibet today; and the regular public performances they give are an important feature of popular entertainment. These amateur teams are dispersed throughout the autonomous region and not all their members are young people — sometimes white-haired old men can be seen waving their long sleeves in the dances. The Tibetans flock to these evening shows, at which revolutionary songs or new ballads are sung and dances or Tibetan operas performed. Since many of these items are based on real people and events today, they ring true and make a strong appeal to the audience.

The "Meng Ya" Library

The Shanghai *Meng Ya* monthly, about which we published an article in our October issue this year, and the Shanghai Branch of the People's Literature Publishing House have recently brought out the first 14 titles in a new series of books. These include three anthologies and 11 individual works. *Meng Ya Short Stories*, *Meng Ya Essays and Sketches* and *Meng Ya Poetry* present the best works in these different genres published in *Meng Ya* in 1964. The other books are short stories by nine writers and two volumes of poems. The range of subject matter is broad, covering life in the army, in factories, in communes, as well as in the field of trade and commerce. The writers are young factory workers, cadres or members of people's communes, soldiers or workers in government offices. The wide welcome given to these works is due in part to their simple, graphic language and authentic flavour of real life.

Eighth-century Arab Coins Found in Sian

Last year three gold coins with inscriptions in the Kufic script were found in a Tang dynasty tomb in Hsiyaotou Village, Sian, Shensi Province. These coins, 0.1 cm. thick, with a diameter from 1.9 to 2 cm. and weighing 4.2 or 4.3 gm., are inscribed on both sides with quotations from the Koran, the designation "dinar" and the dates of mint-

One of the early Arab coins unearthed. The obverse is on the left, the reverse on the right.

ing according to the Mohammedan system of reckoning. The earliest was minted during the reign of Abd al-Malik of the Omayyad dynasty, the latest during the reign of the last caliph of that dynasty, i. e. between A.D. 702 and 747, in the middle of China's Tang dynasty (A.D. 618-907). These are the first coins of the Omayyad dynasty and the earliest Arab coins discovered in China. They provide material evidence of the communication between China and the Arab countries in the Tang dynasty.

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