

CHINESE LITERATURE



4
1973

CONTENTS

STORIES

- An Artist's Dilemma — *Feng Chang* 3
 Always a Step Ahead — *Sun Yi* and *Liu Cheng* 11
 Close as Brothers — *Li Chan-heng* 25

POEMS

- Camel Bells — *Chang Chan-ting* 32
 Herding Horses in the Snow — *Tung Chia-tung* 35
 Spring Comes to the Commune — *Li Kuang-yi* 37

Iron Ball (excerpt from a novel) — *Chiang Shu-mao* 39

Two Poems — *Chang Yung-mei* 91

NOTES ON ART

- A New Style of Bamboo Painting — *Cheh Ping* 96

CHRONICLE 98

PLATES

- Going to a Patient (oil-painting) — *Chang Chang-teh* 24-25
 A Village Bookstall (gouache) — *Huang Chi-shih* 36-37
 Keeping Chickens (painting in the traditional style) — *Teng Chao-kuei* 90-91
 Bamboo Harvest (painting in the traditional style) — *Yao Keng-yun*,
Fang Tseng-hsien and *Lu Kun-feng* 96-97

Front Cover: Girl Lumberjack Starts Work — *Hsu Kuang*

Feng Chang

An Artist's Dilemma

Pu Fu was pleased when asked by a local paper to make a sketch of an innovator Kuang Hsiu-lan, a woman worker in the Five Star Brush Factory. She was reported to have succeeded in mechanizing the working process, raising efficiency and output eight-fold.

With his artist's kit slung over his shoulder Pu Fu headed for the factory in a state of pleasurable anticipation.

After reading Pu Fu's letter of introduction the factory manager beamed. Shaking hands cordially he exclaimed, "Very good. Kuang Hsiu-lan's worthy of a painter's brush. She's a worker we've trained as an engineer."

"An engineer?"

"Yes, certainly." As the manager offered his visitor some tea, he added, "She's a Party member, leader of the youth shock-team and a pace-setter in technical innovations. Before you start, let me show you some photographs." He took two pictures from his desk drawer and handed them to the artist.

To his surprise, Pu Fu found they were photos of a machine, not of Kuang Hsiu-lan.

"This is the machine Hsiu-lan and her team invented," explained the manager enthusiastically. "Our brushes used to be made by hand, so output was low. Now this machine does the work of seven or eight workers. Hsiu-lan and her team made it in sixteen days."

Pu Fu, anxious to see his model, was disappointed. He asked, "How old is she?"

"Thirty-seven. And the mother of three children."

"Really! And how much schooling did she have?"

"She was illiterate until a few years ago. She attends a spare-time school now and is in the sixth grade."

"Good for her!" the artist remarked.

"She won't stop at her first success either," the manager went on, smiling. "Hsiu-lan's tackling something else now. During the last couple of days she's begun automating her new machine."

The artist was impressed. With a mental image of this daring trail-blazer in his mind, he was eager to see her at once and start work on his sketch.

"Where is she? Is she busy now?"

"Busy now? She's busy all day long, she's so wrapped up in her schemes for automation. But I guess she'll spare you a few minutes for a sketch." The manager looked around the office and asked, "How about this room? Is it all right for a studio? I'll ask Hsiu-lan to come here."

"No, no, please don't," Pu Fu quickly rejoined. "I'd rather see her at work. I'll sketch her wherever she is."

"That's good." The manager looked at his watch. "It's after the end of her shift; she won't be in the workshop," he said. "But never mind, she'll be in her 'lab'. You'll find her there all right."

"Her lab?" Pu Fu's curiosity was aroused.

The manager tapped on the panelled wall beside him and in came an efficient looking young girl. She was introduced as Young Lin the office secretary and asked to take the guest to Hsiu-lan's lab.

"Where is it?" Pu Fu inquired. Before the manager could answer, Young Lin said, "It isn't a real lab; it's just a stock-room. But Hsiu-lan found it a quiet room to work in and so her team often go there to plan innovations."

Pu Fu was a little amused. He followed the secretary along a lengthy corridor to the stock-room at the far end of the factory. Since the door was ajar, Young Lin poked her head in, then said to Pu Fu, "Here she is. They're all here."

Young Lin quietly pushed the door open for the painter.

Shelves along the walls were stocked with various materials and tools. In the middle of the room there was a long table with four women bending over it. One of them, using a pen and a set square, was drawing something on a large sheet of paper. The other three were watching her so intently that they didn't even realize anyone had entered. Only when Young Lin chuckled did they look up.

"You imp!" one of the girls gasped.

"What a fright you gave me," exclaimed a younger girl with her hair in two short plaits. She was going to grab Young Lin but thought better of it when she saw the stranger behind the secretary.

"What a coward you are!" Lin teased. "And yet you call yourself an innovator!" Then she turned to the one who was drawing. "Sister Hsiu-lan, are you busy? Can you spare a minute?"

So this is the innovator, Pu Fu thought. He took a good look at her. She was a short but sturdy woman in greasy overalls, her hair stuffed under a blue cloth cap. Strictly speaking she was not good looking but she had a pleasant smile which curved the corners of her mouth attractively. For a mother of three children she seemed quite young too.

"Looking for me?" Although somewhat taken aback, Hsiu-lan put down her pen to greet them cordially. "Is it anything important?"

"Yes, I'll say so!" said Young Lin, purposely withholding the object of their call. "Can you spare some time?"

"No, no. Hsiu-lan has no time to spare," the young girl with short plaits immediately cut in. "We're facing a crisis."

"You've come at a critical moment all right. We're a bit worried," explained a tall girl, another member of the team.

Hsiu-lan glanced at the visitors and said rather apologetically, "I'm really sorry I can't stop work now. If you can come in the evening, I'll be free then. Please tell me what you want to see me about and I'll meet you tonight. All right?"



Pu Fu, standing there with his kit, felt a bit embarrassed. Seeing this, Young Lin explained, "This comrade is an artist. He's made a special trip. . . ."

"An artist!" Hsiu-lan's face lit up. "You can draw?"

"You're doing such an excellent job," began Pu Fu pleasantly, "I've been sent to make a portrait of you."

Hsiu-lan didn't seem to take in what Pu Fu was saying. Glancing at the smiling members of the team, she exclaimed, "What luck! An artist drops from the sky! Just the man we need." She nodded to the girl with short plaits. "Young Chin, get a seat for him, quick."

Jumping up, Young Chin moved her stool over and asked Pu Fu to sit down while the tall one offered him some tea.

This reception made Pu Fu a trifle ill at ease. Putting down his kit he urged, "Please don't bother. I don't want to disturb you at work."

"Disturb us? Instead of disturbing us, you'll be able to help us with our innovation," Hsiu-lan answered with an engaging smile.

"I'm sorry but all I'm any good at is drawing."

"That's just what we need, comrade — someone who can draw."

"But how can I help you make an innovation?" asked Pu Fu, thinking his ears were playing him tricks.

Hsiu-lan pointed to the sheet of paper spread over the table, which was covered with drawings of various gears, cogs and wheels.

"You see, we want to make our brush-making machine automatic as quickly as possible," she explained. "We know exactly the shape of the parts we need, but the trouble is we can't draw them accurately. Look, this is meant to be a special shaped gear, but what a mess I've made of it! None of us can draw well enough." She paused and then pointed at one of her team, saying, "Here's a carpenter waiting for my drawings to make the moulds. This one's a mechanic who needs good drawings of the machine parts too. They've all tried to help me but they can't draw any better than I can. But you're an artist! You can draw. Please lend us a hand." With this, Hsiu-lan took up her pen again and held it out to Pu Fu. He was too dumbfounded to take it and could only gaze abstractedly at the drawings.

Pu Fu was a painter in the traditional Chinese style who had previously specialized in landscapes. In recent years, however, he had devoted himself almost entirely to sketching the labour heroes who had emerged in various fields. The new society in which Pu Fu lived and its bubbling, effervescent life had made a strong impact on him. He wanted to portray these people who were the finest products of the age. Often he submitted sketches to the local papers; and the editors, liking them, asked him for more. Whenever he received a

special assignment by phone, Pu Fu would set off, full of enthusiasm to turn out a faithful and artistic painting or sketch. His portraits improved a great deal as time went on.

Pu Fu, however, had never learned how to do the accurate and precise drawing needed for machine designing. He shook his head saying regretfully, "I can't do this. I'm no draughtsman."

"Don't be so modest. Do help us," pleaded Hsiu-lan.

"I... I really can't."

"But you're a painter," put in Young Chin. "That's no way for an artist to talk!"

Young Lin also spoke up urging him to attempt the job at least.

Pu Fu tried to explain his dilemma to the women workers. He said that not being an engineer or technician he could not produce drawings which were up to standard.

Hsiu-lan laughed. "Which of us are engineers or technicians? Not one of us!" Pointing to Young Chin she continued, "She was a brush-maker, now she's a carpenter." Turning to the tall girl she said, "She was a packer, now she's a lathe-turner and mechanic."

"Sister Hsiu-lan was a brush-maker too," Young Lin put in. "But now she designs automatic machines!"

Hsiu-lan ignored the girl and said to Pu Fu, "None of us has ever studied mechanics but we want to make machines. You know, the Party has called on us to break away from old superstitions and conservative ideas. Comrade Pu Fu, it's true you can't design machines but you are a trained artist. You certainly can draw much better than we can."

"We're determined to produce this automatic machine anyway. So please give us some help with our innovation," Young Chin added.

The dauntless spirit of these women workers silenced Pu Fu. He glanced at the drawings once more and then looking up at Hsiu-lan saw that she was eagerly waiting for his consent.

Pu Fu was in a real tizzy. He doubted his ability but he realized that all these workers were attempting something they had never done before. Besides, he had been trained to draw. Snatching his handkerchief from his pocket he mopped his perspiring face.

Hsiu-lan understood the artist's dilemma. "Maybe you've not

much time either," she suggested kindly. "Never mind. It won't take you long. I'll make the rough drawings first, jot down the required size and shape of each machine part, then all you need do is make fair copies to scale."

"Right. Some you only need to touch up."

"It really won't take you long."

All the girls now joined in persuasively. Pu Fu, the cynosure of all eyes, grew hot under the collar. But he still hesitated. "I have time all right but I'm afraid I'm not up to it..."

"Don't be so modest."

"But you're an artist. You must know how to do it."

Finally Pu Fu found himself saying, "Well then, I'll give it a try."

Immediately the whole room was astir. One girl started to prepare the ink, another spread the paper while a third handed him a pen. Young Lin began busily preparing some pencils. Pu Fu put his kit down and took out his own brushes and pencils, saying, "Don't trouble. I have everything I need here. Give those to Comrade Hsiu-lan."

Overjoyed, Hsiu-lan presented the artist with half a dozen sheets of paper already covered with rough drawings for him to copy or polish, remarking that they were the result of several sleepless nights. She went on to explain what the diagrams stood for, some being



automatic controls; others special gears to do the work of five persons. These designs, she continued, she had copied from an automatic lathe when she visited a machine tool plant the previous week and she had modified them to suit her own design. She asked the artist to scale them down to half size.

When he first started drawing Pu Fu felt a little clumsy, but gradually things went more smoothly. He worked strictly according to Hsiu-lan's requirements. She herself meanwhile was drawing more parts and passing them on to him as each was finished. She told him diffidently, "You see, I never get them quite right, I make the cogs either too big or too small. Please improve them. . . . The gears are very important. Like a human brain they direct the automatic control."

Pu Fu gave the closest attention to every detail, infected by Hsiu-lan's intense enthusiasm. By degrees his absorption in this work, his satisfaction in such creative labour, was just as great as the workers'. When the drawings were completed Hsiu-lan laughed. "They're wonderful!" she exclaimed. "Thank you, Comrade Pu Fu."

Such a compliment made the artist feel a little sheepish. Laying down his pen, he looked round and discovered that he had not heard the rest leave. All had gone except Hsiu-lan and the tall girl mechanic.

Now Hsiu-lan and this girl were together at a bench rasping some machine parts in accordance with the drawings he had just finished. That was when Pu Fu caught a glimpse of Kuang Hsiu-lan's real beauty. Her eyes were sparkling as she tucked a lock of hair back under her cap. And the rasp in her hand, the metal parts, the vice and Hsiu-lan formed one harmonious picture.

The tall girl sitting close to her team leader was busy hammering something. The rhythmic clanging she produced was obviously sweet music in her ears. Her cheeks were rosy, sweat beaded the tip of her nose. She and Hsiu-lan working in perfect co-ordination made a magnificent picture. Watching this moving scene, Pu Fu suddenly remembered why he was here. He immediately moved his stool to a better position and started to draw.

It was the finest sketch he had ever made.

Illustrated by Sun Shun-cheng

Always a Step Ahead

When I was given a temporary assignment in Second Company I was very happy. For after a long spell of office work this offered an excellent opportunity for some vigorous combat training. So early in the morning with my kit on my back, I set off along the highway in high spirits.

July weather in south Shantung often changes very suddenly. Although the sun had been blazing in a clear sky only a few moments ago, great masses of dark clouds soon rolled up and covered it. Then came a crash of thunder. The rain pelted down; drops as big as beans beat on my face. Without a raincoat, I was in a hell of a spot. I looked around and saw a dug-out in a mound beside an old bent willow. It was big enough for a man, so I slipped in to take shelter.

Squatting there, I gazed at the drenched hillsides, now freshly green. Above, the storm raged and around me frogs began croaking for all they were worth. In no time the ditches were full. I was impatient for the rain to stop so that I could get to company headquarters. I was looking forward to the coming manoeuvre. In this field exercise for the whole regiment, our Second Company together with Third

Company were going to make the main attack. What a good chance for me to obtain some practical training in warfare! Thinking of this, I strained my eyes in the direction of my new company.

Presently, on a ridge not far away I spotted a figure coming my way through the storm. What urgent business did the man have, I wondered, that he did not stop to take shelter? He appeared in no hurry but seemed to be tracking something. For a while he stooped and crept forward, then jumped up and ran on. Was he hunting some quarry in all this rain? Or had something unusual happened? Automatically I felt for my pistol.

When the man drew nearer, I saw that he was a soldier in a waterproof cape. He had stopped tracking now and was hurrying on his way. I could not spot anybody near him. What had he been doing?

Since the rain had slackened now I jumped out of the dug-out and soon found myself face to face with the young soldier. Beneath long slender brows his big eyes were sparkling. His handsome face seemed familiar, but before I could place him he accosted me, "Excuse me. Are you Deputy Political Instructor Hung Chun?"

I had never been in this district before. How could he know my name and who I was? He answered my unspoken question by introducing himself: "I'm Chan Yung, a Second Company messenger. Our commander told us you would arrive today and sent me to show you the way." Before I could stop him he lifted my kit-bag off my back and slung it over his shoulder. "Let's go," he said.

I was cheered by his warm greeting. Apart from regular duties, my new comrades were busy preparing for the manoeuvre, yet they had sent someone to meet me. I appreciated this consideration.

"Deputy Instructor, may I make a criticism?" The young soldier came to a halt and eyed me seriously.

What! Criticism when we had only just met? I stopped too, wondering what he had to say.

Chan Yung came out with it frankly: "You're late today." Noticing my perplexity, he pointed to the old willow near where I had sheltered. "It's exactly ten *li* from regiment headquarters to this tree and it generally takes a soldier an hour to walk here. We were told that you would start at seven but it's half past eight already."



He paused, then stepping closer continued, "Comrade Instructor, if a soldier is late for action that only means one combatant less. But in your case it's not just a matter of one single person. There would be a whole company behind you."

He was certainly blunt. Having worked in the office for so long, I realized that my sense of time was not good enough for a battle unit. How true it is that if you don't go down to grass-root levels you never know the way of life and thinking of the rank and file. Comrade Chan had hit the nail on the head.

"Young Chan, you're absolutely correct," I told him. "From now on we'll be living and fighting together. I'll need help in many ways."

The young soldier flashed me a smile then said rather diffidently, "Let's help each other. I like to voice my criticism frankly; I like better still to hear others criticize me. The stronger their fire the better." He paused and then added, "This is the way I see it: Our job is to take up arms in defence of our motherland. But if the imperialists decide to attack us, they'll not give us any warning. War could come at any time, like the thunder shower we've just had. Preparedness for war should take first place. We must always be one step ahead of the enemy." He bent forward then like a sprinter ready to start a race.

His gestures and the way he talked seemed somehow familiar. Could he possibly be Big Tiger? I looked again at his bright eyes and flashing smile. Yes! It was Big Tiger. No mistake about it. Certainly I had never expected to see him here today!

2

Five years previously I had been in charge of joint defence work with the local militia. I recalled a certain incident.

One summer at midday, the call sounded for a defence manoeuvre. The serene fishing village began to seethe with activity. Instantly militiamen, some with loaded guns, others with spears and harpoons, ran towards the drill ground by the village. Lining up, they awaited orders.

When all the platoons had reported, the militia leader asked me quietly, "Shall we start?" As I nodded, he stepped towards his men and began, "Comrades. . ."

"Report!" cut in the clear voice of a boy.

There stood a lad of thirteen or fourteen carrying a thick sorghum stalk on his shoulder and looking intently at the militia leader. His serious, business-like air reminded me of the little Eighth Route sentries who, red-tasselled spears in hand, had examined the papers of passers-by before Liberation. Happy memories of them flooded my heart. I watched this youngster with interest.

"The reserve militia squad report for duty. We're ready to receive orders."

I looked around then and saw about a dozen lads, the youngest maybe seven or eight and the oldest hardly more than fourteen, lined up in a far corner of the ground. Their solemn attentive expressions seemed somewhat incongruous on such young innocent faces. No doubt this was the reserve militia squad.

Already I had heard about the excellent combat readiness here. Not only were young men and women organized into the militia, but old people and children were doing their bit too. I had heard about Big Tiger. He had been turned down many times by the militia because he was under age; so on his own initiative he had set up a reserve squad of boys and demanded that they be accepted as a regular unit. The militia leader hadn't the heart to refuse them. "All right," he said finally. "Your reserve squad under Big Tiger will take orders from the militia company. As to arms. . ." He scratched his head. "Let's leave that till later."

In spite of this, the militia leader did not take the boys' squad seriously. He considered them too young to be given sentry duty, to say nothing of more important tasks. This in no way dismayed Big Tiger. He told the others, "We've received official recognition. If we're not given real work, we must fight for it." That was why as soon as they heard the emergency call they had appeared that day on the drill ground. They were a motley collection, all different sizes; but they held their heads high and were full of pep.

"Comrade Big Tiger," I said. "We're going to cross a river fully equipped. Your squad members are too young for that. You're dismissed."

Big Tiger was obviously taken aback but he gave me a broad smile. "Comrade PLA, are we refused combat training because of our age? Didn't you read in the paper recently about that Vietnamese boy who captured a whole squad of U.S.-puppet troops? War is like a summer shower, it comes without warning. We must always be a step ahead." Saying this, he lunged forward as if to charge the enemy.

I was amazed at the way the boy rattled on. But what he said made sense, especially this idea of being "a step ahead". He expressed himself well too. I glanced at the militia leader, and after receiving a nod from him I ordered, "Good, Big Tiger. Lead your men into position behind Third Platoon and prepare for action."

The boys plunged fearlessly into the river and swam well abreast of the militiamen. But gradually their strength gave out. They began to flounder. We had of course taken precautionary measures and so were able to rescue them one by one, but not before most of them had gulped down some water. Yet they were not a bit disheartened. At the close of the manoeuvre Big Tiger announced proudly, "So we swallowed some water today? If that will help us to defeat enemy attacks tomorrow then we've taken a step ahead."

Not long afterwards I was transferred to work elsewhere and so lost contact with Big Tiger. Little did I think that five years later I would meet him on my way to a new company headquarters. Big Tiger, who had started as a reserve militiaman, was now a smart young PLA fighter!

I followed Chan Yung up a steep mountain slope. When we reached the top the air was cold — an eagle swept over my head. I called out, "Big Tiger!"

The young soldier blinked, caught off guard by my use of his childhood name.

"Don't you remember me?" I asked. "Five years ago when you were head of the reserve militia squad, you took part in a river-crossing exercise. . . ."

"Oh, it's you — Comrade Hung," he exclaimed. "I'm sorry, I didn't recognize you. . . ."

The rest of the way we chatted. I learned that Big Tiger had joined the army only the year before. At first he was a machine-gunner. Six months ago he had become a company messenger. He admitted that he didn't know his job too well yet, but was trying to do his best. He also told me that since the joint defence manoeuvre was to start the next day, the whole company was busy preparing. It occurred to me suddenly to ask what he had been up to during the rainstorm.

"I was training — imagining that I was delivering a message under wartime conditions." He grinned. "It didn't delay me." I realized that this was another example of his keeping "a step ahead".

We climbed another winding mountain path and after crossing a ridge came down to a fairly big river, more than ninety feet across. It was in spate after the storm, with high waves swirling through some rapids. Young Chan smiled. Cool and resourceful, he looked a bit of a dare-devil too. Now, what would he be up to here?

Not far away upstream I spotted a log foot-bridge. I was secretly glad that it had not been washed away by the storm.

"Young Chan, let's cross up there," I suggested, pointing to the bridge.

Chan shook his head, obviously hoping I would understand. "Deputy instructor, if war comes a messenger won't always find a bridge where he needs one. Let's do it this way: You go by the bridge. I'll swim across. Swimming may come in useful in wartime, so we should get in all the practice we can. We must keep a step ahead."

"A step ahead" again! How clearly I remembered that river-crossing five years before when Young Chan and his squad had swallowed so much water. But the speed of the current made me hesitate to agree.

Before I had time to say anything, however, he pushed the kit-bag into my hands and said, "I'm not a hot-headed kid now, I know how to do things scientifically." Saying this, he ran down to a hollow beside the river and pulled out a bundle of bare branches, tightly tied together. "You see, I prepared everything." The next moment he plunged into the water with this improvised float and, cutting

through the swirling waves, was soon halfway across the river and beyond the rapids. I heaved a sigh of relief while watching him swim strongly on. He called over his shoulder, "Deputy instructor, please cross by the foot-bridge. I'll meet you on the other side."

His success in passing the rapids proved that in five years Young Chan had become a first-rate swimmer. As I started for the bridge it occurred to me that I should measure up to him by going "a step ahead" myself, as in fact every revolutionary fighter should do. To cross by the bridge was taking the easy way out — the first step towards retreat — and, as Young Chan had pointed out, my every action had additional importance because there would be a whole company behind me. So I turned back and jumped into the river too. Holding the kit-bag on my head with one hand, I cut through the rolling waves using only one arm.

3

Once on the other side, Young Chan wanted to carry my kit-bag again. I refused his help, then we went on our way.

We came to a new highway hewn out between two mountain ridges. Among some trees at the foot of these stood a small but trim barracks, built of grey stone with a red tiled roof. Soldiers were drilling on the parade ground. I stopped and asked Young Chan, "Is that one of our barracks?"

"Yes. Third Platoon's. Our company headquarters is on the other side of the mountains."

"How far is it from here?"

"Only five *li* as the crow flies. But there's no path over the peaks. So we'll have to take the highway which skirts the mountains although it's three times as far."

"That means we've another fifteen *li* to go. . . ."

Our conversation was cut short by the tooting of a truck behind us. As I turned it pulled up near us. Down jumped a young soldier who called out, "Young Chan, is this Deputy Political Instructor Hung?" He walked towards me eagerly.

Young Chan introduced us, telling me, "This is the leader of Second Platoon. He's on his way back from division headquarters bringing ammunition. Just in time to give you a lift."

Several more soldiers had by now gathered round me. Young Chan introduced each in turn. After greeting me, they tossed my kit-bag onto the truck and all of us except Young Chan clambered up it.

The platoon leader sitting next to me looked down and shouted, "Young Chan, why don't you get on?"

"I'm not going with you — I've something else to do," the young soldier answered and then he disappeared, forcing his way into a narrow path almost overgrown with bushes and wild creepers.

"What a character! He won't take a lift. I wonder where he's going?" I asked myself. I urged my neighbour to call him back.

"No. Let him go," the platoon leader replied. "Maybe he has to go to Third Platoon, maybe. . . . You don't know him yet. Most probably he's gone off to take another 'step ahead'. You couldn't pull him back with a truck, let alone by yelling."

Looking in the direction where Young Chan had gone I saw nothing but towering peaks, steep cliffs and deep gullies. How could he find his way over them?

"Is there a path to company headquarters?" I asked.

"Yes, but not on the map," answered the platoon leader. "Local people say the way lies past nine ravines and eighteen precipices. You can tell from their names, names like Eagle's Grief and Tiger's Dread, that there's no beaten track." He turned to stare at the formidable peaks all around us.

The truck rolled along at full speed. It was not long before we arrived at headquarters where all the comrades greeted me with smiles. The company commander gripped my hand as if we were old friends.

"You've come just at the right time, mate," he said. "Our political instructor is away at a meeting at regiment headquarters, and the joint manoeuvre starts first thing tomorrow. I've been simply rushed off my feet. But now you're here, and they say a new broom sweeps clean. You must put all your driving force into the exercise!" He laughed heartily then put me in the picture, describing the prepa-

rations that had been made and giving me details about his company. Finally he said, "Well, no matter how busy we are, I must let you take a breather, mustn't I?" He poured me a glass of hot water. Then as though suddenly remembering something he asked, "Hey, didn't Young Chan meet you?"

"Yes, he did." I told him what had happened on the road.

A smile of satisfaction lit up his face and he seemed on the point of making some comment. But finally he shook his head, muttering, "Huh! That young fellow! Well, you'd better take a rest..." With that he left the office like a whirlwind, calling back to me through the window, "I'm going to see about the unloading of the ammunition."

As I watched him go I thought, "So that's my new company commander. I'm in luck. It'll be a joy living and working with such a comrade."

Before I had finished drinking the water the company commander had given me, I heard him talking outside. From his tone I judged he was annoyed with someone. I went to the window to see what was up.

"What? You're two minutes late? Who gave you this task? Who fixed the time limit? You think I haven't been over the nine ravines and eighteen precipices? You made it in only three quarters of an hour, yet you're grouching about being two minutes late. Do you want to break your neck?... All right, all right. There's no need to explain. You're to go and rest immediately—those are my orders. And without my permission you're not to stir a foot."

I realized what this was all about: After I'd left on the truck Young Chan had been taking another "step ahead".

The commander's attitude struck me as rather tough. I was thinking of putting in a few good words for Young Chan when he saw me through the window and called out eagerly, "Deputy political instructor!"

The commander, behind the young fighter, signed to me not to interfere. And as I nodded he continued sternly, "You're not going to get off by appealing to the deputy political instructor. Don't argue, go and have a rest, quick."

Reluctantly Young Chan went into the inner office. Closing the door behind him, the commander turned to me and said in an undertone, "Really, you can't do anything with him. Once he starts taking what he calls a step ahead, he gives no thought to his own safety. The terrain around here is most tricky; there are no good tracks to follow. Yet he just crossed Eagle's Grief, Tiger's Dread and the rest in forty-five minutes! Did you notice his torn uniform and the bloody scratches on his hands?" He stopped to peep into the inner room where Young Chan was supposed to be resting and instantly flared up again, "So that's the way you obey orders! Instead of resting, you're writing? — Secretary, confiscate his notebook."

Either this was an empty threat or the secretary was not around. At any rate no one answered.

After supper the commander took me round the nearby platoons. The soldiers were all poring over Chairman Mao's military writings and discussing the coming field exercise.

Later that night, when the commander was posting me on how to proceed with the manoeuvre the next day, we heard a car draw up in front of the office. Staff Officer Wei from regiment headquarters got out and, greeting the commander, gave him a note. He quickly read it. Raising his heavy brows, his face flushed with excitement, he said firmly, "We guarantee to carry out the order."

I realized that there must be some change in the plan. I took the note and read the order:

According to our scouts, the enemy has gone into action ahead of schedule. The regiment Party committee has therefore decided to start the general offensive at nine-thirty tonight instead of at eight a.m. tomorrow. Second Company, as a task force, is hereby ordered to make the main attack in co-ordination with Third Company.

I glanced at my watch. It was ten past eight already. Was our company well enough prepared to rise to this emergency? Guessing what was on my mind, the commander felt for the pistol at his belt and said confidently, "Old Hung, don't worry. The whole company's a step ahead. We're fully prepared. There's no problem."

But then, stepping up to the military map, he knit his brows thoughtfully. I heard him say to himself, "The immediate problem



is how to notify Third Platoon of the place and hour for assembly." Third Platoon was on the other side of the mountains.

"Time's pressing. We must send a messenger at once."

"There's only one thing to do," replied the commander after pausing a moment. "In one hour and ten minutes we attack! There's no time to send a messenger by the highway."

"Let me go, company commander!" shouted Chan Yung bursting out from the inner room. Standing before us, determined and confident, he pleaded, "Company commander! Deputy political instructor! If I take a short-cut I can deliver the message in forty minutes. I know the way. Let me go!"

Impressed by the young soldier's keenness, I was about to support his request when I noticed that the commander was still poring over the map. At last, without raising his eyes, he said to Young Chan: "Let you go? You made that trip in daylight all right, but it's dark now. D'you think you can reach Third Platoon safe and sound without any light, eh?" In spite of his stern tone it was obvious that he was considering granting permission.

"I've thought it all out," Chan Yung answered decisively. "When I was climbing Tiger's Dread today, I lost my way. It took me more than ten minutes to find it again. That's why I was back late. But I found several small tracks up there. I shan't lose my way again, I'm sure of that."

The commander could not conceal his satisfaction. Looking at Young Chan intently he said with concern, "Comrade Chan Yung, the Party committee has confidence in you. You must be quick and bold on this mission but keep a cool head. It will be a race with time. Take extra care crossing Eagle's Grief and Tiger's Dread. . . . After you reach Third Platoon, proceed with them to the assembly point and then send up a red flare. As soon as we see it, First and Second Platoon will proceed towards the main peak." He stopped for a moment then concluded gravely: "Comrade Chan Yung, the path you'll be taking is rough and difficult, but it's the key to victory. Get going."

We both shook hands with Young Chan. Then he slung his rifle over his shoulder and disappeared into the dark night. . . .

After seeing Young Chan off, the company commander mustered our men while I mulled over in my mind the young soldier's concept of keeping a step ahead. Then I went back into the office and on the desk in the inner room found Young Chan's notebook. I opened it at the first page. There in strong, vigorous characters he had written: "Revolutionary fighters should at all times be one step ahead of the enemy." Intensely interested I read through several pages of notes the young soldier had made while studying Chairman Mao's military writings including an entry that evening. There flashed into my mind then a picture of a splendid fighter scaling dangerous peaks and striding along the rough path to victory. . . .

I turned to look out of the window. A crimson flare was rising into the sky, turning the western peaks a glowing red.

Illustrated by Chen Yu-hsien

Going to a Patient (oil-painting)
by Chang Chang-teh ►



Close as Brothers

The men of our company belong to several different nationalities. Platoon Leader Bulghamode is a Mongolian, Squad Leader Udinke is a Hocheh, I am a Han; and we have Owenke, Tahur, Korean and Manchu comrades too. The proverb says: The horses of one herd vary in colour but they gallop together. The thirty-odd men of our platoon are united as one, always in step with each other. The fiercest wind on our steppe cannot tear us apart. This is thanks to our Party which teaches us that unity makes us invincible; thanks also to Bulghamode's good leadership. I remember somebody once telling me: "That's a fine name your platoon leader has: Bulghamode. It's the Mongolian for 'unity', so your platoon's solidarity isn't surprising." However it took a raging blizzard one winter night on the Darinor Steppe to really bring home to me the importance of this splendid quality.

That day Udinke and I had left the rest of our platoon and gone out to keep watch over fifty tons or so of fodder in the hills. It had been snowing for a solid twenty-four hours. By evening the snow had stopped but the sky was still overcast by cloud-banks like

stampeding herds of cattle, while the fallen snow whirled and drifted as if in a dance—sure sign that a White Wind was in the offing. This wind brings the temperature down to more than forty degrees below zero, freezing cattle to death, making caravans lose their way, and carrying off whole tents.

“This fodder is vital for our army horses,” Udinke impressed on me. “We mustn’t let the White Wind carry it off. You keep an eye on our tent while I go and have a look at the stack-yard.” Picking up some coils of rope and a stick he strode out.

Though I had been with the company for more than a year, our squad leader still considered me a novice and would always take on the most difficult tasks himself. If I remonstrated he would simply say: “No, this is my job, you can’t have it. If Bulghamode were here, I wouldn’t be able to get it from him either.” So all I could do was saddle his grey horse for him. As he was mounting he turned back to call: “Mind you don’t stir a step from this tent. . . .”

Gradually darkness fell. After securing the tent pegs and ropes I sat down to wait for the squad leader’s return. I lit the lantern hanging on the post, but even after I had trimmed the wick three times there was still no sign of Udinke. The wind gathered force. When I noticed my horse was snorting I realized the White Wind was here! Unable to sit still a moment longer, I put on my overcoat and picked up my saddle and harness. I was just reaching for the lantern when a warm and powerful hand grabbed me from behind.

“So you’re back, squad leader!” I exclaimed in relief.

“What’s wrong with your eyes today? They’re usually sharp enough,” somebody chuckled. It was our platoon leader. He was covered from head to foot with snow; even his eyelashes were white. A gun on his back, a whip in his right hand, he had two big fur coats under his left arm.

“Our squad leader. . . .” I stammered.

“So Udinke’s out in this storm, eh?” Bulghamode eyed me searchingly. “Gone to the stack-yard, I suppose. Hmm, when did he leave?”

“At four.”

“What’s the time now?”

“Seven.”

“Well, it looks as if we shall have to spend the evening playing hide-and-seek with him in the storm.”

The smile never left Bulghamode’s face as he spoke. He was like that, always optimistic. Not even the White Wind could disconcert him. As for me, I was eaten up by anxiety. I could have kicked myself for letting the squad leader go out all alone.

“What shall we do?” I asked.

“When we’re scouting and one of our comrades attacks an enemy, we cover him with our guns. When he’s groping his way back on a stormy night, we must light up his path with our lanterns. You wait here, Young Ku, while I find him.”

But I wasn’t having this. I seized the lantern and hurried out of the tent. Seeing that I was determined, Bulghamode conceded, “All right. Put on this coat.”

Put on another coat? I had one on already. But Bulghamode showed me how to put my own coat on back to front, buttoning it down my back, then slip the other over it and strap it round the middle.

“That’s it. Fine,” he commented. “Now no matter how hard the White Wind whirls, it can’t get past your defences.”

“Aren’t you going to put on the other coat, platoon leader?”

“Not I. I don’t feel the cold—I’m an old-timer. Come on, but don’t forget to bring your gun.” With that Bulghamode switched on his torch and stuck it out of the tent flap. “There, let it stay here to keep watch for us.”

We cantered out of the valley and soon reached the plain. After riding for a few miles through the choking, blinding snow, we reached the stack-yard. We made the rounds and satisfied ourselves that the hundred-odd stacks of fodder there were safe. A few dozen stacks on the slope exposed to the full fury of the wind were firmly roped and weighted with stones. This was clearly the work of Udinke, but not a trace could we see of him or his horse. He must have got lost. We shouted his name, although knowing this was quite useless, for the wind was howling like a pack of famished wolves. Though Bulghamode and I were side by side, I had to cup my mouth with my hands and shout at the top of my voice to make myself heard.

"Four hours he's been out," I yelled. "He must be freezing."

"Don't worry. Our fighters' hot blood melts ice and snow."

Bulghamode was obviously trying to cheer me up. Actually he was frantic too, for as he spoke he swung his lantern to and fro.

"Where shall we look for him?"

He raised the lantern again and pointed ahead. "What's in that direction?"

"Company headquarters."

"Udinke may have gone that way."

"But that's a good forty miles away," I objected. "It's only ten miles to our platoon headquarters. Surely he'd head there instead."

"Well, he only got that grey horse of his three days ago from company headquarters. The horse will remember the way to its old stable. It may have taken him there."

"Would the squad leader give the horse its head?"

"Why not?"

"In this waste of snow how can we spot a single horse?"

"Don't let the snow blind you. How about this lantern? When your squad leader went fishing on the river at night, how did he get his bearings?"

"By watching out for lights."

"Exactly. So let's get a move on and show him our lights."

We crossed the wide snowy plain to a range of sand dunes. Since the snow had filled all the hollows, any moment we might plunge into a snowdrift. Bulghamode reined in saying, "Stop. Let me go on ahead. Keep ten yards behind me."

Of course he was a crack horseman who had started to ride bareback at the age of nine and won many horse-races. Still, this ride over dangerous terrain in a snowstorm was full of risks. But ignoring my protests he spurred ahead, inclining sideways to light my way with his lantern. . . .

Suddenly snow spattered my face. I heard a neigh of alarm as the platoon leader and his horse vanished from sight, leaving nothing to be seen but a flickering lantern. I hurried forward, untied the strap round my waist and let it down into the pit. When Bulghamode had extricated himself and the horse we pressed on and presently came to another long gully.



"Listen, Young Kul Wolves!"

Though I strained my ears, I heard nothing but the roar of the wind and the crunch of our horses' hooves. Then, sure enough, the platoon leader's sense of hearing was vindicated. The eerie howling of wolves carried to me distinctly. The next moment Bulghamode reined in and covered his lantern with the flap of his coat.

"Listen, Young Ku. Hear a horse neighing?"

Yes, this time there was no mistaking the sound.

"Quick. Forward!" He pulled out his cartridge-belt and swiftly loaded his gun. I followed suit.

The horse's neighing and the howling of wolves grew clearer every second. It was Udinke's grey horse beyond any doubt.

"Close in, quick. Mount your bayonet."

We dismounted near the pack of wolves and threw ourselves flat. Then Bulghamode raised his lantern and by its light we made out a circle of wolves attacking the frightened horse.

"Fire at the leader of the pack!" We both shouted in the same split second, for this was the only way to save the horse.

Crack! With one shot Bulghamode downed the foremost wolf. The rest, after a moment's confusion, turned and made for our light. Again our guns barked, and again, till several wolves fell and some others limped away. Then we hurried forward and found Squad Leader Udinke half buried in a snowdrift.

After lying so long in the snow Udinke was too numb to stand. At the sight of our lantern his lips trembled and he stretched out an icy hand.

"Here we are, squad leader!" I cried. "Platoon Leader Bulghamode too. Are you all right?"

Udinke tried to answer but could say no more than "Ku, Ku. . . ." With his numbed hands he fumbled to hoist himself to his feet.

Knowing that he was half frozen, I whipped off my coat just as Bulghamode took the spare coat from his saddle and draped it over him. Together we hauled him up and rubbed his hands with snow to restore the circulation. Then Bulghamode unbuttoned his coat and clasped Udinke to his chest to warm him.

"Still cold, squad leader?" I asked anxiously.

"How about you, Ku? Cold?" He was able to speak now.

"N-no . . . I'm f-fine. . . ."

"F-fine, eh? Your teeth are chattering." The squad leader smiled and his smile warmed my heart.

"Help him into the saddle. Let's go." Bulghamode ordered.

We galloped on for several miles, till exercise brought the warmth back to Udinke's body. By then the wind was dying down and we decided to shelter in a shed used by some hay-makers in the autumn.

"We're only ten miles from company headquarters," Bulghamode told us cheerfully, as he picked up some dry cow-dung piled in one corner of the shed as fuel.

"So near?"

"Must be. Our platoon leader knows this part of the Darinor Steppe like the palm of his hand."

Busy lighting the fire, I asked: "Platoon leader, you always say

you were raised on this steppe, but I've heard people say you come from Udan. How's that?"

Bulghamode did not answer, just gazed thoughtfully at the lantern.

"That's a very interesting story, Ku," said the squad leader, making me more eager to hear it. When I pressed the platoon leader to tell it, he agreed. "All right. First hang up the lantern." Then he embarked on his tale.

"Before Liberation my family lived in Udan. My father slaved for the cattle-owner there till he could stand it no longer and ran away to join the people's cavalry in Darinor. When the cattle-owner found out, he turned my mother out of her hut although she was six months pregnant. She roamed the steppe for fifty days or more, till one night the White Wind started blowing. Then exhausted with hunger and cold, she managed to drag herself towards the light of a lantern hanging outside a tent. This tent as it happened belonged to my father's unit, but he had gone off to Darghan with a Han comrade, Chang, to fetch some important dispatches. The lantern hanging there was to guide them back. My mother gave birth before her time that night in the tent. Then my father came back alone, because his Han comrade had been killed by bandits while protecting him and our cavalry arrived just in time to rescue him. In order to commemorate his dead Han comrade, my father gave his newly-born child the name Bulghamode."

"Bulghamode meaning 'unity'."

"That's right," said the platoon leader with emotion. "The unity among our different nationalities was built up under the leadership of the Party, cemented by the blood of our comrades, and steeled in the flames of war. It has been handed down to us by fighters who gave their lives for the revolution. Our generation must keep up this tradition."

Gazing at the lantern, I pondered this meaningful story. It seemed as if a spark of fire was kindling and irradiating my heart. Just then we saw the gleam of lights in the distance. Our company had sent out a rescue party. Platoon Leader Bulghamode, Squad Leader Udinke and I went out together to meet them.

Illustrated by Chen Yi-hsun

Camel Bells

The tinkle of bells
Comes floating from far away. . . .
Is it a letter from home
With a mother's advice:
"Step up your vigilance, son,
Standing guard at the border
For our socialist land"?

The tinkle of bells
Comes drifting over the sand-dunes. . . .
Is it a photograph
Posted from Peking,
The picture I had taken at Tien An Men
The day I joined the army?

Chang Chan-ting

The tinkle of bells
Is borne by the gusty east wind. . . .
Is it the "camel-back bookstore"
Bringing our fighters books and magazines,
Spurring us on to study hard
And master Marxism?

The tinkle of bells
Has reached the ridge near by. . . .
Is it a load of saplings
To clothe our well-guarded frontier
In verdant green?
I vow to stand firm as a mighty tree
Barring the onslaught of storms.

The tinkle of bells
Filters through the tamarisks. . . .
On the camel's back glints a gun.
Are these militiamen
Come to join our patrol,
Shoulder to shoulder with us
Making a Great Wall
Impregnable as steel?

The tinkle of bells
Sounds closer now and clearer. . . .
Ah, it is old Uncle Batur
Come across the desert again
To us, his children;
And his camel's hump is laden
With the love of all China's nationalities.

The tinkle of bells
Re-echoes in our ears. . . .
The well-loved sound
Fills us with pride and courage;
Year in year out we guard this stretch of sand,
But our hearts beat
With the pulse of our great land.



Tung Chia-tung

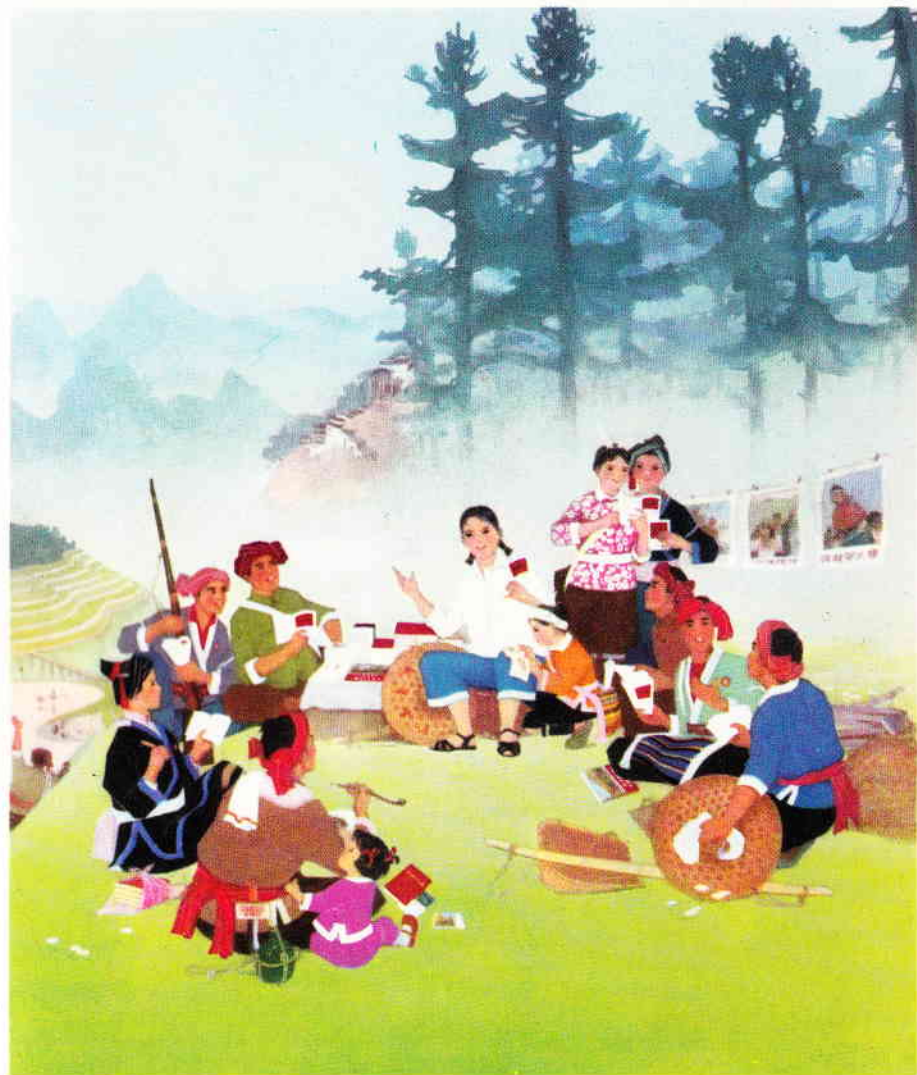
Herding Horses in the Snow

Icicles, dagger-sharp, hang from the eaves,
The sky is leaden, frozen hard the ground,
The north wind rages, snowflakes whirl. . . .
Comrade, in such a storm, where are you bound?

Plodding through snowdrifts to the stable door
You saddle a good horse and off you go,
Spurring your steed to flying speed,
Scattering sprays of snow.

The rolling Jorghai Steppe, all silver-white,
Is flecked with chestnut horses, sparks of fire;
Tamarisks, mounted fighter, snow —
What lovelier landscape could the heart desire?

Cold barley cakes and snow
For food and drink suffice,
For winter never touched your heart
Whose ardour melts the snow and ice.



A Village Bookstall (gouache)
by Huang Chi-shih ►

Spring Comes to the Commune

The morning star has just appeared —
Whose are those rapid footfalls?
Whose the songs floating through the mist?
Our village girls are marching off to battle!

A host of carrying-poles, a host of songs,
Their kerchiefs silvered with hoarfrost,
They cross the bridge, cut through the willow grove,
Setting cocks crowing in the mountain village.

Strewn with sunshine the Tachai road
Down which our girls swing,
A match for the toughest young men,
Each carrying two hundred pounds of good manure.

Poles arched like rainbows,
Racing through the clouds,
They challenge the magpies
With songs carried by the wind.

As their singing floats into the stable,
Uncle Chao throws back his head to shout:
 “What are you carrying, girls?
 Is it gold or silver?”

With a peal of laughter
The girls flash back:
 “It’s a bumper harvest that we’re carrying;
 We’re bringing spring to the commune.”

Wild geese winging north
Alight outside the village, a brave sight;
Our commune is as lovely as a painting,
A picture painted by our commune members.

*Illustrated by Chen Yi-hsun
and Hao Chan*



Iron Ball

EDITORS' NOTE: Here we present an excerpt from a novel for young people *Angry Tides on Fishermen's Island*.

The story takes place in Dragon King Island, which consists of a few dozen scattered fishing villages off the east coast of China. In 1945 after the victory of the War of Resistance Against Japan, the local people under the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party liberated this island, and democratic power was established. The Party led the people to carry out land reform and struggle against the local despots, so that the poverty-stricken fishing folk became masters of their own fate. However, in 1946 Chiang Kai-shek launched another civil war, and the following year his forces attacked the province of Shantung where Dragon King Island is and helped the local despot Chih Lung-chang and his gang to return to the island and dominate it once more. The fishermen put up a stubborn fight against their enemy. Finally they destroyed this counter-revolutionary force and the island was again liberated.

In the course of this struggle one of the novel's chief characters, young Iron Ball, grew up and became a revolutionary fighter. This is how his story begins.

1

Under the scorching sun and cloudless midsummer sky, Dragon King Island was like a sea of fire. Ever since its recapture by the reaction-

aries, Chih Lung-chang and his gang had ridden the high horse; the fishermen were unable to put out to sea, and even the youngsters were afraid to go swimming. Only young Iron Ball still roamed about freely, regardless. Chih Lung-chang, the chief despot, was not cracking down on the villagers for the time being but trying to subdue them by a show of kindness. He knew that the leader of the Fishermen's Union, Wang Ssu-chiang, had gone into hiding with the militia forces, and would avenge any villager who was killed. This being the case, Iron Ball not only felt secure but kept taking the bullies down a peg or two, helping the poor on the island to get their own back.

This day at noon he dived into the pool east of the village and caught five eels. Going home in high spirits he called out from the doorway:

"Uncle, here are some eels. If we can't fish in the sea, we can make do with the pool."

His uncle, Tang, glanced up at him and said: "Well, Iron Ball, most of the older ones of your children's corps have gone into hiding or moved away, but you're still up to your old tricks. You've beaten up Chih Lung-chang's old man and his nephew. Think he's forgotten that?"

"If he starts anything I'll fight back," replied Iron Ball airily. "I'm not afraid of man or ghost. Don't you know that, uncle?"

"I know you all right, you young rascal." His uncle shook his head.

Iron Ball fetched a basin and started cleaning the eels. "I may be young," he retorted, "but I don't take things lying down the way you do."

His uncle made no reply.

Tang had in fact been rough-handled that very morning by Chih's thug One Ear, and was still aching from three punches and two kicks. Eight years ago this thug had been a pirate who came one night to steal Tang's fishing-net. Catching him in the act, Tang gave him a good thrashing and cut off one of his ears before letting him go. Now that One Ear had come back to the island, he meant to get even with his old enemy. "Eight years ago you cut off my ear. Now watch

out for your own head. . . ." he threatened. Tang had to swallow his hatred and keep silent.

"If I were you," continued Iron Ball, "I wouldn't stand for such treatment."

"But he has Chih Lung-chang's backing," his uncle countered.

"So what? If Chih himself bullied me, I wouldn't take it lying down," rejoined Iron Ball, vigorously chopping up the eels.

"What could you do? What's the use of empty talk?"

"Empty talk, is it?" The lad stepped to his uncle's side and lowering his voice elucidated: "The other day didn't Bad Egg order the Boys' Brigade to clean up the latrines? When he saw me he strutted over. 'Still riding high and handsome, Iron Ball?' he sneered. I was too disgusted to pay any attention. So thinking I was afraid he ordered me: 'Before you start, sing me a song.' I asked: 'What song?' He said: 'Whatever you like.' 'All right,' I said. 'Just listen carefully:

The brigands whose names are mud

Eat men's flesh and drink their blood."

That made him hopping mad. He took a swipe at me. Before I could hit back that thug Squint Eye stopped me. I told Bad Egg: 'You can't get away with this. I'll get even with you. Just you wait.'"

"You're simply asking for trouble," cut in Tang uneasily. "You'll only succeed in getting yourself beaten up."

"Didn't you see the bandage on his head this morning?" asked Iron Ball gleefully.

"Yes. . . ."

"All right then." The boy's eyes lit up. "Yesterday afternoon, all dressed up as usual, he was carrying his birdcage to South Cliff when I spotted him. . . ."

"So you're the one who went for him?"

"Sure. Not with my hands — his face is too filthy — with this." He proudly produced the catapult which Party secretary Yeh Hungshan had made for him. "When I saw him fooling around with his bird there I thought: You swiped me yesterday. Now it's my turn. So I climbed that big mulberry tree north of the cliff, settled down



on a branch well hidden by leaves, got out my sling and a pebble and took careful aim. Wham! I hit him bang in the middle of his forehead. When he clapped his hands to his head and they came off bloody, he forgot his precious bird and ran howling home. . . .”

“How is it no one nabbed you?” Tang was worried.

“How could they? I have legs. When Bad Egg beat it, I slid down the tree and ran. He didn’t see me.” The boy paused a minute, then added: “I’m only sorry I hit him on the forehead instead of in the left eye — that’s where I was aiming. If I had, there’d be a One Eye today to keep One Ear company.”

Hearing this his uncle relaxed and his spirits rose. Though Iron Ball’s act of reprisal seemed boyish mischief, it had settled scores for Tang too. Still he warned the lad: “You took the hell of a risk.”

“A revolutionary has to take risks. If One Ear bullies you again, uncle, just tell me. I’ll teach the swine a lesson. Those bullies are all alike. Give in to them and they’ll trample all over you; stand up to them and they’ll back down.”

As Tang smiled his approval Iron Ball went on: “This is just the beginning. Wait till Grandad Wang comes back with our militia. Then I swear I’ll kill that devil.”

The veins on Tang’s temples suddenly stood out. Springing to his feet he blurted out: “Old Wang and Hai-sheng have been caught by those bastards.”

The knife in Iron Ball’s hand clattered to the ground. “Is that true?” he demanded.

“Only too true, more’s the pity. They’ve seized our pillar of strength. And they’re torturing them both, Old Wang and his grandson. . . .”

“Where are they?”

“In that storehouse where nets are kept. . . .”

Without waiting to hear any more, Iron Ball rushed out.

Running all the way to the storehouse, Iron Ball saw through the open door that Pock Face was brutally beating Wang Ssu-chiang inside. He felt as if the lashes were landing on him; for the old man was as dear to him as his own grandad, and Hai-sheng was his good friend. Since two thugs were on sentry duty in front of the storehouse, he

ran round to the back. Stepping on to a rock he peeped through the one small window. Pock Face was still beating Old Wang. Carried away by anger, Iron Ball snatched up two stones, cursing: "Stop that, you bastard!" He threw one stone and hit the thug on the wrist. With a yelp Pock Face dropped his whip, blood staining his sleeve. Before he knew what had hit him, Iron Ball hurled the other stone straight at his stomach, winding him and bowling him over. As soon as he had recovered his breath, Pock Face scrambled up and ran out yelling: "Catch him! Catch him!" But there was no one in sight.

Iron Ball slipped quietly home. He had a burning sensation in his throat and after gulping down a bowl of cold water he crouched down, his heart aching, on the ground. The capture of Grandad Wang was a disaster because he had always given the lead in the village; he was the man the tyrant Chih hated most. The boy had been longing for the day when Grandad Wang would bring back the militia to wipe out Chih and his gang; but now he had fallen into the enemy's hands. Seared on Iron Ball's mind was the picture of the old man and his grandson, both in chains, cruelly whipped and bleeding. His heart constricted. "Throwing a few stones at Pock Face is no use," he told himself. "We've just got to rescue them, and quickly too, or Chih and his thugs will kill them. . . ." Jumping to his feet, he clenched his fists and swore but could think of no way to save them. He decided to talk it over with Spring Catch, his only friend still in the village. Off he went and, as luck would have it, found the other boy standing at the door of his home.

"Iron Ball!"

"Spring Catch!"

These were short, simple greetings but in those days of White terror they held a wealth of feeling. "Where are you off to?" Spring Catch asked.

"I was looking for you. Let's talk inside." Iron Ball led the way in and Spring Catch closed the door behind them.

"Where's your mother?"

"Fetching water. . . . Did you hear that Grandad Wang and Hai-sheng have been caught by those devils?" Spring Catch's face was grim. He spoke huskily, the tears welling up in his eyes.

"Yes, I've heard. That's why I'm here," replied Iron Ball. "We must find some way to get them out quick, otherwise Chih Lung-chang may murder them. See?"

"I know. . . ." After Spring Catch had heard this news he had circled round the storehouse several times, wondering how they could rescue the prisoners. Just as he had decided to find Iron Ball, his friend had come to consult him. He said: "They're in terrible danger. What can we do?"

"Would I have come to ask your advice if I knew what to do?" replied Iron Ball frantically.

"In that case, let's apply ourselves now to this problem. I'll do my thinking on the *kang* inside, while you stay here. We'll think up some plan, right?"

Iron Ball agreed. So Spring Catch sat himself down on the *kang* and started racking his brains, while Iron Ball paced the outer room like a strategist preparing a campaign.

Before long both boys had a plan.

"Let's hear yours first," said Spring Catch.

"It's this," was the confident answer. "We'll kidnap Bad Egg and, using him as a hostage, negotiate with Chih. Give him an ultimatum. Unless he releases Grandad Wang and Hai-sheng, we'll put his nephew to death — throw him into the sea in a sack to feed the turtles. How's that?"

Spring Catch at first thought this a splendid scheme. But on second thoughts he asked: "After kidnapping him where shall we keep him? What if Chih finds out where he's hidden?"

Iron Ball blinked, forced to admit that his proposal was impractical since Chih controlled the whole island. "All right. Tell me your plan," he urged.

"Here it is. We'll get some fire-crackers and an empty tin can. At night I'll go to the seashore and fasten the fire-crackers to the can. When I let them off it'll sound like a machine-gun and Chih, thinking our guerrillas have come, will take his men out to fight. That'll give us a chance to get Grandad Wang and Hai-sheng out. . . ." Spring Catch watched his friend's face as he spoke for signs of approval. But Iron Ball shook his head.

"What's wrong?"

"Wouldn't Chih leave guards at the storehouse?"

That stumped Spring Catch. They had to think again. Soon Iron Ball put forward another proposal.

"It's only the storehouse gate that's guarded, Spring Catch. The middle room's locked and there are no guards at the back. Let's tunnel through the back wall tonight, then crawl in and fetch them out. We can hide them either in my home or yours..."

"Wouldn't digging make so much noise that those thugs would hear it?"

"We can do it so quietly that however long those donkeys' ears are they won't hear a thing."

"Good," exclaimed Spring Catch. "We'll start as soon as it's dark." It occurred to him that perhaps they should consult Third Sister Liu, for his mother had told him that after Grandad Wang's capture they should always consult Third Sister Liu before taking any action. But then he reflected: They're so anxious to get grandad out, they'd be sure to agree.

Soon after dark, all their preparations completed, the two boys crept up to the storehouse. By this time the whole village was asleep. A light wind had sprung up, clouds were scudding through the sky, and the few stars which appeared from time to time seemed to realize that the youngsters' secret mission could best be done in the dark; so, winking, they hid themselves behind clouds again. The two boys had with them a chisel and a hammer, and Iron Ball had draped a dogskin over his shoulders by way of camouflage, besides smearing his face with coal-dust. In no time they groped their way to the back of the storehouse. Hiding in a nearby ditch they peeped cautiously round. The only light to be seen was a glimmer through the back window of the lock-up. Iron Ball nudged his companion and whispered: "Let's start."

Spring Catch, rather nervous, just nodded.

"You stay here and keep watch," Iron Ball told him. "If you spot any enemy movements let me know. If you can't come over, whistle..."

With this he started crawling forward. A thorn pricked his palm, making it bleed. He pulled out the thorn and went on. Then he heard footsteps. Someone asked:

"Anything stirring?"

"No."

Iron Ball knew it was Pock Face making his rounds and talking to One Ear who was on guard at the gate. When all was quiet once more he crawled forward again. By the time he reached the back wall, his heart was pounding. Now only the wall separated him from the prisoners and he longed to call out: "Grandad! Hai-sheng! Just wait. We'll have you out in no time..." But taking a grip on himself, he set to work.

The wall was built of stone. He put the point of the chisel in a crevice and tapped it with the hammer. But the blow being light had no effect. Since all around was still, he was emboldened to strike three hard blows. To his delight this time he prized loose a big stone. Unfortunately the thugs at the front heard the hammering.

"Who's there?" rang out the challenge.

Iron Ball dropped on all fours and froze.

"Who's there?" yelled Pock Face again. Rifle at the ready he ran to investigate.

One Ear dashed to the back of the storehouse too and, flashing his torch around, saw a furry shadow. This was Iron Ball in his dogskin.

"It's just a dog." One Ear put his torch away.

"Man or dog, we have to be careful," grumbled Pock Face. "Mustn't let that rascal Wang run away."

Fuming with frustration Iron Ball crawled back to the ditch.

"What are we to do?" whispered Spring Catch, in a cold sweat.

"Go back and sleep," was the despondent answer.

"Then how about Grandad Wang and Hai-sheng?"

"We'll think out some other plan."

When Iron Ball reached home, his uncle and younger brother Iron Lock were already asleep and the door was barred. He crawled in through a hole, and lay down quietly beside them. But he could not go to sleep for worrying about Grandad Wang and Hai-sheng.

If only he had a gun! Then he could shoot the two guards and get them out. He could think of no way to get a gun, however. He racked his brains, his mind in a turmoil till cock-crow, when at last he fell into an exhausted sleep.

2

Iron Ball spent the next two days moping, casting about in vain for some way to rescue Grandad Wang and Hai-sheng. This afternoon he called on Spring Catch again. He found his friend's mother sitting by the door sewing, as if on the watch for someone. From inside he heard the low voices of a man and a woman.

"... At this crucial time we must convince the masses that this is only a passing phase. Darkness will give way to dawn. The villagers must be convinced that the revolution will win out. They must be organized to stand up and fight. We mustn't knuckle under to the enemy but return blow for blow."

Iron Ball agreed to this with all his heart. But who was it speaking? He heard the woman reply:

"Right. Wolves will always be wolves. The more afraid you are, the more they bully you..."

"What other problems are there just now?" asked the man.

"Now the enemy's running wild, and Old Wang is a prisoner: that makes things hard. Still, as Grandad Wang always said, difficulties are like wind and waves, but we fishing folk can sail into the teeth of a storm. Death itself has no terrors for us; so why should we worry about difficulties? I promise the Party to do my best to rally the villagers to overcome our difficulties. Have you any other special jobs for me?"

"That bandit soldier Dwarf Wang you just mentioned must be won over. This is vital for rescuing Old Wang. Then you must find out in detail the disposition of guards round the storehouse, in readiness for action."

Just then Spring Catch came out and Iron Ball asked eagerly, "Who are those people talking in your house?"

"You can go in and see."

The next second Third Sister Liu came out, signed to him to go in and left. Walking into the house, Iron Ball found a man sitting on the *kang* in the inside room. On the floor by the *kang* were two baskets of fish, a carrying-pole and a steelyard. So this was obviously a fish-vendor. Iron Ball was turning away in bewilderment when the man called him by name. His voice was familiar. The boy took a closer look at this visitor's lean, unshaved face and recognized Party secretary Yeh Hung-shan! Yeh had been keeping up the fight with his battalion. For days he had not had one sound sleep, not eaten one single square meal. Yet although worn out he had led his band of guerrillas all this time in enemy territory.

The sight of Yeh was like a light piercing the darkness. Iron Ball's heart was filled with indescribable joy. Crying "Uncle Yeh! Uncle Yeh!..." he fell into Yeh's arms sobbing. As the Party secretary stroked his ruffled hair he remembered what a mischievous, carefree boy Iron Ball had been. Now this cruel struggle was making a man of him. Yeh wiped the lad's eyes and smiled.

"Look, Iron Ball! See what I've brought you." Yeh took from his belt a wooden pistol wrapped in red cloth. With its hard-wood handle and bright red varnish, it was a replica of one he had previously given Hai-sheng. Iron Ball took it, examined it closely and pulled the trigger. His face lit up.

"I'm worried stiff these days, uncle," he confided. "That swine Chih is torturing Grandad and Hai-sheng, and I can't think of any way to rescue them. Tell me what to do!"

"We must rescue them, right," Yeh said gravely. "The way you slung stones at Pock Face was fine, but..."

"But what can I do, just on my own?" cut in Iron Ball. "Since those bullies came back, some people have been scared. Some have even given back the things we shared out when we struggled against the despots. 'Ta-kuei's like that. I don't think much of him. It takes guts to be a revolutionary..."

Yeh listened with a smile to this outburst, then said, "True, some youngsters aren't politically aware yet. But they can be helped along. Take 'Ta-kuei for instance. Just now I heard from Third

Sister Liu that when Bad Egg ordered him to turn the millstone the other day he rebelled and refused to go."

"I put him up to that," said Iron Ball. "Otherwise he'd have done as he was told."

"If you can put him up to doing something revolutionary once, you can put him up to it again. If he takes part in a few real struggles, he'll become more politically conscious and forge ahead."

Iron Ball did not attempt to deny the truth of this.

Then Yeh added: "If you could organize all the politically conscious boys from poor families in the village and set up an underground youth corps to fight the enemy, that would be more effective than acting alone. For, as Chairman Mao teaches us, **'Revolutionary war is a war of the masses; it can be waged only by mobilizing the masses and relying on them.'** Just relying on a few is not enough. Only when we mobilize old and young alike and use all the means at our disposal to fight can we drown the enemy in the sea of people's war..."

Iron Ball listened, holding his breath, while warmth flooded his whole body. Chairman Mao's teachings helped him to see further. "Yes," he told himself. "Revolutionary war is a war of the masses. It's no good fighting alone."

Just at this moment Spring Catch coughed twice outside, a warning that someone was coming. So after half an hour's talk Iron Ball reluctantly took his leave of Yeh, who enjoined on him in parting:

"From now on you must be more careful. Do nothing rash. Courage alone isn't enough, you must use your brains as well. After you set up an underground youth corps, united action and discipline are essential. When problems crop up, discuss them with Third Sister Liu..."

"You can count on me, Uncle Yeh," the boy assured him.

This encounter left Iron Ball too excited to sleep. The next morning he got up before it was light, ate some cold pancakes by way of breakfast, then ran off to enlist Spring Catch's help in organizing the underground youth corps. After that he went to find Ta-kuei.

Ta-kuei felt very grateful to Iron Ball, who had got him out of forced labour and stopped Bad Egg from beating him. So he gave

the boy a warm welcome. When Iron Ball refused a seat and a drink of water, Ta-kuei offered him a turnip.

Iron Ball took the turnip and struck it against his knee, breaking it into two parts, one of which he gave back.

As Ta-kuei smacked his lips and took a bite, Iron Ball announced, "I've come to discuss something with you."

"What is it?"

"If those bullies order you again to work at the mill for them, will you go or not?"

Ta-kuei munched reflectively and then replied: "That depends on whether you'll back me up or not."

"What difference does that make?"

"If you back me up, I'll refuse to go. If you don't, Bad Egg will give me a hiding."

Iron Ball grinned. "If you want me to back you, will you do as I say and join in our fight?"

"What fight?"

"We must fight against Chih. This is no joke, mind you. We mustn't be afraid even of his guns. Only a coward shows fear. Have you the guts to join us?"

Ta-kuei hesitated. To fight was certainly no joke but a matter of life and death. If he consulted his mother she would never agree to it — she had often vetoed his plans. But if he stayed out of the struggle, there would be no end to Bad Egg's bullying. His heart beating fast he looked at Iron Ball, who was waiting rather impatiently for an answer.

"Go on. Have you the guts or not?"

Ta-kuei finally reached a decision. Glancing around to make sure the coast was clear, he answered: "Yes, I have."

"Have I your word for it?"

"Yes... I'm no cowardly turtle. But don't tell my ma."

"Fine. That's settled then."

Pleased with the outcome of this talk, Iron Ball had another discussion that afternoon with Spring Catch. Then he went to see Third Sister Liu.

When Third Sister Liu had let him in and barred the gate again, she listened with growing satisfaction to the boy's report of his progress.

"Uncle Yeh told me that our youth corps was to take orders from you," said Iron Ball. "What jobs do you have for us?"

"Don't be so impatient." Third Sister Liu smiled. "There are plenty of jobs, but we'll have to see how well you shape..."

"We'll carry them out well, I promise!" he cut in.

Third Sister Liu turned to the *kang* and took out a parcel from the flue under it. "Here," she said gravely. "This is your first assignment. Hit the enemy where it hurts."

Iron Ball jumped for joy, imagining that this must be a package of dynamite.

"Don't worry!" he cried. "We'll blast the enemy to smithereens." He took the package from her and started out.

"Where are you running off to?" Third Sister Liu stopped him. "This isn't dynamite, it's something more effective than dynamite." Seeing his look of bewilderment she explained, "These are pamphlets from Headquarters."

"Pamphlets?"

"Yes, we must distribute them quickly, to organize people to refuse to pay taxes or give up things confiscated from the diehards, and to fight on to the end."

"Fight on to the end!" Iron Ball gritted his teeth and patted his trouser pocket which was bulging.

"What have you got in your pocket?" Third Sister Liu asked.

"The pistol Uncle Yeh gave me," he answered proudly. "It's only a dummy, but good enough to bluff the enemy." He produced the wooden pistol and showed it to her.

Third Sister Liu smiled at him fondly. "Yes, I see."

"We can't make a revolution without guns," he continued.

"That's very true, Iron Ball. But Uncle Yeh must have told you too of the need to be very careful. Don't show off with that gun in front of the enemy. If they find out what you're up to, there'll be big trouble."

The serious expression on her face made Iron Ball shift uneasily. She continued, "Chih Lung-chang is a cruel, crafty tyrant. It takes both boldness and cautiousness to fight him. As Grandad Wang always said, the least carelessness may cost lives. So we must be extra careful."

Iron Ball bit his lip and nodded. "Yes. I'll be more careful in future."

"Good. We trust you. You're not a child any more but a fighter for the revolution. You must do whatever the revolution requires."

Two days later, all sorts of pamphlets appeared in the village and all the despots received warning letters. The villagers gathered excitedly in small groups to canvass these events. Ta-kuei's mother loved a good gossip, but since the despots' return she had stayed at home all day to keep out of trouble. This morning, however, without even waiting for breakfast, she went out to the old locust tree and started chatting with some other women.

"Tigers lurk in deep mountains, troubled times bring forth heroes — what a true saying that is! The other day someone taught Pock Face a lesson; now pamphlets have been distributed at night. Mark my word, things are going to change..."

"Do you know who's giving the lead?"

"It must be Old Yeh who used to come so often to our village. Who else would have the nerve? I've heard he's in command of a guerrilla battalion. Quite a few of them were here last night."

"Did you see them?"

"It stands to reason. Otherwise how could so many pamphlets have been left all over the village? They say all the moneybags have received stern warnings not to demand the things confiscated from them and not to take reprisals — otherwise they're only digging their own graves."

The other women listened wide-eyed, holding their breath. One of them chipped in: "It's said that the other day Old Yeh and his battalion held a meeting north of our village. They called for resistance to the diehards and handed out pamphlets. They even arrested some ward chiefs."

"I heard that too," said another. "Is it true?"

All eyes turned to Ta-kuei's mother who was thought to be in the know. Finding herself the centre of attention, she cleared her throat, looked from face to face and said softly: "Of course it's true. Who would fool people these days? I've heard that Old Yeh has been seen in these parts. Sometimes he wears a big straw hat and carries a mattock, like a peasant; sometimes he appears as a pedlar with a rattle, hawking cloth and thread through the streets; sometimes as a fish-monger with two crates of fish.... That reminds me. Look! Here's a pamphlet Ta-kuei picked up...."

"What does it say? If only we could read! Ask Tsui-hua to read it out."

Then Tsui-hua standing beside Ta-kuei's mother, took the pamphlet from her and read:

Brothers, all of us who are poor must unite as one and stand up to our enemy like Grandad Wang. Refuse to pay taxes, refuse to return confiscated property. Fight to the finish against Chih Lung-chang. The final victory will be ours.

Dragon King Island Committee
of the Chinese Communist Party

Iron Ball arrived on the scene just as Tsui-hua finished reading. The eager smiles on the faces of the village women as they discussed these pamphlets made him feel that the job he and his friends were doing was highly significant. Excitement and triumph brought the tears to his eyes. It seemed to him that his meeting with Uncle Yeh had given him boundless strength to fight on with the other boys here in the enemy's lair.

"Have you seen this pamphlet, Iron Ball?" Ta-kuei's mother called. Since Iron Ball had rescued her son from Bad Egg her heart had warmed to him. Besides he had stopped playing tiresome tricks on people and seemed to be growing up.

"What pamphlet?" Iron Ball put on a show of surprise.

"One of Old Yeh's pamphlets. Look...."

Just at this moment Squint Eye appeared in the distance with several armed thugs, all glowering like wolves.

"What are you doing there?" yelled Squint Eye. "Break it up! Scram!"

As the group of women dispersed, Iron Ball slipped away.

After the appearance of the pamphlets, Chih and his gang tightened their control of the villagers. They imposed curfews, stopped all communication between the village and the outside world, and forbade people to talk in groups in the street. All those suspected of having connections with the Communists, including youngsters like Iron Ball, were under strict surveillance. This harsh suppression fanned the flames of revolt. Even the children joined in the fight with their elders.

One afternoon, the keenest members of the youth corps met in a meadow at the back of the village where Iron Ball encouraged them to fight on without flinching however hard things were. The blazing sun made them pour with sweat, and Iron Ball felt so sleepy after the meeting that he was tempted to slip home for a nap before going to the forest on Big Dragon Mountain where Third Sister Liu had told him to find Uncle Yeh. However, since he knew his home would be stifling, he suggested to Spring Catch and Ta-kuei that they should go for a swim.

"Where?" asked Spring Catch.

"How about the northeast bay?"

"Fine."

The northeast bay with its flat sandy bottom was free from currents and an ideal place for swimming. But when they reached the end of the village, they found sentries posted there. At a signal from Iron Ball the boys slipped down a byway, then climbed over a wall and ran off through the maize fields. It was Ta-kuei's first adventure of this kind, so he kept glancing back apprehensively over his shoulder, only calming down when they were out of sight of the village.

Iron Ball and Spring Catch walked ahead, discussing in low voices a meeting a few days earlier when, led by Third Sister Liu, the villagers resisted the levying of miscellaneous taxes. The fisherfolks' elation and the gangsters' dejection had boosted their morale enormously.

Soon they reached the shore. As they started to strip off their clothes they spotted One Ear and Half Nose splashing about in the water not far away. Ta-kuei was ready to take to his heels, and Spring Catch swore: "Look who's here, damn them! Let's go back."

Iron Ball whispered: "Never mind." He signalled to them to follow him and they slipped into hiding among some reeds.

These two thugs were on sentry duty, but the day was so hot that they had knocked off for a bathe and were splashing about in water up to their shoulders. When Iron Ball noticed their guns and uniforms on a rock some distance away, he had an idea. He was longing for a gun. Grandad Wang had told him: "Revolution isn't empty talk. To scare the enemy we must take up weapons." It was because they had guns that these thugs could bully people. If he and his friends seized these guns, they could kill the guards at the storehouse and rescue Grandad Wang and Hai-sheng. Should they ask permission first from Third Sister Liu? There was no time for that. Besides, she was bound to agree. Knitting his brows he turned to the other boys.

"Are you afraid?"

"Afraid of what?" demanded Spring Catch.

"Let's steal their guns and arm ourselves," said Iron Ball stoutly. He fixed Ta-kuei with his eye. "How about you?"

"W-well..." Ta-kuei's answer froze on his lips.

"Afraid, eh? You told me you weren't a cowardly turtle."

"I'm not. I'll keep an eye on these swine while you get their guns." Ta-kuei felt too limp to stand up, and his heart was pounding.

Iron Ball nodded then coolly crawled off, followed by Spring Catch. His courage made a great impression on Ta-kuei. When he was a child, he remembered, there had been a gilded effigy of a goddess which everyone said was of real gold on one of Chih Lung-chang's boats. Hai-sheng had got beaten merely for touching it. Then Iron Ball told the other boys: "Just wait. I mean to steal that gold goddess." And a few days later, when the crew were having their afternoon nap, he swam out to the boat and stole it. Unfortunately the image was not made of gold but of gilded clay, so by the time he swam back to the shore its head had disintegrated. Now Iron Ball was off to steal guns, which was far more dangerous. For all his bold talk Ta-kuei was thoroughly scared.

However, Iron Ball was again successful. He and Spring Catch were back a few minutes later, Iron Ball with a carbine and Spring

Catch with a fine rifle. In his delight Ta-kuei forgot his fear and only wished he had got himself a gun too.

Looking at the two thugs still splashing about in the water, Iron Ball had another idea. If we take their uniforms too, he thought, they won't be able to go back to the village naked. Since Ta-kuei was staring with envious eyes at his gun, he whispered: "Are you still scared?"

"Who says I was scared? Next time I'll go with you."

"You mean that?"

"Sure."

Iron Ball pointed to the rock. "All right, then. Go and get their uniforms."

Ta-kuei's heart missed a beat but he could not go back on his word. He screwed up his courage and started to crawl towards the rock. Very soon his teeth started chattering. However, it was too late to turn back. He forced himself to crawl on though his knees were aching and he was dripping with sweat. When he finally returned with the uniforms, Iron Ball patted him on the back and softly commended him: "Good for you! So all three of us are heroes!"

At that Ta-kuei smiled, forgetting all his fears.

Still hiding in the reeds, they examined their loot. None of them had ever handled a carbine before, and when Iron Ball pressed the trigger the boys were nearly deafened by the shots which rang out over the sea. As for the two thugs, they shrieked with fear, then promptly dived under the water. Before very long gun-fire sounded from the village. Iron Ball beckoned to Spring Catch and Ta-kuei, who were beginning to panic. "Quick! Let's run for it and hide in the sorghum fields."

Chih Lung-chang was in the middle of a meal when he heard gun-fire from the coast. He dropped his rice bowl in alarm, assuming that the guerrillas were launching a surprise attack. Hastily assembling his men he ran towards the shore. They could see no enemy there, but fearing an ambush Chih made his men lie down and open fire at random with their machine-guns, rifles and revolvers. They even fired a few shells from their mortars. After a while, since nothing stirred, they got up and ventured forward. In the northeast

bay they found two naked men hiding their heads in a cave. When challenged, these two thugs thought the guerrillas had caught them and cried: "Don't shoot! Don't shoot! We didn't want to join Chih's gang..."

At that Chih Lung-chang recognized One Ear and Half Nose. He aimed two vicious kicks at their bare bottoms. "Get up, you bastards!" he swore, then asked what had happened.

"G-guerrillas c-came," they stammered.

"How many?"

"About a dozen... No, more than twenty... They've gone towards Big Dragon Mountain."

"After them, quick!"

Iron Ball and the other two boys had not made for the mountain, however. They ran off with their loot through the sorghum fields and by the time they reached the pear orchard Ta-kuei was tired out. He begged the other two to stop and rest. Since Iron Ball and Spring Catch were out of breath too and the gun-fire had stopped, they agreed.

There was plenty of shade in the orchard, where the air was fragrant with the scent of the ripe yellow pears still hanging on the boughs. Each breath of wind set the fruit-laden branches trembling like old men weighed down by burdens too heavy for them. There was no one in sight. The owner of the orchard must have run off to hide at the sound of gun-fire. Ta-kuei's throat was parched, and the ripe pears made his mouth water. He told Iron Ball:

"I'm dying of thirst. Let's pick a few pears. There's nobody about..."

Iron Ball too was very thirsty. But after a minute's thought he answered gravely, "No, we can't do that. We belong to the underground youth corps. We have to obey army discipline, not go picking other people's fruit. See?"

Ta-kuei was unconvinced. He thought: Only last spring he was filching cherries from our tree...

A sudden burst of gun-fire not far off made them jump to their feet, forgetting their thirst, and race out of the orchard through a maize field. Soon they reached the forest at the foot of Big Dragon Moun-

tain. They were about to climb a tree and rest before deciding what to do next, when they heard someone calling: "Iron Ball!..."

At first they feared it was the enemy.

"We'll have it out with them," cried Iron Ball. "They won't take us alive. Quick, run!..."

They were starting up the mountain when a man leapt down from a tree in front of them, barring their way.

"At him!" yelled Iron Ball. He charged the man with his gun.

"Stop!" cried Spring Catch. "It's Uncle Yeh."

Sure enough, it was Party secretary Yeh Hung-shan, who had arranged to meet Iron Ball here that evening. He had come early and hidden himself to escape detection by the enemy. While Iron Ball panted for breath, unable to speak, Yeh took out a towel and wiped the sweat from the boys' faces. He then told them to climb a tree. Iron Ball and Spring Catch swarmed up it easily, but Ta-kuei had to be helped up by Yeh. Once they were securely seated on the leafy boughs, Yeh asked for an account of what had happened. He was delighted by the boys' acquisition of the guns and uniforms, for these would enable him and one of his men to disguise themselves as enemy soldiers when they went into town the next day on an urgent mission. The boys had done them a great service. However, he felt he must warn them against rashness.

"Don't you think our guns are fine, Uncle Yeh?" asked Iron Ball jubilantly. "Don't we look like soldiers with these guns?"

"You do. But a real soldier has to obey orders."

"I know. I obey your orders."

Yeh smiled and nodded, then asked Spring Catch and Ta-kuei: "How about you two?"

"We're disciplined too," they replied. "We'll do whatever you say."

"Fine. In that case, listen. The carbine, rifle and two enemy uniforms captured by the underground youth corps must be handed over to Headquarters."

"What!..." The boys were staggered. Iron Ball nearly fell off the tree. "We're soldiers too," they protested. "Why can't we keep them?"

Yeh explained quietly: "Just think, if you took these guns and uniforms back, what would happen if Chih Lung-chang discovered them? If you give them to us, they'll be in safe keeping. . . ."

Iron Ball looked with dismay at Spring Catch and Ta-kuei.

"Well?" asked Yeh. "Can't you bear to part with them?"

What could Iron Ball do? He had already promised to obey orders. Caressing his gun, he finally nodded and said in a low voice: "Here, take it." When Yeh told him he could keep the gun for the moment, the boy hugged it to his heart.

After a while Yeh and Iron Ball climbed a different tree to discuss some other business. They conferred for more than half an hour. Spring Catch and Ta-kuei did not hear what they said and did not try to hear either, knowing that their business was secret.

3

When autumn came and the crops on the island turned golden, huge wind-whipped waves dashed wildly against the shore. These booming breakers voiced the misery of the fisherfolk and rang out like a bugle call spurting them on to fight it out with their oppressors.

The chief local tyrant Chih Lung-chang had recently been like an ant on a hot pan — he did not know which way to turn. Since regaining control of Dragon King Island, he had succeeded neither in rounding up Communists nor in collecting taxes. Many of the village heads and ward chiefs under him had thrown up their jobs for fear of the guerrillas. If this went on, he himself might be forced to quit. He made up his mind to track down the communist guerrillas by first searching out and seizing their liaison men in the village. Before he had made any headway in this, however, a report came in from one district that Yeh Hung-shan had held a secret mass meeting there and two thugs collecting taxes had been beaten to death by the angry fishermen. Then another district reported that their local guards had virtually been wiped out during a surprise attack by the guerrillas. Enraged and alarmed, Chih tore up both reports and, without stopping for breakfast, hurried away with his guards to investigate.

One thing the despot failed completely to understand: although his gang had seized control of Dragon King Island, the islanders were uncowed. The struggle was still going on. Men and women, old and young were all against them, while every hill and stream, every bush and tree provided cover for the resistance fighters led by the Communist Party. All this forced the despot's gang on to the defensive. . . .

Towards evening Chih returned home with his armed guards. He was met at the gate by Bad Egg, scared out of his wits. "Quick, uncle! Take a look at this," he cried.

"What is it?"

"Here. . . ." Bad Egg pulled a sheet of red paper out of his pocket. Chih took it and read:

Chih Lung-chang, your end is near. The more crimes you commit, the more harshly we shall deal with you. You other bandits must lay down your arms and surrender to the people. Unless you atone for your crimes you have no way out.

The Guerrilla Battalion
26th of the 7th moon

With a show of coolness which he was far from feeling, Chih asked his nephew: "Where did you find this?"

"In our courtyard after my nap this afternoon. The guerrillas must have left it there."

"In our courtyard, eh?" Chih broke into a cold sweat. Scratching his head he barked: "Fetch Chien here. Quick!" Chien was his flunkey Squint Eye.

This warning on the despot's own doorstep, before he had got to the bottom of those serious setbacks in outlying districts, showed that the guerrillas were active here and that they had the support of the villagers. Otherwise, however bold, they would not dare plant a pamphlet in his yard in broad daylight. What if there were Communists among his own men?

When Squint Eye turned up, Chih asked him: "Did you hear that the Reds left a pamphlet in my courtyard?"

"Yes . . . I heard," Squint Eye mumbled, keeping his eyes on the ground.

"It's a good thing I came back. If I'd stayed out any longer, the Reds might have burnt down my house right under your nose."

"First thing this morning, boss, I went out on your orders to find out from the landlords which of the villagers are in league with the guerrillas."

"Find any?" demanded Chih.

"They said those families who had Reds staying with them before were the most likely. That means most of the families in Makuai Lane...."

"Which in particular?"

Squint Eye listed the families of 'Ta-shun, Spring Catch and others.

"Did you search those households the other day?"

"We did, but we didn't find anything," answered Squint Eye.

Chih turned to Bad Egg. "Did anybody come here today?"

"No... I didn't see anyone. Only this pamphlet. It was wrapped round a pebble.... Maybe someone slung it in with a catapult, uncle...." With trembling fingers he handed over a pebble.

Chih examined the pebble thoughtfully. Then glancing at the bruise on his nephew's forehead he asked: "Who's the best shot with a catapult in this village?"

"Iron Ball." Bad Egg fingered the bruise on his head.

"How about Spring Catch?"

"He has one too, but he's not such a good shot as Iron Ball."

Chih asked Squint Eye: "What more have you found out about Third Sister Liu?"

"She has a child to mind at home," replied Squint Eye. "They say she sometimes leaves the village; but she's only a woman...."

"Only a woman? Fool!" Chih remembered how Third Sister Liu had been the first of the villagers to speak against paying taxes at a meeting. "A woman brainwashed by the Reds can pull the wool over your eyes," he fumed. "Underestimating her may cost you your head.... Which other people does she have most to do with? How does she spend her time? Have you found out?"

Before Squint Eye could answer, another of Chih's men came to report that two more pamphlets wrapped round pebbles had been

found in the courtyard of the district headquarters. At once Chih stopped interrogating Squint Eye and hurried to his headquarters.

It was, of course, Iron Ball and Spring Catch who had catapulted the pamphlets into Chih's compound. That noon when the despot was away, the other bandits were having a meal at the police station and Bad Egg was taking a nap, the two boys had set out with baskets and hooks ostensibly to gather mulberry leaves. While Spring Catch kept watch, Iron Ball climbed the big mulberry tree behind Chih's house and shot the pamphlet into his courtyard.

After completing this task according to plan, Spring Catch shot the other two pamphlets into the headquarters courtyard, while Iron Ball went on to a neighbouring village as if to beg for food. Actually, however, he distributed pamphlets and put up posters calling on the people to rise and resist their oppressors.

After supper that night Spring Catch went to bed early, but he could not sleep for worrying about Iron Ball's safety. Recently the two boys had grown much closer to each other, for their devotion to a common cause had cemented their friendship and made them true comrades-in-arms.

Iron Ball returned successfully from his mission as dawn broke the next day. Although he had not slept all night he was buoyed up by excitement and a sense of achievement. To his surprise, when he approached the village he heard thugs shouting, dogs barking and a general commotion. Why had the enemy started making trouble so early in the day? Had Spring Catch been caught sending out pamphlets? Carefully steering clear of enemy sentries, Iron Ball ran to his lane. Before he reached home, an old man with a goatee seized him. It was a distant relative of his.

"Quick, lad, hide in my house," whispered the old man.

"What's happened, grandad?"

"Come in and I'll tell you."

Iron Ball followed the old man into his home, where he found his younger brother Iron Lock, only half dressed. The little boy ran to him, sobbing, and clung to him.

"What's happened?" demanded Iron Ball frantically.

"Your uncle was dragged off last night by Chih's thugs. Iron Lock managed to slip away. Those devils are looking for you. More than ten families have been arrested. Spring Catch and his mother, Third Sister Liu..."

"On what charges?"

"For being in league with Party Secretary Yeh, for helping the underground, attacking Pock Face and distributing pamphlets."

"They say if we don't hand over underground workers, if we don't hand over Uncle Yeh, they'll shoot all the people they dragged away," sobbed Iron Lock. "I'm afraid, brother..."

This news was a terrible blow to Iron Ball. In the distance he seemed to hear the yells of the bandits, the crack of their whips and the angry curses of those being tortured.

The old man shook his head in despair and sighed. "Those swine won't talk reason. You'll have to go into hiding. If they discover you..."

How could Iron Ball go into hiding and give up the fight? How could he leave his dear ones to their fate? Impossible! But what could he do? He bit his lip till it bled. Usually so resourceful, he felt quite helpless now at this unexpected turn of events.

"Damn it!" he burst out finally. "I'll go and have it out with them!"

"Are you out of your mind?" The old man was consternated. "Don't you know they're waiting to nab you?"

Iron Lock was scared too and tried to stop his brother, but Iron Ball dashed out. He had not gone far before he was spotted and captured.

The warnings in the pamphlets had forced Chih's hand. That night he led his thugs to seize sixteen families suspected of having connections with the underground. These people were taken to the local police station, where Chih interrogated them one by one, after which they were dragged to his family temple for torture.

When Spring Catch was brought to the police station by two thugs, Chih glared at him with bloodshot eyes.

"Spring Catch," he growled. "Don't you know the penalty for helping the underground?"

Spring Catch made no answer.

"Out with it!" The bully leapt to his feet and banged his pistol on the table. "Where did you and your mother hide Yeh's men? Who distributed those pamphlets yesterday? If you tell the truth, I'll let you and your mother go."

The boy's heart missed a beat but he answered: "I don't know what you're talking about."

"Don't be so stubborn. Come clean and you'll go scot-free. Refuse to talk and I'll shoot you."

"I don't know anything."

"All right. Take him to the temple," bellowed Chih. "We'll soon get the truth out of him."

Two thugs dragged the boy to the Chih's ancestral temple. In one of the side rooms there, three gangsters were whipping a fisherman to within an inch of his life; but before Spring Catch could see who it was, he was pushed to the central hall. Hanging from the beam was a woman, her clothes torn, her hair dishevelled — it was his mother! With a cry Spring Catch tried to rush to her, but his captors held him back.

His mother looked up at the sound of his voice. "Don't be afraid, son," she said firmly. "We're not afraid to die, you and I. So what else need we fear? However hard they beat us, we don't know anything..."

"See?" The thugs leered. "Will you speak now?"

Spring Catch saw Chih approaching, whip in hand. "Why beat my mother?" he raged. "What has she done? Let her go!"

"If you tell the truth we will... Still stubborn, eh?... All right, hang him up too!"

As his hirelings did his bidding, Chih rolled up his sleeves and raised the whip threateningly. "So you won't talk, eh? I'll soon make you change your tune." But before he could lash Spring Catch, a voice rang out:

"Hands off, you bully! If you're looking for the guerrilla battalion — here I am!"

Chih wheeled round to see Iron Ball between two guards. "You?" he grated between clenched teeth.

"Right. It's me." Iron Ball's eyes were blazing with hatred. "I nicked Pock Face, I shot that pamphlet into your turtle-hole. Are you quite blind, you bastard? Snapping right and left like a mad dog!"

Livid with fury Chih hurled his whip to the ground. "Tie him up!" he bellowed.

"No need. I won't run away." Iron Ball thrust aside the thug coming to truss him up. Then he turned to Spring Catch. "Don't you worry, mate..."

Spring Catch, tears running down his cheeks, cried out to him. But Iron Ball had already been hustled out.

Chih felt better after capturing Iron Ball; but this boy could not be the only underground agent. And the pamphlets must have been written by someone else. Iron Ball might have been responsible for the pamphlets catapulted into Chih's courtyard and headquarters, but this did not account for all the other pamphlets distributed and all the posters pasted up. As for the capture of the guns and uniforms, it was even more inconceivable that this was the doing of a single boy. So Chih started cross-examining his prisoner.

"You must answer a few questions, Iron Ball."

"Go ahead. If it's anything I know I'll tell you."

"Right. That's the spirit. If you answer my questions properly, I may spare you."

"Fire away."

"You're not responsible for all the things that have happened recently, are you?"

"Of course not. We've a whole battalion of fighters."

"Who else is in your battalion?"

"A whole lot of people, but I don't know their names."

"Why not?"

"Because they all use fake names."

"Which villages are they from?"

"There are the Communists who once stayed in our village. Judging by their accents most of them come from the east coast, but some

have a Wenteng or Haihsi accent. The only ones I know are Instructor Wang and another man called Chang..."

"Where are they now?"

"Can't say. According to our arrangement..." Iron Ball blinked reflectively, "Today is the first of the eighth month. On the evening of the fifth, at nightfall, we're supposed to meet at White Cloud Cave in Big Dragon Mountain."

"The evening of the fifth?"

"That's it. I was to go there to find them."

"How many men do they have?"

"I only saw nine last time. I don't know the whole number."

Chih was surprised to have obtained so much important information so easily. However, the boy was behaving so naturally and giving such rational answers, it did not seem as if he were lying. And because Iron Ball was usually straightforward, Chih felt that he might well be telling the truth. But then what of Party secretary Yeh Hung-shan? Was Iron Ball the only liaison man in the village? He scrutinized the boy carefully, then asked:

"What contacts do you have in the village?"

"None. Instructor Wang told me not to let anyone else in on this. That's our rule — secrecy."

Chih knew that the Communists emphasized absolute secrecy. And they might have picked Iron Ball for this work because he was so fearless. Still, he must have been recruited by somebody else in the village. He tried again:

"How did you make contact with the guerrillas in the first place?"

Iron Ball knew that Chih was still suspicious. He did some quick thinking, then countered: "You want to know who gave me those pamphlets?"

"Yes," cried Chih eagerly. "Was it one of your group?"

"It was that big fellow Chang who belongs to Fifth Squad, Second Platoon, of the First Company of guerrillas. He used to stay in our house. He came down from the hills one night to find me, and after giving me those pamphlets he went back to Big Dragon Mountain."

"So that's how you made the contact?"

"That's the way it was." With a sigh Iron Ball added: "Just before he left, he told me not to tell a soul. That's the whole story: take it or leave it."

"Don't worry about him," Chih snorted. "When we've wiped out those Reds I shall be in the saddle again. We shall mop them all up soon now." He lit a cigarette then glanced back at Iron Ball. "What are you supposed to do when you go to meet them on the night of the fifth?"

"I'm not too clear. All I know is I'm going to fetch some dynamite. Probably to blow up your headquarters."

Chih started up, drawing his gun.

"Don't be angry! Don't shoot me!" begged the boy, laughing up his sleeve all the while. "You promised not to kill me if I tell the truth."

"I won't kill you. Let me ask you another question. Are you in touch with Yeh Hung-shan?"

"Yeh Hung-shan? Never heard of him. Who's he?"

"That Communist Party secretary who used to be here."

"No, I've never met him. We must be in different units."

Chih just could not believe that these guerrilla fighters were not connected with Yeh. But Iron Ball no matter how closely pressed denied any knowledge of the man. Never mind, thought Chih. Once I catch some guerrillas I'll find out Yeh's hideout. He asked Iron Ball: "Did you know that the guerrillas disarmed two of our men the other day?"

"Yes. I heard it was when One Ear was swimming in the bay. Our guerrillas did that all right, but I wasn't in on it. I only heard about it later."

Chih had never imagined that Iron Ball knew so much. He regretted not having arrested him earlier. But suppressing his anger he asked one final question: "Is all you've said the truth?"

"Every word of it."

"Very well. We'll see on the evening of the fifth..."

After Iron Ball was marched off under guard, Chih gloated to Squint Eye: "That young devil is smart, but he can't wriggle out of my clutches now."

"You handled him brilliantly, boss. Brilliantly!" said Squint Eye. "But what shall we do about young Spring Catch and his mother, and Third Sister Liu and the rest?"

"Let them go for the time being. We'd have to feed them if we locked them up. We can get hold of them whenever we want them and give them a grilling any time we like." He added: "Go and alert our troops. Get ready for action on the evening of the fifth."

"Very good, sir!" Squint Eye answered.

After interrogation Iron Ball was taken to the storehouse where Grandad Wang and Hai-sheng were imprisoned. Hai-sheng was asleep by the wall when he arrived. Grandad Wang stood up to ask him softly: "What's happened?"

Iron Ball smiled. Having made sure that no one was listening, he gave the old man a summary of the recent enemy activity, concluding: "They asked me all sorts of questions, and I've told them a pack of lies. Enough to keep them from getting any sleep tonight." He reported in detail then all that he had said.

Grandad Wang was pleased with his answers. "What was Chih's reaction when you said you were going to the mountain on the fifth?" he asked.

"He swallowed it hook, line and sinker! Just wait and see, Grandad. They'll wear out their shoes for sure trapesing through the mountain."

Deep in thought, Grandad said nothing. And now a guard unlocked the door to bring in supper. It was Dwarf Wang. Grandad and the Dwarf exchanged glances, and the latter putting down his basket said: "Be quick about it. Your vegetables are under the sorghum rolls." Then he went out, locking the door, to chat with the sentry outside under a tree.

"Grandad," said Iron Ball. "This fellow often goes to Third Sister Liu's place..."

"Not so loud! He's on our side now." Grandad quickly took out the steamed rolls. Underneath was a bowl of pickled vegetables, and under that a slip of paper with the message:

The enemy's plots have failed. We've been released. Greetings from all the villagers. Hold out till victory!

Grandad Wang's face lit up. As he swallowed the slip of paper Hai-sheng, who had woken up, asked: "Who was it from?"

"Third Sister Liu."

"Can we send a message back?"

"We can and will," replied Grandad.

Hai-sheng fetched a bit of charcoal from one corner of the room while Grandad tore a small strip of paper from the window and handed it to him.

"Tell them we haven't knuckled under to torture, that all's well," the old man said. "Tell them to unite firmly and stand up to every test. The enemy will soon be defeated. Victory will be ours.... Last but not least, tell them that Iron Ball has told the enemy to go to White Cloud Cave on Big Dragon Mountain at nightfall on the evening of the fifth to find the guerrillas. They must pass on this information immediately."

On the morning of the fifth, Iron Ball was haled before Chih for another interrogation.

"Today is the fifth. You are supposed to meet the guerrillas soon after dark this evening, right?"

"Right."

"At White Cloud Cave on Big Dragon Mountain, eh?"

"Right."

"If you're lying...."

"I never tell lies."

After the boy was led away, Chih exulted to think that the communist guerrillas were done for this time — he would wipe the whole lot out. Unfortunately he had just received word that the magistrate would be coming from the county seat to inspect this island that afternoon, so he would have to entertain him instead of leading his men into action. He ordered Squint Eye: "You are to lead the troops up the mountain in my place this evening. Mind you capture all the guerrillas. Take them alive. Not one of them is to escape."

Gratified by the trust imposed in him, Squint Eye saluted. "Yes, sir. Not a single one will escape."

"Tell the men that if they carry out this task well, they will be rewarded."

"Thank you, sir. We shall do our duty."

Chih ordered the men to be given a good meal before they left, then asked Squint Eye: "How many men will you take?"

"About twenty should be plenty."

"No, take at least fifty. This is your big chance to prove your loyalty. And we need results to impress the magistrate who's coming this evening."

"Should we go before it's dark?"

"Of course not. If they see you they won't show themselves. Set out at sunset and you'll get there before the moon rises."

Sure enough, the guerrillas did go to White Cloud Cave that evening.

In the morning as Yeh and his comrades were discussing their plan of action on the north side of the mountain, they received Grandad Wang's message sent out by Third Sister Liu. They decided to distribute copies of the message to encourage the masses in other villages. Then they discussed the false "intelligence" which Iron Ball had given to the enemy.



"The enemy may be taken in and really go to the cave. We mustn't let them make the trip for nothing," said Yeh. "Let's pretend we've fallen into their trap, while actually we'll ambush and wipe out all who come. Teach the swine a lesson!" They drew up a detailed plan.

White Cloud Cave, some fifty feet in depth, lay half way up the south side of the mountain. It was a favourite haunt for boys collecting firewood and herding cattle. The cave overlooked a chasm filled with bamboos, while behind it rose strange rock formations on which grew magnificent pines. Just before sunset Yeh and his men laid mines along the paths to the cave. Then they climbed up trees to await the enemy.

Squint Eye and his thugs had a big meal that evening. This was followed by a harangue from Chih. Then they set off for the mountain so gorged and bloated with food that they could hardly drag themselves along. Squint Eye was buoyed up by confidence, however. To catch a dozen or so guerrillas with his fifty men seemed like an easy job. And Chih had promised to reward them with silver dollars, in addition to which he himself might well get promoted. This was the chance of a lifetime. When they reached the foot of the mountain he divided his force into three groups to advance along different paths up towards the cave.

Chih's hopes, too, were running high. Party Secretary Yeh might well be up at the cave. If he could capture the Communists' key men, it would put an end to the underground resistance and the island would be in his hands. How lucky that the county magistrate was turning up just at this time! He would see for himself how effectively Chih was controlling this district.

That evening they held a feast to welcome the magistrate. As night fell, Chih rose to his feet. With a bow to the magistrate he proclaimed:

"Gentlemen, I have a piece of good news to announce. According to our intelligence there are still a dozen or so Communists hiding in Big Dragon Mountain. They're headed by their Party secretary Yeh Hung-shan. These men are going to White Cloud Cave for a secret meeting tonight. I have sent a force of fifty men to catch them. Since His Honour's visit coincides with this operation of ours, I now

propose a toast to the magistrate's health and to our coming victory."

The fat magistrate beamed on hearing this and rose with the other guests to drink the toast.

After this toast Chih conducted the ward chiefs, local landlords and the magistrate to a place north of the village where benches had been put ready. They sat down looking towards Big Dragon Mountain, waiting for news of victory. As the minutes ticked away they began to lose patience. By now it was quite dark. Suddenly the rattle of gunfire and explosion of hand-grenades sounded from the mountain. Chih was overjoyed. Then some big mines went off, shrouding the mountain in smoke. The fat magistrate turned to ask Chih:

"Are those mortars you're using?"

Chih was flustered, sensing that something had gone wrong. Pointing towards the mountain he ordered his guards: "Come on! Let's go and have a look."

They were less than half way when a few men came running towards them.

"Who's there?" challenged Chih.

These stragglers told him that they had been ambushed and fallen into a mine trap. Most of their group had been wounded or killed. They claimed to have encountered the communist main force.

"How about your commander?"

"Squint Eye hid behind a rock. He managed to escape..."

"How can he direct operations if he hides? Blast your eyes! Call yourself men?"

"But all hell broke loose, sir..."

"Hell!" Chih spat, too furious to speak. To make things worse, the magistrate kept demanding what had happened. Chih cast him a venomous glance, swearing to himself: If you hadn't turned up today of all days, it might not have come to this.

4

Wang Ssu-chiang woke up at dawn when both boys were still sound asleep. As he fanned his handkerchief to keep the mosquitoes away

from their faces, his grandson smiled in his sleep. Looking at him fondly the old man reflected how happy these boys would be once Chiang Kai-shek's regime was overthrown.

"Have you been awake all night, Grandad, keeping the mosquitoes off us?" asked Hai-sheng opening his eyes.

"No, I only woke up a moment ago. Why were you smiling in your sleep just now?"

"I had a wonderful dream. I was fishing in a boat with a diesel engine. It was fine not having to row or trouble with sails."

"Yes, when we down Chiang Kai-shek and his gang there'll be no more oppression. We will have motors for our boats too. That will be a different world."

"Will we live to see that day?"

Old Wang knew what was in his grandson's mind. He answered gravely: "Struggle means sacrifice. Of course, the purpose of our struggle is to live happily. But, in order to win our people a good life tomorrow, we must make sacrifices today. Without shedding blood we can't wipe out the enemy. Our fighters must be at the forefront of the struggle, with no thought of personal safety, ready if need be to give up our lives.... But you and Iron Ball may live to see that day."

"I understand, Grandad. The enemy won't spare us. But Spring Catch and the others will keep up the fight."

"That's it, lad. Our young people will never give in."

"Shut up, there!"

The guard's shout outside awoke Iron Ball. The interrogations and tortures of the last few days had taken their toll of his strength. Apart from talking a little with Grandad and Hai-sheng, he had spent most of the time sleeping. For he needed to recoup his energies after the stress and strain of recent months.

The sun came out, the room brightened. The two boys got up and went to the back window to take some deep breaths of fresh air and feast their eyes on the tall sunflowers outside, their golden petals shimmering like flame. The door banged open. One Ear brought in their meal: porridge and steamed maize-meal rolls.

Iron Ball scowled at the guard. "This is the Moon Festival. Why don't you bring us better food?" he demanded.

"You're lucky to get anything, dammit!" One Ear swore. "Still talking big after our boss knocked out your teeth!" He stamped out before Iron Ball could make any retort.

"Come and eat, Iron Ball," said Grandad.

"I'm not eating that stuff."

"If you don't, you won't have the strength to fight. Come on."

Hai-sheng offered Iron Ball a bowl of rice-porridge, but he took a coarse roll instead. Old Wang took this away from him saying: "No, take the porridge. That's an order."

The day after his men's defeat at White Cloud Cave, Chih had called for Iron Ball and beaten him savagely, knocking out one of his teeth. So now Old Wang and Hai-sheng kept all the porridge for him and would not let him eat the hard maize-meal rolls.

After the meal Iron Ball started scratching his head. Grandad Wang saw that he had lice.

"Hell!" swore Iron Ball. "As if Chih's rough handling weren't enough, these lice are having a go at me too."

"Wipe them out," suggested Hai-sheng. "Wipe them out the way we're going to wipe out those bandits."

He and his grandad began to catch the lice for Iron Ball. And their hearts ached at the sight of the welts and burns left on his tortured body. As they were engaged in this work they heard a thud: A bundle had been dropped through the back window. Old Wang glanced outside and was relieved to see that the sentry was Dwarf Wang. In the bundle they found wrapped in an old jacket a bottle of liquor, six packages of fish-roe and six crabs, shelled and cooked. There was also a slip of paper on which was written:

Today is the Moon Festival. Greetings from the whole village. The jacket is for Iron Ball.

It was Spring Catch's handwriting, and Iron Ball's spirits rose as he slipped on the jacket.

At noon, when Dwarf Wang brought them food again, he said: "Today there's more porridge, because of the festival." Then seeing

that there was no one outside he told them softly to look in the basket, and quickly went away.

The message smuggled in this time was short: "Prepare for action at midnight."

For a moment Old Wang said nothing, overwhelmed by the Party's deep concern for them.

"What does it say, Grandad?" asked the boys.

When he showed them this message they exclaimed: "Uncle Yeh must be coming to rescue us. We must be ready."

Grandad nodded, then enjoined on them gravely: "If we do get out, we must work even harder and not let the Party down."

Fear and fury over the White Mountain Cave fiasco had knocked Chih out — he took to his bed for some days. However, he did not lose hope. He was not taken in by Squint Eye's claim that a large force of Reds had ambushed them, for in that case the Communists would not have slipped away without inflicting still heavier casualties. Chih was sure this was the work of Yeh's small contingent. But how had they known his men were going to the cave? Iron Ball must have sent word somehow, although even under torture he would not admit this. The fresh outcrop of pamphlets in the village also proved that the resistance was still active. This convinced the despot that Iron Ball's confession was false. He regretted not having terrorized the villagers into telling the truth. On the advice of his father, he decided to spare Wang Ssu-chiang for the time being, but to kill off Third Sister Liu, Hai-sheng, Iron Ball and a few others to strike fear into the rest.

On the morning of the Moon Festival, Chih went with Squint Eye to look for an execution ground. He finally decided on a deserted garden near his house, where there was an old dried-up well.

"This'll do," he told Squint Eye.

"Shall we behead them or shoot them?"

"Neither. Smash in their skulls with spades and shove them into the well."

He gave Squint Eye the list of villagers to be killed. "Start as soon as it's dark," he ordered. "Don't let one of them get away."

"What about Third Sister Liu's brat, the one they call Liberation?"

"Dig up roots lest they grow into trees, then into woods where tigers lurk," hissed Chih. "Kill the child too. Make a clean sweep."

"Very good. And old man Wang?"

"We'll kill the rest first and see if that softens him up. There's not a man on earth who isn't afraid of death."

"That's true," agreed Squint Eye. "Killing Hai-sheng and Iron Ball may frighten him into telling us the names of the local Reds and where Yeh Hung-shan is hiding."

"If he still refuses to talk I'll kill him slowly, to let the riff-raff on this island know that Chih Lung-chang is not to be trifled with!... Now lay in plenty of wine and kill two pigs. Since this is our first killing and today is my father's sixtieth birthday too, I'm going to give a party."

As Squint Eye was leaving Chih added: "Send some wine to the prisoners too. After Wang drinks I shall tackle him again... And get headquarters to put up this notice: Anyone who disobeys my orders, helps the guerrillas or refuses to pay taxes will have his head cut off..."

The tradition was for the Moon Festival celebrations to begin soon after sunset, when the whole village sprang to life, old and young alike making merry and enjoying the full moon. But today no children chased fireflies in the lanes; the moon had hidden herself behind dark clouds and the hooting of owls sounded eerily through the darkness. Grandad Wang and the two boys had refused the wine brought them by the thugs and were instead drinking the liquor sent by Spring Catch and enjoying the fish-roe and crabs. Soon the boys became very merry, but their captors' gift of wine filled Old Wang with foreboding. This increased when he noticed that their guard had been doubled.

"Why are you so quiet, Grandad?" Hai-sheng asked.

For a moment the old man was silent. Then he said: "I think I should warn you to expect the worst. We may be called upon tonight to give our lives for the revolution."

"Didn't the message say they're going to rescue us at midnight?"

"The enemy will most likely strike first."

"How do you know?"

"Hasn't Chih doubled the guard and sent us wine? That's the custom here before an execution. Of course he may have other motives too." Glancing at each boy in turn he asked: "Afraid?"

"Not I," answered Hai-sheng.

"No revolutionary is afraid of death," declared Iron Ball. "I'm only sorry I can't kill that devil Chih with my own hands." From an inside pocket he took out the badge with a red star given him by Yeh. He pinned this on his jacket.

Grandad Wang smoothed the boys' ruffled hair and straightened their jackets fondly. "Let me tell you about the great storm I ran into once out at sea," he volunteered.

The boys listened with rapt attention to the tale, forgetting their own imminent danger till the tramp of feet sounded outside. A wind sprang up, lashing the waves into fury. A storm was in the offing.

Roaring drunk after his tipping Chih staggered to the storehouse, revolver in hand, with several thugs behind him.

"Have you drunk the wine I sent you, Wang?" he sneered.

"Not a drop of it," was the disdainful answer. "But we had some drinks to celebrate the festival."

"What drinks?"

"Some liquor sent in by friends."

Chih rounded in a rage on the sentry. "Who gave him liquor? You don't know? Fool! They could kill you and you wouldn't know what hit you." Turning back to Old Wang he threatened: "If you don't come clean, this will be your last night on earth!"

"Drunken sot! We fishermen can stand up to storms. We're ready to die at any time to destroy fiends like you and carry the revolution through to victory."

"You three are not the only ones I'll kill!"

"Go ahead. Do your worst."

Chih ordered his thugs: "Bring in the others."

At that they brought in the villagers doomed to die, among them Third Sister Liu and her three-year-old boy. Old Wang gave an involun-

tary start then steadied himself and went over to fondle the child, swearing under his breath: "They stop at nothing, these devils..."

"Wang Ssu-chiang, I give you five minutes to talk. This is your last chance," raged the despot.

Old Wang's eyes blazed with hatred as he glared at Chih. Then he glanced at the villagers one by one and in their eyes read support and understanding.

Chih interpreted this silence as weakness. He stepped forward with a hypocritical smile to urge: "Don't hesitate. You're no fool. This is your last chance. Tell the truth and I'll set you free."

"You can kill us but you can't make us talk."

"Have you no heart? Do you want me to kill them all?"

"Stop your devilish tricks, Chih Lung-chang," thundered Old Wang. "We're not afraid! Not afraid because our death will make more people rise up to wipe you out."



Clasping her child close, Third Sister Liu called out in ringing tones: "That's right! We'll die rather than kowtow to you devils. You can kill us but we warn you: your time is coming. Our victory is at hand. Our island is going to be liberated. The people are going to settle scores with you."

All the prisoners glared at the despot with flaming eyes. He waved his revolver shouting: "Wang's poisoned your minds. But think it over calmly. I'm giving you a last chance to come clean."

"All right." It was Iron Ball who spoke.

Chih nodded. "Go ahead. It's not too late."

Iron Ball smiled at his friends who were staring at him in surprise.

"Hurry up," urged Chih losing patience. "Tell me which villagers are in league with Yeh Hung-shan and the guerrillas; then you can go home."

"I won't talk in front of all these people."

"Come over here."

Iron Ball strode up to the despot and started whispering inaudibly. As Chih bent his head to listen he suddenly felt his neck grabbed and his ear bitten. With a shriek he tottered back bleeding like a stuck pig. He fired twice at Iron Ball who fell to the ground gasping: "I should've killed you, you swine..."

Grandad Wang rushed to the boy's side. Iron Ball's face was still ruddy under the lamplight. His eyelids flickered as he tried to sit up. Then with the faint cry "Grandad!" he closed his eyes and slumped back to the ground.

Chih made Squint Eye bandage his bleeding ear while he bellowed like a wounded beast: "Drag the whole lot away! Kill them, quick!"

His thugs started pushing out all the villagers, Grandad Wang and Hai-sheng among them. Squint Eye kicked Iron Ball and found that he was still breathing.

"Shall we bury him too?" he asked Chih.

"Is he dead?"

"Not quite. But he's done for."

"A quick death is too good for the young bastard," grated Chih. "Spin it out a little longer."

Grandad Wang, Hai-sheng and the other villagers showed no fear as they were led out to be slaughtered. Heads high, they marched off proudly. And as they took one last look at their homes, Old Wang bade farewell to their fellow villagers:

"Goodbye, folk! Time's running out for these gangsters, for their boss Chiang Kai-shek too. Our victory is coming. We must stand firm. Our island will very soon belong to the people..." His brave words struck fear into Chih and his thugs.

The sea roared. The villagers left behind shed tears and with clenched fists vowed to avenge their dear ones.

Meanwhile Yeh had decided to take advantage of the Moon Festival when Chih was celebrating his father's birthday to rescue Grandad Wang and the two boys. Careful preparations had been made for this raid. Soon after dark the guerrillas concealed themselves in the forest northwest of the village, while Erh-hu reconnoitred. He came back to report that Chih had enforced a curfew since that morning, besides increasing the sentries. This was a new development.

"Did Third Sister Liu make contact with you?" Yeh asked Erh-hu.

"No. Neither did Dwarf Wang. Something's up. Shall we still proceed according to plan?"

Yeh thought this over. They had twenty-odd men only against Chih's hundred and more. Courage alone was not enough to rescue the prisoners, if the enemy were on the alert. He ordered Erh-hu: "Slip in to spy out the land. But don't let anyone see you."

After Erh-hu's departure, Yeh heard two revolver shots from the direction of the storehouse; then there was silence. It had previously been arranged that Third Sister Liu should send Dwarf Wang to report on the preparations in the village, the dispositions of the enemy and the password used by the sentries. The Dwarf's failure to appear alarmed Yeh further.

Dwarf Wang had in fact been sent out that afternoon with another guard to collect taxes in a neighbouring village. Upon his return after dark he learned to his horror of Chih's plan to kill the prisoners and some other villagers; but he could not get away immediately.

Only after Chih had carried out his murders and returned to the feast did the Dwarf manage to run to the forest.

Yeh waiting on tenterhooks heard quick footsteps approaching. Then Erh-hu came back with Dwarf Wang.

"Chih has murdered them!" Erh-hu blurted out. "Third Sister Liu, Hai-sheng and. . . ." He broke off, choking.

"How about Grandad Wang and Iron Ball?"

"Chih decided at the last moment to leave Grandad Wang for a while, to try to wring from him the names of his underground contacts," said Dwarf Wang. "Iron Ball was shot at by Chih but wasn't killed outright. We don't know whether he's alive or dead."

Suppressing their grief, they discussed their plan of action. Dwarf Wang told Yeh that Third Sister Liu had arranged for Iron Ball's uncle Tang to be ready with a boat to take them to a nearby island. He also reported the enemy's dispositions. After a brief council of war they set off for the village, Yeh disguised as a swaggering Kuomintang officer flanked by two orderlies, with the other men following quietly behind.

When they reached the crossroad leading to the village, two sentries challenged them: "Who goes there?"

"Security corps from Tsingtao."

"Password!"

By the time they gave the password Yeh and his men had drawn level with the sentries. They swiftly overpowered them.

"Not a sound or we'll shoot you!" Yeh aimed his revolver at them.

"Yes, sir. . . . Don't shoot, don't shoot. . . ."

Yeh had these two prisoners gagged and bound and left them in a willow grove near by. Then he divided his force into two groups. Erh-hu, Dwarf Wang and another man sped off to mine the alleys outside Chih's house and headquarters, then disarmed the sentries at the east end of the village. The other group headed by Yeh made for the storehouse.

Grandad Wang, when he saw his comrades being murdered, had grappled with the thugs but been overpowered. After the others were killed, he was carried back to his lock-up. Iron Ball was lying there in a pool of blood, but the old man found that he was still alive.

"Iron Ball, Iron Ball!" he called softly. With tears in his eyes he tried to stanch the blood, tearing strips off his jacket for bandages.

Presently the boy came to. Opening his eyes he murmured: "Where am I?"

"You're all right, lad. You'll live." Grandad added with emotion: "Dawn will soon be here. The enemy won't escape us."

"Yes, Grandad," replied Iron Ball faintly, then lost consciousness again.

Meanwhile Yeh had made contact with Iron Ball's uncle and found out the situation. He now ordered his men to fan out around the storehouse while he and his "orderlies" marched straight to the gate.

One Ear and another thug were on duty that night. When they saw three men approaching they challenged them. Yeh's overbearing manner made One Ear treat him with deference, but he inquired his business.

"I have important business with your boss Chih Lung-chang. Is this his headquarters?" Yeh pointed at the storehouse gate.

Since One Ear was a local man who had met Yeh before, the Party secretary's voice struck him as familiar. He flashed his torch on him. But before he could raise the alarm, Iron Ball's uncle Tang who had crept up from behind leapt at him with a chopper and cut him down. The other guard was so paralysed with fear that they had no difficulty in dispatching him too. Then at a signal from Yeh they broke down the gate.

"Grandad Wang!"

At the sound of Yeh's voice Old Wang stepped forward trembling with emotion. "I didn't think I'd see you again. Iron Ball. . . ."

Yeh and Tang between them carried the boy out. Then they smashed Old Wang's fetters and helped him out too. They were joined by Erh-hu and his men who had finished their task and together, carrying Iron Ball, they marched east, leaving only a few men as a rearguard in the village.

Spring Catch, his mother and Iron Lock were waiting for them in the boat Tang had moored in the bay. For fear that Chih might murder them, Yeh had decided to send them with Grandad Wang and Iron Ball to an island further north where their guerrilla base

was located. Erh-hu and Dwarf Wang were to escort them, while Yeh and his men remained to carry on the struggle in Dragon King Island.

Having reached the bay in safety, Yeh took off his padded jacket and put it over Grandad Wang's shoulders. Claspng the old man's hands he said: "We must say goodbye for now. We shall soon start our counter-offensive. We'll meet again after our victory. Rest well when you reach our base. All the folk here hope you'll quickly regain your health."

"I'll do as the Party says. Look after yourself. Hit the enemy still harder..."

Yeh kissed Iron Ball's cheek. The boy was still unconscious. "Go as fast as you can," Yeh urged Erh-hu. "And as soon as you reach our base send him to hospital. He must be saved at all costs."

The moment Old Wang and the others were aboard, Erh-hu and Tang hoisted sail and cast off. The boat sped like an arrow out to sea. As Yeh waved goodbye, a big explosion sounded in the village. Two enemy sentries had stepped on a mine and instantly been killed. At this Chih left his feast and staggered off with his troops in search of the guerrillas. Fearing lest they catch sight of the boat, Yeh and his men made a quick detour to the north, firing shots and throwing hand-grenades to lure the enemy towards Big Dragon Mountain. Soon they had withdrawn to safety.

5

By the autumn of 1947 the War of Liberation had turned from the defensive to the offensive. In September the Shantung unit of the People's Liberation Army attacked in the Shantung peninsula and advanced along the coast, winning one victory after another. The dark night was drawing to its close. The people of Dragon King Island were looking forward eagerly to the dawn.

On the thirteenth of the twelfth lunar month, soon after dark, an armed unit from the county came to the island. Yeh as head of the local guerrilla forces discussed with its commanders a plan of campaign for wiping out Chih and his gang.

As they prepared for battle Hai-sheng, now a full-fledged guerrilla fighter, went to the end of the village to wait for Grandad Wang and Iron Ball. Hai-sheng had had a lucky escape from death. When Chih ordered his men to kill him on the night of the Moon Festival, Hai-sheng was struck on the head with a hoe and shoved into the disused well. However, because his injuries were not fatal, he managed to climb out later that night and crawl back to the village. He took refuge in Ta-kuei's home where Ta-kuei's mother nursed him back to health, then went to the mountain and joined Yeh's guerrilla force. The news that Grandad and Iron Ball were coming back tonight had filled him with irrepressible excitement. Burning with hate for the enemy, he longed for the coming battle.

"Hai-sheng! Hai-sheng!..."

Aroused from his reverie, he saw that Grandad had indeed come back. He ran to meet him. They flung their arms round each other.

"You've grown taller, stronger too," commented the old man.

"You look well too, Grandad. Where is Iron Ball?"

"He's recovered completely and was discharged from hospital some time ago. We've come together. He'll be here as soon as he's seen to some business he has."

While he was still speaking, up came a young soldier in a thick cotton-padded uniform. It was Iron Ball! The two youngsters, too moved to speak, could only shed tears of joy over their reunion.

"This is no time for tears!" exclaimed Grandad Wang. "Soon the enemy will be wiped out and our island liberated. You should be laughing, lads."

They wiped their eyes at that and grinned. Then Grandad Wang went into Headquarters to have a talk with Yeh, and the two youngsters started comparing notes.

"Are you really fit again, Iron Ball?"

"Fighting fit. We heard you had a miraculous escape, Hai-sheng. It seemed too good to be true."

"I never thought you'd get over your wounds so quickly. The bandits are still living in a dream world, but we're going to settle scores with them tonight... How are your uncle and Iron Lock?"

"My uncle has joined the army," answered Iron Ball cheerfully. "I hear he's going all out and making great progress. Iron Lock is doing well too. He'll be back in a couple of days with Spring Catch's mother."

That reminded Hai-sheng to ask about Spring Catch. Iron Ball said he was working under Squad Leader Chen with the guerrillas. After repeated requests they had allowed him to help carry ammunition and learn to use a machine-gun. Tonight his unit would take out a boat to cut off the enemy's retreat.

The youngsters were still deep in conversation when Yeh and Granddad Wang came out.

"So you've joined the army, eh?" said Yeh with a smile, delighted to see Iron Ball. "I see you're wearing a new uniform."

"I was issued with this in the army hospital," replied Iron Ball rather sheepishly, looking with envious eyes at Hai-sheng's gleaming revolver and Yeh's gun. Yeh knew what was in his mind.

"So you're still empty-handed? How can you fight without a gun?" He led Iron Ball into Headquarters and presented him with a brand-new revolver.

"Take this and use it against the enemy. If they make trouble, wipe them out."

"You can count on me." Iron Ball solemnly took the gun. Then he drew from his belt the wooden gun made for him by Yeh earlier in the year, which Iron Lock had taken to the base for him. "I'll let my younger brother have this," he said.

"That's the idea," Yeh approved. "Then Iron Lock will get used to handling a gun."

A whistle sounded muster. After Yeh had addressed his men he divided them into three groups to strike out. The clarion call to wipe out the enemy had sounded.

Chih had been on tenterhooks ever since hearing that the communist forces had launched counter-offensives on all fronts. After the Kuomintang troops suffered a number of reverses in eastern Shantung, the despot knew that the tide had turned against him. He rounded up as many men as he could and made careful preparations

to resist. He also sent gifts to Regiment Commander Tung in Tsingtao with a request for more guns, ammunition and boats in view of the grave situation on the island. Since Dragon King Island happened to be his own home and occupied a strategic position near Tsingtao, the Kuomintang officer agreed to send two platoons of troops there. Thus reinforced Chih felt easier in his mind. He combed the whole island for "Reds" and equipped all the district headquarters with telephones to improve liaison work. Since he now had more than two hundred and sixty men — his own security troops, three militia corps and two regular platoons with U.S. equipment — provided nothing happened to Tsingtao, Chih had no fear for this island.

All reactionaries inevitably misjudge the situation. Little did Chih dream that this very night his headquarters, his reinforcements and his own troops would all be surrounded by the people's forces.

At 2 a.m. red signal flares flashed through the dark sky over Big Dragon Mountain. At once with a deafening roar guns and hand-grenades pounded the enemy fortifications and barracks, meting out punishment to the murderous brigands.

Chih and his father were sitting up late devising new devilries when gun-fire and explosions burst out all around them. The old man was paralysed with fear. Chih, consternated too, drew his revolver and dashed out with his guards to the police station. The security police, newly aroused from sleep, were milling madly around. A guard rushed in.

"What's happened?" demanded Chih.

The fellow stammered: "B-boss, we've been s-surrounded."

"Man the pillboxes and hold out. . . . How about our men in the other districts?"

"The telephone wires are cut. We've lost contact. . . ."

As the firing closed in, Chih hurried home with his guards; but finding the place deserted he dashed out again. As he pelted down the alley, some villagers gave chase, and in the glare of the flames he recognized Iron Ball and Hai-sheng. At first he took them for avenging ghosts! Frightened out of his wits he fired a few shots at random, then raced towards the pillbox just in front of the village.

"There's that devil Chih, Grandad. After him..." yelled Iron Ball.

"He won't get away," answered Grandad giving chase.

Once in the pillbox Chih ordered his thugs to hold out. But when dawn broke he saw through the gun-slots that all three other pillboxes were in flames and the attackers' fire was concentrated on this, his last stronghold. Since the situation was hopeless, he hitched up his black padded gown and decided to make a break for it with his guards and head southwest where the firing was less intense. However, as soon as they showed themselves the guards were all shot down. Chih alone zigzagged on, his eyes burning like a mad dog running amuck, firing completely at random. Erh-hu some distance away took aim and fired. The despot staggered and fell, then struggled up again, only to be confronted by Yeh himself. Mad with pain and loathing, Chih levelled his gun at Yeh; but Grandad Wang darting up from behind hacked at his arm with a chopper. Then seizing the revolver which Chih had let fall, the old man ordered: "Down on your knees! Don't move."

Chih slumped to his knees, foaming at the mouth. "So you've done for me, damn you, Wang Ssu-chiang!" he swore.

Grandad Wang's eyes blazed with fury and contempt. "We shall put paid to all you devils," he retorted.

Now Hai-sheng ran over, beside himself with hate for this monster who had murdered Third Sister Liu, little Liberation and so many other villagers. He aimed his gun at Chih's head, but Grandad stopped him.

"Leave him for a public trial," the old man ordered. "All the islanders want to see this devil executed." So they marched Chih back to the village.

The sun rose from the sea. And the waves scintillating in the morning sunlight had never seemed so splendid.

So Dragon King Island returned to the people's hands. The air was filled with singing and the triumphant din of drums and cymbals. At a public trial on the third day after the island's liberation the chief despot Chih was condemned to death and all his ill-gotten wealth

was confiscated. He would never again fleece and grind down the fishing folk here. Then the local Party committee led a mass campaign against all counter-revolutionaries and enemy agents. Discussions were held on organizing a supply and marketing co-operative to spur the catching of fish.

First thing in the morning after Spring Catch's return he went down to the shore and gazed out across the ocean. Not a cloud was in sight. The whole sea was bathed in sunlight. It was a familiar scene, yet never had he been so exhilarated by it. Never had the sea seemed so dear.

"Spring Catch!"

Turning he saw Hai-sheng. "I hear you and Iron Ball are leaving tomorrow," said Spring Catch. "Is that true?"

"Yes."

"Why not stay at home a few days longer?"

"We can't," said Hai-sheng. "Our island is liberated, Chih has been killed; but we haven't yet overthrown Chiang Kai-shek. Many places are still under his control. Thousands of despots like Chih are still oppressing our class brothers. So we decided to ask to go to the front, and Grandad and Uncle Yeh agreed."

That evening other youngsters in the village flocked to Hai-sheng's home, having heard that he and Iron Ball were going off with the PLA to the front. They chatted until it was late. And Grandad Wang listening to them was well content. Now that these once mischievous boys had been steeled and matured in the struggle, he felt as happy as a gardener whose hard work produces fine blossoms. He was proud to have had a hand in bringing up such fine youngsters, a new generation of heroes.

As soon as it was light the next morning, Grandad got up to prepare a meal for the two lads. After breakfast Hai-sheng and Iron Ball packed their things, while many young people came to see them off. They pinned big red rosettes on the young soldiers' chests and presented each with a pair of new cloth shoes.

"My mother made these shoes for you to wear at the front," said Spring Catch. "She'll be coming presently to see you off."

Hai-sheng turned the shoes over and saw embroidered on the soles the words: "Down with Chiang Kai-shek!" and "Liberate all China." Deeply moved he said: "It's very kind of her. We shan't let you down."

Soon Iron Lock turned up, immensely proud of the wooden pistol in his belt. When his elder brother and Hai-sheng were ready, they stood to attention before Grandad Wang and saluted. "Reporting. We're ready to leave. Do we pass muster?"

Grandad Wang inspected them from head to foot. "Fine." He patted their shoulders. "You look like regular soldiers. Mind you fight well at the front."

"Right, Grandad."

The two boys assembled with other guerrilla fighters who were going to join the regular army. Together they marched to the bay. The sun, higher now, turned the crests of the blue waves golden, and the roar of the tide was music in their ears — a magnificent, stirring send-off. Sea-gulls were winging towards the distant horizon.

On the beach the two boys sought out Wang Ssu-chiang again. "Grandad, what last instructions have you for us?"

Grandad Wang looked at them fondly. "As long as man-eating sharks and wolves are at large, remember to keep a tight grip on your guns and carry on the revolution. We must fight on until all oppressed people in the world are liberated."

"We will, Grandad. We'll carry the revolution through to the end."

Then the anchor was raised, the sail hoisted, and the boat cast off. Hai-sheng and Iron Ball, standing on the deck, waved farewell to Grandad, their young friends and all the villagers come to see them off.

"Goodbye, Dragon King Island! Till we meet again, dear folk. . . ."

The small boat sped over the waves like a stormy petrel and presently vanished from sight.

Illustrated by Tung Chen-sheng

Keeping Chickens (painting in the traditional style) by Teng Chao-kuei ▶



Two Poems

Women Coastguards

Moonlight glitters over
the fishing harbour; militia women
out in a boat on coastguard duty,
one with flowers in her hair,
stands at the stern, rifle in hand;
the other with long braids, works
the big oar, it curving in and out
as it pushes the boat forward.
Lass and her sister-in-law.

As the boat cuts through
the choppy sea, the lass says

“Hey, sister-in-law, so newly
married, but with pretty clothes
left behind, now out on coastguard duty
surely you are the model worker
in your family! How lucky my brother
was to get you!”

The stern shines in the moonlight
“Don’t talk such nonsense!
No matter who you marry, you are
still in the militia, still
must go on coastguard duty; and when
you marry, you will still have
to work that oar for us!”

Waves slap against
the sides of the boat, splashing in.
The lass prattles along
“At home
you were a group leader,
called the good girl general
so don’t be shy in giving me
any orders you have.”
Says the other, “Now
we are going out into the open sea!
Watch out, you are on duty!
Stop your chatter or I’ll find a way
to shut you up!”

Comes the murmur
“My sister-in-law is really tough,

better for me to do as she says”
as at the big oar the lass and
her sister-in-law together
guard the coast, out under the moonlight.



Night March

Night march
fire-flies glittering in grasses;
dawn, and we climb hills
on manoeuvres, then go on
to help farmers with their work
until late at night, they
farewell us with torches
to light our way, the depth
of their feeling, warming our hearts.

Night march
stars sparkle as they hang in the sky;
their meeting over, our two leaders
come together to our bivouacs,
covering some of the sleeping with
their overcoats, full of comradeship
for class brothers.

Night march
waves of heavy clouds cross the sky
guards are on the alert
eyes wide open, smiling
as they hear
a drill order shouted out by
someone in dream; defenders
of our land ever go to rest,
rifles beside.

Night march
a sudden storm comes
with lashing rain and raging wind;
not a drop of water on their rifles
but their uniforms are drenched through;
cold though their bodies
they feel warm like spring
since they have the people in their hearts;
cutting wind and rain like arrows
they count as naught.

Night march
making holes for cooking
so that no smoke shows;
striking camp as swiftly
as lightning, then
a bugle sounds; weather
clears and in the light of dawn
cocks crow, smoke rises
from the villages,
and a glorious sun comes up
over the eastern hills.

Cheh Ping

A New Style of Bamboo Painting

Bamboo Harvest is a new and outstanding painting of the traditional school. An original composition and lively brush-strokes throw into prominence rows of sturdy, lovely bamboos and conjure up the luxuriance of the bamboo plantation. By choosing to depict bamboos after rain, the artists bring out the lush verdancy of the grove; and this is enhanced by the white mist on the river, which conveys a sense of space and freshness. In the distance, bamboo rafts are floating in apparently endless succession down the stream. The whole panorama of this fine harvest of bamboos in the mountains of south China brings home to us the keenness with which the commune members here support socialist construction.

Bamboos have been a familiar subject in Chinese painting throughout the ages, but artists of different classes in different periods of history depict them in different ways. The feudal literati painted bamboos to express the sense of indolent leisure of individual scholars or of the exploiting classes, to convey their aloof detachment. This painting forms a marked contrast to such past works. For the artists



吳江雨山亭山景竹枝
丁巳年夏月
畫於滬上

have critically assimilated certain features of Chinese landscape and flower-and-bird painting and imbued them with a new socialist content.

We can see from their mode of expression that the artists have drawn from real life to create something new. In composition they have made use of the traditional form of a horizontal scroll, combining in a single work the attention to detail typical of traditional flower-and-bird paintings and the method of evoking atmosphere typical of landscape painting. The depiction in the foreground of sections of bamboo to convey the vigour and height of the whole grove breaks one of the chief taboos in traditional painting, yet it underlines the main theme, that of a good harvest. In the background the rafts in the distance floating downstream, suggesting an endless convoy, add to the breadth of the horizontal scroll. This way of handling the relationship between the nearby bamboos and the distant rafts reinforces the artistic effect of the whole.

The brushwork, concise, vigorous and realistic, impresses us with a feeling of freshness and power; while the simple colours, like those in traditional painting, emphasize the main colour contrast. The luxuriance and vitality of bamboos are portrayed by spirited strokes and vivid colours, and the artists also contrast warm with cold shades. The effect of distance is achieved by a sketchy presentation of the rafts, the use of perspective, and by contrasting the mellow tints of the rafts with the brilliant greens of the bamboos. This conveys the width of the stream and the extent of the plantation in a broad panoramic landscape.

The artists who painted this picture, Yao Keng-yun, Fang Tseng-hsien and Lu Kun-feng, are three young teachers in the Chekiang College of Art. Having lived in the mountains and come to understand the revolutionary spirit of the poor and lower-middle peasants there who dare to transform nature to win a good harvest, they have been able to express the revolutionary drive and vitality of the labouring people through this depiction of a bamboo grove. This work is one of their more successful attempts at creating something new in the school of flower-and-bird painting.

“Stage Items” Off the Press

Recently published in Peking is a book entitled *Stage Items*. It contains selections from the entertainments performed on National Day in the capital last year. These items by both professional and amateur artists present in popular art forms the spirit of the workers, peasants and soldiers in their advance in socialist revolution and socialist construction.

Among the collection are songs for soloists and choruses, solo and orchestral music, dances, dance-dramas, arias from local operas adapted from the modern revolutionary Peking operas as well as ballads from different districts.

The book is the first of the “Literature and Art Series” compiled by a section of the Cultural Group under the State Council.

New Documentary Films

During the Spring Festival new colour documentary films were released in Peking and elsewhere throughout the country. They include *Tachai the Red Banner*; *The First Asian Table Tennis Championships*; *Samdech Sihanouk Visits Tsinan and Tsingtao*; *The Chinese Table Tennis Delegation Visits Canada, the United States, Mexico and Peru*; *Hunting an Elephant* and *The Taming of the Deer*.



The First Asian Table Tennis Championships

Tachai the Red Banner records how successfully members of the Tachai Production Brigade in Hsiyang County, Shansi Province, fought to change their poor hilly land into a new socialist farm, reaping good harvests for several years on end. This they did in accordance with Chairman Mao's teaching on self-reliance and hard work.

Shanghai Children's Art Exhibition

Recently there opened in Shanghai an exhibition of art works by boys and girls of five to fourteen years of age. The more than four hundred exhibits include oils, water-colours, gouaches, pastels, paintings in the traditional style, and other works of graphic art.

These works have the exuberance and vitality characteristic of children's art. For instance, *Huge Hanlage Truck* shows the excitement of children by the roadside as they watch the giant truck taking on

a load weighing three hundred tons. This picture, in fact, sings the praise of the new achievements of Shanghai industries. Children's love for the new society is fully displayed in the painting *The New Bridge*, which depicts the signs of prosperity around the bridge.

Auntie Helps Me to Find Mama is a simple line-drawing showing the care New China's children receive from all sides. Other works such as *Our Little Workshop, Changes Outside Our House, We Must Study Hard* and *We Like Revolutionary Tales* all show in different ways the healthy growth, cultural as well as physical, of China's younger generation.

Yin Kuang-lan's Songs Published

The Anhwei People's Publishing House has recently brought out a collection of songs by Yin Kuang-lan. Its title — *I Sing Aloud for the Red Sun* — is a facsimile of the handwriting of Kuo Mo-jo, the noted poet.

Yin Kuang-lan has composed more than two hundred songs. The seventy in this collection are simple evocative lyrics closely linked with the life of the people. They reflect the peasants' happy life under socialism, and their love for the Party and Chairman Mao.

The folk singer, aged thirty-seven, is a commune member of Feitung County, Anhwei Province. Her childhood was one of misery and poverty, when singing was her main pleasure. Ever since Liberation in 1949, she has taken an active part in amateur art performances in her village. Together with other commune members she sings songs during the transplantation of rice shoots, leads in work-chants in the fields and gives performances at the evening gatherings on the threshing-floor.

To help her develop her creative ability, the Party has sent her to school and to conferences on writing, besides arranging visits for her to learn from advanced workers and peasants in other districts. In the past ten years or so, Yin Kuang-lan has studied hard and never stopped composing songs to serve the workers, peasants and soldiers.

During the cultural revolution she wrote for local newspapers and wall-newspapers in her village in praise of the victories of the revolution.

In March 1971, Yin Kuang-lan was asked to be a part-time teacher in the Chinese Language Department of Anhwei University. To express her joy, she wrote a new song *Chairman Mao Has Sent Me to This Platform*.

New Iron Pictures

Iron picture making is a traditional art popular in Anhwei Province. Displayed against a white background, iron pictures create an effect much like that of Chinese ink paintings, except that they stand out in sharper relief and last for centuries.

According to historical records, this art came into being over two hundred years ago in the city of Wuhu, Anhwei. A blacksmith there named Tang Tien-chih loved to watch his neighbour, who was a painter, at work. For this he received a dressing-down from the artist. Then he decided to make pictures himself. Taking the anvil as his ink-stone and the sledge hammer as his pen, he began producing wrought-iron pictures, the fame of which spread. But in the old society this art never had the chance to flourish.

After Liberation, under the guidance of Chairman Mao's line for art and literature of letting a hundred flowers bloom and weeding through the old to achieve the new, iron picture making acquired a new lease of life. Veteran craftsmen, in association with painters, have learned the methods of expression of traditional painting and made bold innovations, producing many original works. They not only have preserved some traditional designs, but have turned out new works with themes from present-day life. One good example is *While Drinking Don't Forget the Water's Source* which depicts the people's feelings for the Party and Chairman Mao; while achievements

in socialist construction and features of the new countryside are displayed in works entitled *Meishan Reservoir*, *Ploughing*, *Fighting the Drought*, *A Good Harvest* and *Delivery of the State Grain*. Heroic images of workers, peasants and soldiers are well presented in *Liu Ying-chun*, *Women Militia* and *A Barefoot Doctor* while *Mountains After Snow*, *Pines Greet the Visitors* and *Lotus Peak on Mount Huangshan* show the magnificent beauty of China's landscapes. Some of these excellent works are now on display in the Great Hall of the People in Peking.



Published by Foreign Languages Press
Yu Chou Hung, Peking (37), China
Printed in the People's Republic of China

Hunting (scissor-cut)

by Lin Tsai-hua



中国文学

英文月刊1973年第4期

本刊代号2-916