

CHINESE LITERATURE



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Hao Jan

First and Last

Two days before the Spring Festival the commune had a day off. And since it was cold and there was no work to be done the villagers were loth to leave the warm quilts in which they had slept so snugly all night long.

The brigade's old Party secretary, however, stuck to his long established custom and rose early. Though getting on in years, he was still spry. In no time at all he slipped into his trousers and padded jacket, pulled on his shoes and socks and bound his trousers round his ankles with strips of cloth — all this with the dexterity of a young soldier roused by reveille. When he opened the front door — flop! — something white and glittering fell in, making him start.

So it was snowing, a heavy snowfall too. Doors and windows were blocked, lanes, chicken-coops, haystacks, pickle jars and pig-troughs were muffled up in white. Earth and sky were merged in the steadily falling snow.

A flurry of wind, cutting like a knife, pelted the old fellow with snowflakes, pearling him from head to foot with drops of water.

Having tightened his belt and blown on his hands to warm them, he turned to pick up a broom and nimbly cleared a path to the gate, after which he turned to sweep back towards the window. The swept-up snow was grimy, blackened by the coal dust lying by the wall.

At this point he remembered something. The previous evening the brigade leader had assigned a cart to go into town this morning to bring back coal-balls for the commune members; but a horse could hardly be sent out in this snowstorm. So what were they to do? As the proverb says: Hillfolk never lack for firewood. Normally, the people of Yellow Flower Valley burned brushwood from the mountain, but over the Spring Festival they liked to light coal-stoves. This was a time-honoured custom, just as much a part of the holiday as preparing cakes of sticky rice, dumplings and pork hotpot, or as the women and children putting on new clothes and shoes. The warmth of these stoves added enormously to the festive atmosphere. Without them, it would not be half so cheerful. Actually, on the eighth of the month, when they ate the traditional gruel with "eight treasures" in it, the old Party secretary had remembered the need for coal-balls and quite a few villagers had asked leave to go and buy some; but they were so busy at the time collecting fertilizer that no one could be spared. The brigade leader had promised to see to the matter. He guaranteed that every household would have coal-balls for the Spring Festival.

At this moment the brigade leader, a raincoat over his shoulders, came crunching through the snow in his felt topboots. His first words on entering the courtyard were: "Party secretary, I think we'll have to call off our plan to fetch coal."

The Party secretary straightened up and darted a sharp glance at his younger colleague, who looked a regular snowman. "Call it off? That won't do. When we promise our folk something, we must keep our word. We'll have to find some way to fetch the coal-balls."

"Seems to me, if we get the team leaders to explain the situation, our people won't complain. Their level of understanding isn't so low."

The Party secretary smiled. "That's true. But shouldn't we cadres have an even higher level? Just think: over the past year our people have sweated blood to get a good harvest and never asked for the least consideration. Whatever we told them to do, they did. The salt of the earth, they are, every one of them. The Spring Festival comes round only once a year. We must see that they have a real good holiday, with no enjoyment lacking."

Someone spoke up from the door: "That's the idea. This shows our cadres have a higher level than the masses."

It was the Party secretary's wife who had made this comment. As the saying goes: Live three days with a mason and even if you can't build a house you'll know how to lay bricks. After being married for so many years to the Party secretary, she had quite a high level of understanding herself. Shaking out a fur-lined waistcoat she stepped forward to drape it over her old man's shoulders. "Coal-balls are part and parcel of the Spring Festival," she asserted. "Take my case for instance. Of course, just thinking of oneself is selfish; but actually I'm thinking of other people too. Over the holiday visitors keep dropping in, and I need a stove to brew tea and cook side-dishes. It would be awkward without it, and not so cheerful. Besides, my old man needs a few days' rest. He's getting on, and if he just sits at home without a fire he feels chilly to the marrow of his old bones. But if you cadres simply tell me we've got to do without coal, could I insist and say: No, that won't do! You must get me coal. Would my understanding be so low? See how it is? So I think you should make an effort. Right?"

The brigade leader protested: "It's not that I'm not concerned for people's welfare, but use your eyes. How can any horse pull a cart through such a snowstorm?"

"That's another matter," said the Party secretary. "The first question is: Should we fetch coal or not? If we make up our minds to fetch it, we'll hit on a way. If we lack the determination, of course we'll find no way out."

"All right. We'll do it. Now you tell me how."

"Look. How about using barrows?"

The brigade leader beamed and slapped his thigh. "The very thing!" he exclaimed. "Barrows will do fine: they're easier to handle."

The woman's pleased comment was: "A high political level makes you resourceful."

The brigade leader wanted to be off at once to find men to push the barrows, but the old Party secretary stopped him. "Wait. How many barrows will you send?"

"Five. All right?"

"Can do. And who's to take them?"

"One man from each team. We'll choose the toughest youngsters."

"Get four then."

"Why four?"

"Count me in."

His wife opened her mouth to speak, then swallowed her protest. She must watch her tongue in front of the brigade leader.

"In weather like this," he said, "everyone's at home. We can find people easily."

"If the villagers are at home, so are the cadres," rejoined the Party secretary. "On a fine day it wouldn't matter whom you sent. But in this snowstorm this is a tough assignment. When a job is hard we can't just send others to do it. We cadres must take the lead."

The brigade leader grinned sheepishly and nodded. "Very well, I'll go too. So we'll only need three others."

After the brigade leader's departure, the old Party secretary went on sweeping the snow until he had cleared all the paths. He then went indoors to find lighter padded shoes for the coming trip to town. He searched every chest and cupboard, all to no purpose. Even the fur waistcoat which he had tossed on the *kang* had disappeared. He asked his wife: "Where have you put my old pair of lighter shoes?"

His wife by the door was tying on an apron. "What do you need them for?" she asked with a smile. "Even if you found them I wouldn't let you go. In front of the brigade leader, I didn't like to say. . . ."

Her husband had been expecting a scene like this. He said: "In front of other people you talk about your high level of understanding. When they've gone, your level drops. I always said that 'high level' of yours was bogus, but you would never admit it."

"It's not that. All those young chaps in our brigade are idle. Why should an old man like you rush to take the lead?"

"I'm a cadre, of course I have to take the lead. Can we send our commune members out in such foul weather while we cadres stay at home lolling on the *kang*?"

"But how do you expect other people to feel if an old man like you goes off on this job? This has nothing to do with your political level. When it comes to sowing seeds, digging canals, carrying manure or harvesting, it's only right for you to take the lead. When have I ever stopped you? Just tell me that. If I'd stopped you even once, you could call me selfish and I'd take it. But why should you wear yourself out over a fiddling business like fetching coal-balls? It just doesn't make sense."

"I think you're the one talking nonsense. A cadre should take the lead in big matters and small. Especially if the job's hard, he should get in and tackle it first. If he doesn't take the lead in little things, I can't see him giving a lead on important ones either."

"You're not the man you were six months ago. You're just over a serious illness and still shaky. So don't fight to go on this trip. This autumn the commune Party secretary gave me the job of looking after your health. And ever so many villagers have told me I should keep tabs on you. If I let you go and catch cold, I'll be falling down on my job. That would be a poor show. So you'd better stay quietly at home."

Her husband threw out his chest. "I'm as fit as a fiddle."

"Be your age," she begged. "If you fall ill again, there'll be one less to help see to the spring ploughing and I'm the one who'll be blamed."

They were at it hammer and tongs when the brigade leader came back with four young team leaders, all tempered in the time of the Big Leap Forward in 1958. Strapping, spirited fellows, they strode in, covered with snow, bringing in a gust of cold air.

The brigade leader said: "Party secretary, following your example, these team leaders have decided to go themselves instead of sending people from their teams."

The Party secretary eyed them in turn and nodded. "That's the spirit. This is how team leaders ought to behave. Let them all go if they're so keen."

"Five carts and five men, just right. So we don't need you."

The old man thought this over, then said: "All right. I'll help you get the barrows ready." He turned to ask his wife: "Are you satisfied now?"

She smiled and retorted: "I knew they wouldn't let you go. I'm not the only one concerned for you. The whole village wants you to take good care of your health."

As the Party secretary was helping the five men prepare barrows and sacks in the brigade office, some villagers crowded in. They started grabbing for the barrows and sacks.

"Brigade leader, why didn't you give us this job?" they demanded. "What's the idea, sending only team leaders for coal?"

"We want a share in this hard job."

"Let the team leaders stay at home. We'll go in their place."

"Right. This is a job for us."

The brigade leader lunged right and left to bar their way. The office suddenly looked like a boxing-ring.

The Party secretary neither granted their requests nor tried to stop the sparring. He looked from one man to another, a smile on his face. Though this was a trifling matter, he was delighted by their comradely spirit and co-operation.

The brigade leader now bellowed: "Stop arguing, will you? Tell me: Will you accept the Party secretary's decision?"

They chorused: "Of course we will."

"All right then. It was his idea to send the cadres. So you'll have to agree to it."

Then all turned to plead with the Party secretary.

"Party secretary, we can't just sit waiting to have coal delivered to us."

"Make them stay at home and send us instead. How about that?"

Only then did the old Party secretary speak up. "Our commune members' eagerness to take on the job is fine. So is our cadres' attitude. As long as we keep this up, each trying to be the first to rough it, the last to take it easy, our unity will be like iron and we shall increase our output every year. If on top of that we keep the class struggle in mind, our good life under socialism is ensured. As for whom to send on this trip to town, we can discuss that again. It's not all that important."

"What is there to discuss? Just send us."

"Just say the word, Party secretary."

He replied: "Don't you see, we've only these five barrows. So even not counting cadres there are far too many of you to go — some will have to stay behind. Go home now to have your meal. The brigade leader will let you know later whom we've decided to send."

Since further argument was clearly useless, the villagers dispersed. Some went home for a meal, others to put on more clothes. A few youngsters having put their heads together decided to go to the old Party secretary's house. As he always showed special concern for young people and understood their feelings, another appeal to him should do the trick. If he refused it, they would pretend to be hurt; if he remained adamant, they would grab the barrows and make off with them.

However, all these fine plans came to nothing. The old Party secretary had not gone home. They found only his wife there sulking because the meal on the table was untouched. The barrows had disappeared from the brigade office, and so had the cadres — they'd stolen a march on the rest. In fact they hadn't even told the old Party secretary that they were going. Which road had they taken? There was no way of knowing for the snow, still falling thick and fast, had covered their tracks. The villagers felt like kicking themselves. They sighed, gratitude mingled with their exasperation.

The snow was coming down more heavily now, like flour sprinkled from a giant sieve. Gusts of howling wind followed each other in swift succession. The whole familiar landscape, fields, ditches,

slopes and ridges, was lost to sight. As for keeping to the road, that was out of the question.

The brigade leader and the four team leaders, each pushing a barrow, floundered through the snow in the teeth of the biting wind. All were powerful men, toughened by years of hard work on the land. So they managed to keep on their feet.

Before long they came to the river. It was fairly wide, a good hundred metres across. The snow on its frozen surface had made it nearly level with the banks. To reach town they had to cross this river. When the water was low, people usually waded over; when the water was high, they crossed by a ferry-boat. Now that it was frozen, they could walk over the ice.

The young team leader in front, not stopping to think, started pushing his barrow towards the river.

"Hey!" yelled the brigade leader. "Wait a bit. Not so fast."

"What's wrong? The river's frozen solid."

"Better be careful. Yesterday men from West Village were breaking the ice to catch fish. It may not have frozen over solidly, and now it's covered with snow. If you fall in, we'll be in real trouble."

"What's your idea then?"

The brigade leader parked his barrow and walked to the bank. He said: "I tell you what: You four wait here while I try out the ice..."

Before he could finish there was a chorus of protests.

"No, you wait here while one of us goes ahead."

"I'll go."

"I've more experience than you."

The brigade leader countered: "Whatever you say, you must let me test the ice. If it's safe, you can follow."

The others retorted: "Why? Aren't we all cadres?"

The brigade leader chuckled. "True, we're all leading cadres, but I happen to be brigade leader. As the old Party secretary says: The higher your rank, the harder you must work."

They stood there disputing by the frozen river, none of them willing to give way. They had all been sweating before. Now the biting wind chilled them to the bone and set them shivering.

Suddenly one of the team leaders let out a yell: "Hey, look! There's a track across the river."

They went forward to look. Sure enough, across the smooth snow a track snaked towards the opposite bank. Though fresh snow was beginning to cover it again, it was still visible. Obviously somebody had just passed this way, weaving from side to side to find a safe passage.

"Yes, someone's just gone this way."

"Just one person wouldn't have left so wide a track. Maybe some troops passed over."

"And not long ago either. Come on, if we keep to this track it's bound to be all right."

Jubilantly, each man turned back to his barrow. As the brigade leader took hold of the shafts he exclaimed: "Wait. Can you see someone in front?"

They strained their eyes through the snow and made out a stooping figure moving slowly forward on the opposite bank. A faint swishing sound carried to their ears.

The brigade leader cupped his hands round his mouth and bel-
lowed: "Hey there! Is this ice really solid?"

The man straightened up and called back: "Wait a bit. Wait a bit."

The brigade leader gave a start, for it was the old Party secretary's voice. The others were staggered too. So he had stolen a march on them again.

No mistake, it was the old Party secretary. He was sweeping a path through the snow with a big bamboo broom. As he swept he tested the ice ahead. The howling wind was whirling great flurries of snowflakes which fell on the ice, on the track and on his head, shoulders and back. Icicles had formed on his eyebrows and his beard. The snow seemed to have brought the sky lower, raised the earth higher, and made the old man's figure loom larger too. From a distance he looked like the mythical God of Longevity.

After he had cleared the last section linking the track with the bank, he tucked the broom under one arm and rubbed his horny

hands which were purple with cold. "Come on," he called cheerfully. "This path is safe."

The five barrows, like tanks in a military parade, trundled over the track cleared through the snow by the old Party secretary.

That evening, ten bulging sacks of coal-balls were piled up in the courtyard of the brigade office.

Snow was still whirling in the air. A new layer of white had fallen over the courtyard which had been swept clean. Pitch black against the white, the coal-balls glistened above the dazzling snow.

The old Party secretary standing on a stone outside the gate was calling through a megaphone: "All who need coal-balls, come to the brigade office to fetch them."

His voice resonant as a bronze bell carried clearly through every lane. The whole village knew that voice. Before Liberation the old Party secretary had been a well-known mason. In those days when people were struggling to keep alive, the young, enterprising mason had organized his poor neighbours to quarry stones to make a living, and every day he had called them to work in these same ringing tones. When the war against Japanese aggression broke out he organized guerrillas, and then his powerful voice had called his hot-blooded young comrades-in-arms to join in the fight. When the first agricultural co-operative was set up here, it was his voice again which had called the co-op members out to the fields or to discussion meetings, encouraging them to fight flood and drought, urging them to take their share of the crops home or deliver grain to the state granary. Now he was calling the villagers again and,



although the delivery of coal in the snow was nothing of vital importance, still his announcement warmed the hearts of all.

Chatting and laughing, the villagers came with baskets and sacks through the snow to get their share of coal-balls.

The Party secretary's voice galvanized his wife, too, into action.

She was getting supper when she heard his announcement. At once she stamped out the fire she had just lit and dashed out, poker in hand.

She was a warm-hearted woman and one who set store by face. The villagers treated her with the same respect as they did her husband, and she both enjoyed and prized her dignity. Having been the Party secretary's wife for several dozen years, through thick and thin, she felt she understood him better than others. She knew how much he had done for Yellow Flower Valley. She believed that in the construction work to come, someone of his calibre would be needed to give the lead. So she treated him like the apple of her eye. That autumn in the fight against flood, the old fellow had taken the lead, working in mud and water for five days and five nights without rest, quite regardless of his own health. The flood was brought under

control, but he fell ill. In the middle of the night he ran a high fever and became delirious, unable to touch food or drink for three whole days. All the villagers were scared stiff. They came in groups to watch by his bedside. A doctor was sent by the county committee, and the commune Party secretary stayed at the patient's side. His son and daughter working away from home sent back money. . . . At long last he recovered. As the commune Party secretary was leaving he told the old woman: "You must take good care of him for our sake, auntie. Keep him fit and cheerful. Then you'll be doing your bit for the revolution." She had sensed an unspoken criticism here for her failure to look after her husband better. The memory of his all-out fight against the flood and of those days when he lay at death's door appalled her. She said: "If anything happens to my old man, how am I to account to our folk?" After this, having learned her lesson, she did everything in her power to cosset her husband. This frequently led to arguments, even to quarrels, between them. None-the-less she did as she was told, sticking faithfully to her task. As the Spring Festival approached she had decided to keep the house snug and warm and to prepare some appetizing food. The Party secretary had never cared much for meat and drink but he did enjoy a pot of good tea; so if they had a coal fire it would come in very handy for brewing tea. She told herself: My old man's rarely at home. This holiday is a chance for him to have a good rest and store up energy to give the lead when the spring ploughing and sowing start.

A villager who met her in the lane said: "There's no need for you to go out in this snow. Give me your basket and your old man can take the coal home for you."

She laughed. "That won't do. If I leave it to him, sure as fate he'll bring back nothing but some coal dust."

The accountant and storekeeper were hard at work, one keeping the account, the other weighing the coal-balls.

The old Party secretary walked over beaming and ran into his wife just entering the courtyard. It was clear from the basket in her hand what she had come for. He thought: There may not be enough coal-balls to go round; so cadres should wait till all the

others have taken their share. But if he tried to stop his wife, the villagers were bound to insist on her taking their share; while if he didn't stop her, she would edge forward. Not knowing what to do, he stayed at the gate.

His wife walked over to the heaps of coal-balls and plumped her basket on the ground. Before she even opened her mouth the villagers near her cried: "Serve the old lady first. Serve her first."

In desperation the old Party secretary shouted to his wife: "Hey, come here, quick."

"Wait till I've got my coal," she answered.

He pinched the middle finger of his left hand. "Quick. It hurts like hell."

Not knowing what had happened she hurried over and followed him to the outer room of the office. "I've got a splinter in my finger," he said. "See if you can get it out."

She took the needle she kept pinned on her tunic and raised his hand to examine the finger carefully. "Where is it?" she demanded. "It must have gone right in."

"Don't waste my time. There's no splinter here. I must go and get coal-balls."

"Listen to me. I reckon these five barrows of coal may not be quite enough to go round."

"But surely we'll get our share."

"We mustn't just think of ourselves. Wait to the last and see."

"Wait to the last? There's a share for everyone. Let me take it home now so that I can get on with the supper."

"Quiet, woman. Come and wait over here."

He tugged his wife into the adjacent room. At once her eye fell on a worn sack in one corner. She recognized the sack as one of theirs. When she went over to feel it, sure enough, it was full of coal-balls. She beamed. "So you've got the coal."

The old Party secretary signed to her to keep her voice down. She was puzzled but kept quiet. Still she felt very pleased. This was the first time her husband had shown such consideration for his own family.

Aware that she had jumped to the wrong conclusion, he could not very well explain just then; for if he said there was not enough coal for all, many villagers would give their share to others.

Now shouts reached them from the courtyard:

"Why haven't the cadres' families come for coal?"

"There's not much left. Let's keep it for them."

The Party secretary went out to the yard. "Don't keep any back," he said. "Let the villagers have theirs first. The cadres can wait."

Naturally they would not agree to this. They protested:

"No, that's not right. Share and share alike."

"Save this for the cadres."

Some who had already taken their coal prepared to empty their baskets.

"Don't do that," cried the Party secretary. "We'll have to make another trip in any case. It makes no difference if some cadres get their share a little late."

Some young fellows surrounded him and said:

"This time you must let us go."

"Let's just take the barrows and go, so that they can't steal another march on us."

With eager shouts some snatched up sacks while others grabbed hold of barrows. Then they headed home. There was no stopping them.

It was growing dark now and the snow was still falling.

All the coal-balls had been distributed. The accountant and storekeeper put away the baskets and scales, then swept up the coal dust.

The team leaders who had fetched the coal had been toasting themselves by the stove. They now emerged from the inner room, their faces glowing with health.

The Party secretary told them: "You've had a hard day. We won't hold a meeting this evening. Go home and rest."

The brigade leader asked: "Shall we make another trip tomorrow?"

The Party secretary looked at the young team leaders. "We can talk about that tomorrow morning," he said.

One team leader proposed: "If more's needed, we'd better fetch it."

Another agreed: "That's right. We know the way."

When his wife saw that everyone had gone she reached for the sack in the corner, but her husband said: "No, let me carry it. You don't want to get dirty."

The old couple went off through the snow. Snowflakes falling on the Party secretary's ruddy face promptly melted and beads of water trickled down from his eyebrows. With a glance at the sky he said with feeling: "These young cadres of ours are first-rate. After going to so much trouble to fetch coal, they've let the masses have it all, not keeping any for themselves. The first to fetch coal, the last to take their share — they're really working whole-heartedly for the people."

His wife said: "Tomorrow you can send more men and get more, then everyone will have enough."

He looked up at the sky again and stretched out one hand to catch snowflakes. "The snow isn't letting up," he replied in a low voice. "How can we send them out again in this weather? The harder they drive themselves, the more consideration we should show them. . . ."

"Well, you can send commune members instead. They're all fighting for the job, aren't they?"

"They've all got their coal. Why send them out on such a tough errand, on the eve of the festival too, just for the sake of a few cadres?"

"What's to be done then?"

"Now our folk have got coal and can have a happy, enjoyable festival. Well, that warms the cockles of our hearts. So even if we cadres don't get our own stoves burning, we won't mind."

This was a simple, unaffected statement, but the Party secretary's wife was puzzled. She stopped to look at the sack over his shoulder and the icy drops beading his face. Then she demanded: "What's come over you? Is this right?"

"What?" Her husband pretended not to understand.

In exasperation she stamped her foot and said: "You're usually smart; what makes you so dense today?"



"Dense? Not I."

"Oh yes, you are. Just think. The other cadres haven't got coal and you're not sending for any more tomorrow, yet you, a leading cadre, have kept some for yourself. What will people think? Even if they don't complain to your face, they're bound to resent it."

"You're right, every Party member should take the lead, stand in the forefront. Take the lead in what? In doing the hard jobs, in working for socialism. Not in taking advantage of others, in working for petty selfish interest. Whatever the issue, be it big or small, selfishness is contemptible. If I did something mean I wouldn't be worthy to be a Party member and, even though you're my wife, as a Party member yourself you'd feel ashamed. You wouldn't want the masses to have a low opinion of me, would you?"

"The way you run on! *Aiyaya*, if you can talk so well why did you do such a thing? Who told you to keep coal for yourself? You can't put the blame on me. I thought you'd be fetching more and it wouldn't matter if some people got theirs later. If I'd known you wouldn't be making another trip, I wouldn't have asked for any. What does it matter if we don't light our stove over the festival?"

"Well, why didn't you say so earlier?"

"So you are blaming me! If you'd told me you wouldn't be fetching a second lot, I wouldn't have let you take this."

"If I'd said it in front of the others they'd not have agreed to it. They'd none of them have come to collect the coal."

The old couple went on disputing in the snow, one really worked up, the other putting on an act.

The snow kept whirling down. From time to time branches crackled under its weight.

The Party secretary's wife was worried, exasperated and puzzled. She weighed the matter in her mind. On the face of it this was a little thing and in anyone else's case it wouldn't have mattered; but for the old Party secretary it was serious. She knew her husband. He had never done such a thing before. This time, all because he was thinking of her, he had for once forgotten his principles. She felt very bad.

The old Party secretary looked at his wife, able to guess pretty well what was in her mind. Although he was secretly pleased he did not show it, but seized this chance to straighten out her thinking. "Don't you blame me," he said. "I've a criticism of you too."

His wife pouted. "Anyway I didn't put you up to this."

The old man said: "It isn't just this case I have in mind, there are plenty of others too. What about this morning and the trip to get coal? Was your attitude right? I know you were worried about my health, and I appreciate that. But you ought to understand that a Communist should feel more concerned for the Party's good name and the interests of the masses than for his own health. If the Party's reputation and the people's interests suffer, the best health in the world is no use. But these days you've been so obsessed with keeping me fit, you've no time for anything else. Let me tell you a golden rule: Health is capital for the revolution, not for the individual. The revolution comes first, health comes second..."

His wife hung her head in shame. "You needn't say any more. Take the coal back, quick. I want to get rid of it."

"We'll get rid of it, and at the same time we should get rid of selfish interests. If we don't root them up, they may crop up again. When that happens, we're liable to produce a whole lot of fine-sounding arguments to fool others as well as ourselves. So the only way is to grit our teeth and eradicate our selfishness, root and branch."

"Anyway, I don't want this coal. We still have a bit of coal dust in the yard, enough to make coal-balls to last a couple of days. We mustn't make a bad impression over such a trifle. Divide this sack of coal-balls between the cadres. It won't come to much, but it's the thought that counts."

The old Party secretary clapped his hands. "Right. We could do that. But each cadre would get too little to be of any real use; besides, they probably wouldn't accept it. To tell you the truth, when I saw that the coal wouldn't be enough I decided to save this for old Liu Erh who's living all on his own. But you jumped to the conclusion that it was for us. Well, now your ideas are straightened out, let's take this sack to Liu."

Since his wife was so keen now to get rid of the coal-balls, she readily agreed.

In no time they reached Liu Erh's door, which seemed curtained with snow. The old Party secretary climbed the steps and knocked loudly.

At the sound of this rat-a-tat-tat his wife beamed, jubilant because she and her husband had done another good deed. She turned to go home first. After supper she and her old man together could use the coal dust they had left to make coal-balls.

Illustrated by Pan Shih-hsun



Uncle Ni

I only met Uncle Ni once yet, the older I grow, the deeper and more significant becomes the impression he made on me.

I met Uncle Ni in April 1943 when I had just left home and was on my way to a revolutionary base area behind the enemy's lines. I had been told beforehand that the journey would take me three days, that I must myself find a place to sleep the first night on the way, but the second night I could go to Uncle Ni's house at "Hell's Corner". Why was the place called Hell's Corner? It was because Uncle Ni lived in Puchiang County and especially in Nita Village. Some ten miles to the east of it was a base area, a place fit for human beings to live in, which was led by our Communist Party. West of the village, the area was all occupied by the enemy. This was literally a "hell" on earth. Living there on the border, the old man's task was to be guide and liaison man for those who were going behind the enemy's lines to join the New Fourth Army led by the Communist Party.

I arrived at Nita Village just at sunset and right away met a group of children. Before I had time to ask them where Uncle Ni lived,

one of the older ones came up to me and asked, "Who are you looking for?"

"Uncle Ni."

"Come with me, I'll take you to him," he offered and led me to a small hut at the east end of the village. He indicated it with a nod, then turned and left me.

When I looked at the hut I thought it well situated, being surrounded and screened by a thicket of green bamboo. I called out "Uncle Ni" several times. Since there was no answer, I pushed the door open and went in. As I glanced inside I frowned, for the room was as small as a snail's shell. Along one wall there was a stove with two cauldrons on it. There was clean water in the larger one but the smaller one was cluttered up with two dirty bowls and a pair of chopsticks. A bed stood against the opposite wall with a tattered mosquito net hung over it. Though the net must once have been white it was now discoloured and dirty from the smoke and dust of years. There was no table. Besides a small millstone which took up the space in the centre of the room, there were two benches, one with an oil lamp on it. I called again, still there was no answer. I began to wonder if this was the right place. Just then, a great bundle of faggots was propelled through the door, so large that all I could see of the person carrying it was a pair of feet in straw sandals. I hurried over to relieve the man of the bundle, giving him a chance to straighten up. Strangely enough he showed no expression whatsoever while he calmly looked me over from head to toe. He only said bluntly, "Just pile the faggots by the stove."

As I was doing this, he asked, "Did you come here looking for me?" I gave him the password, "I want to see Uncle Ni who sells Yiwu piglets." He grunted and sat down. Not until he had lit up his pipe did he invite me to sit down on the other bench. I had a chance to look him over then. He wore an old-fashioned jacket of blue homespun with an old belt tied clumsily around his waist. His face still wore that dead-pan look but I discovered there was a sharp glint in his eyes.

According to an old saying, "A guest must do as his host does." There was so much the two of us should have talked about, such as

what my name was, where I came from, where I had stayed the previous night, what difficulties I'd encountered on the way and so on. . . . I could have answered all such questions easily if only he had asked me. But the old man didn't ask a single one. I was very puzzled. Why was he so cold and indifferent?

When he had finished his pipeful, he slowly knocked out the ashes on the sole of his sandal. After that he stood up and announced, "Now we'll prepare a meal." He drew out a sack from beneath the bed and poured out some corn into a pan. Without any hesitation he put me to work saying, "Come on, you grind the corn while I boil some water."

A moment later the room became a little livelier with the rhythmic creaking of the millstones and the crackle of the faggots in the stove. But neither of us said a single word; it was as though we were both deaf mutes. The meal was finally cooked in what I felt to be an almost unbearable silence.

The old man lit the lamp, put the lid of the water-vat on the millstone to serve as a table and scooped up a bowl of corn gruel for each of us. When I began to eat, he finally broke the silence to ask, "Can you manage to eat this all right?"

Not wanting him to misunderstand and think I couldn't stomach such coarse grain, I put the bowl to my lips and answered with a smile, "Oh yes, I like it very much."

"Like it? But you don't seem to know how to eat it!" Watching me as I slurped some more of the gruel into my mouth with my chopsticks, Uncle Ni actually smiled. This was the first time he had done so since my arrival. I was pleased and continued slurping eagerly. Suddenly my hand holding the chopsticks was gripped tightly. I looked up then to find Uncle Ni bending over me.

"You should eat it like this. . . ." He showed me then how to scoop up the thick gruel properly with my chopsticks. Sitting down again, he held up his own bowl to his lips and said with an air of self-assurance, "This way, the gruel will remain thick right to the bottom of the bowl. You can finish it up so clean you won't even need to wash it!"

After we had eaten, without waiting for his orders, I began to wash up. He sat there puffing away at his pipe, not bothering to stop me or make any polite remarks.

Soon everything was put away. Uncle Ni, lamp in one hand, took up a quilt from his bed. "Time to get some sleep," he said. I followed him up a short ladder into a tiny loft. He helped me to pile up some straw for a bed and filled the open skylight with a bundle of straw too. Indicating my bed with his chin, he asked again, "Will you be able to sleep all right?"

After the experience I'd had eating the corn gruel, I thought I understood what he meant, more or less. Putting down my small parcel of belongings, I stretched out on the straw and imitating his tone said reassuringly, "I'll sleep well like this."

"Wait a minute! The enemy as a rule doesn't dare to come here in the night so you can take off your long gown and shoes before you sleep. If anything happens, keep calm and don't run around." This was the longest speech he had made since I arrived and I was more than pleased. I took off my gown and threw it aside casually then kicked off my shoes quickly without bothering to untie the laces. But telling me to get up, carefully he spread the gown over the straw like a sheet, then he covered me with the quilt he had brought from his own bed. When I was settled he picked up my worn-out gymshoes and examined them by lamplight. I thought that this would be a good chance to talk to him, but before I could say a word he took up the lamp and turned to go. When he was already on the ladder, he raised the lamp higher and turned back to say, "You'll have to be up early tomorrow morning, so get to sleep now!"

Uncle Ni had to wake me the next morning. I opened my eyes to find a pale light visible through the skylight. Thinking that I had overslept, I dressed in a hurry.

"Don't be flustered," Uncle Ni remarked. "The cock has only crowed once."

Downstairs beside the millstone, I found two pairs of new straw sandals and a frame for making them. A closer look at the lamp showed it was almost bone-dry. "Uncle must have worked the whole night through." I said as though talking to myself but Uncle Ni



pretended not to hear me. He put some golden corn cakes already cooked on the millstone. "Help yourself and be quick. We should start out right away."

After breakfast the old man handed me one pair of straw sandals. "Put them on! We'll have to travel through the mountains." Before I could protest, he had bent down and was undoing my shoe-strings.

"Do you know how to put these on?" he questioned me again. This time he was quite sure I couldn't manage. He helped me to put on the sandals, fastened the strings for me and asked me to take a few steps to see how they felt. I thought they were a perfect fit, but he made me take them off again so that he could adjust them a little.

After he was satisfied and I had tied them on again, he took off his belt and gave it to me. Holding it, I was at a loss, not knowing what to do with it. He tucked up my gown and, tying the belt tightly round my waist, made the gown look more like a jacket.

"Let's get started now," he ordered. "I'll go with you for a short distance." He tucked a sickle under his belt and holding a long staff with pointed ends went out of the hut.

Outside, a bright moon hung high in the sky. Uncle Ni told me to keep about twenty paces behind him. This meant that I still couldn't speak, although I was bursting with things to tell him.

We walked together for about ten miles instead of a short distance. When the rim of the rising sun showed above the horizon, we were already high on a mountain between the counties of Puchiang and Yiwu. We had walked fast, and climbed steadily uphill so that I was panting and Uncle Ni's forehead was glistening with sweat. There he stopped proudly standing with legs firmly astride, his staff in one hand, facing the sun and gazing fondly at the vast landscape below. There was a glint of gold on the distant streams and ponds while nearby valleys were all shrouded in a gauzy morning mist. As the cocks crowed again lustily here and there, I imagined I could hear the soldiers marching out for their morning drill in the revolutionary base area and the people going cheerfully to work. Only then did I notice that Uncle Ni's face, far from being dead-pan, showed deep emotion.

He asked me my name then and told me that it was a rule he had made for himself not to ask the name of anyone he was taking to the revolutionary base until he reached this mountain top.

"Comrade Hsiao Wang," the old man said slowly, "down there at the foot of this mountain is our base area and so my mission ends here..."

I looked up at Uncle Ni, seeing him standing there as he had so many times before, with the sun rising behind the mountains, sending off countless youngsters like myself to join the revolutionary ranks.

The two of us stood there in silent exaltation for quite a while. Then Uncle Ni grasped my hands and put the other pair of sandals into them. These were made of pale yellow glutinous rice straw and looked both pliable and strong...

A year later when our base area was expanded, Nita Village was liberated too. One day when our unit was near the village I and some other comrades who, like me, had been escorted to the base area by Uncle Ni decided to visit the old man. But our political commissar told us that Uncle Ni had long since left the village. Where had he gone we wanted to know? The political commissar smiled. "We are all leading normal lives now, Uncle Ni's still living at 'Hell's Corner'. You'll meet him some day when there is no more 'hell' anywhere in our country."

Illustrated by Chen Yen-ning

Wei Kuo-chen

Between the City and the Countryside

I went recently to a grocery store in a new industrial district in the suburbs, one of those places that kept open day and night, with the intention of writing about the people there and learning from their fine spirit.

It was situated on a wide and straight road stretching to the countryside. Tall poplars planted on both sides of the road gave a feeling of tranquility and ease. The store's cream coloured front and red sign contrasted vividly to the green foliage of the trees.

It was well stocked with goods, and spick and span, its glass windows polished, its floor well swept, its assistants industrious. Though called a grocery store, in addition to fruits, sweets, cigarettes, biscuits and canned goods, it also sold sauces, spices, tools, nails, metal fittings and all sorts of household stuff. It seemed more like a department store than a grocery to me.

I arranged with the management to become a temporary assistant. Before long the other assistants and I were getting on swimmingly. There was one young man in his mid-twenties whom I liked especial-



ly. Tall and slender, and wearing a smart-looking work outfit, he told me about the various commodities, where each item should be put and how much each was priced. In his calm voice I could detect a feeling of pride and love for his job.

Since the store was in an industrial district, it was not very busy during the day, except for a short period early in the morning. But when evening came, workers returning from work dropped in to do their shopping, and there were people milling round all the time. Our young assistant Yang then worked with doubled energy. His enthusiastic service attracted customers like a magnet. With beaming face he dealt with all requests and saw to it that they left satisfied.

One evening when the last rays of the setting sun still lingered on the tips of the poplars outside, an old peasant came into the store. Still a little out of breath, he glanced round the stalls and asked: "Comrade, do you have white paper?"

Since Yang had just gone to the store-room to fetch some goods, I answered for him: "Yes, how many sheets do you want?"

"A hundred," he answered.

I took out a stack of fine, white paper, put it on the counter and started to count out the sheets. The old peasant felt the paper with his rough fingers and asked: "How much for one sheet?"

"Eight cents."

"Hmm. I don't need such good quality. Have you got anything cheaper?"

I searched round but could not find any. "We only have this kind in stock," I told him.

He turned and looked at the stationery shop across the street which had already closed and said reluctantly: "All right then... I'll have a hundred sheets of this."

I suggested he could try again tomorrow, but he said he needed it immediately. I asked him why he was in such a hurry. He told me that his brigade this year had a good crop of spring silkworms, and so had a larger number than usual for breeding. The moths laid their eggs on sheets of paper, but the brigade had not prepared enough. This afternoon the moths were emerging from the cocoons and would commence laying.

I urged him, in that case, to buy the kind I had offered. He did this and went off with the paper. When Yang came back I told him what had happened, and he ran out to find the buyer. After some time they both returned, each carrying a stack of paper and chatting and laughing. Yang had called up the stationery store and managed to get a hundred sheets of cheaper paper, costing only three cents a sheet. I then refunded the money to the old peasant.

After he had left, I said half jokingly to Yang: "Look, you've spoiled this eight dollar's purchase. We'll blame you if we don't reach our quota by the end of the month."

He grinned and answered: "Still, we shouldn't sell him that."

I asked him why.

"We mustn't only think of fulfilling our quota of selling goods," said he as he began cleaning the counter with a piece of cloth. "We should also see that they need to save every single cent in the building up of their commune."

I nodded and said: "You have true class feeling and concern for the labouring masses."

My words of praise apparently reminded him of something. Darting a glance at me, he was silent. After a while, when we had no customers for the time being, he told me the following story. . . .

This was last winter, before the Chinese Lunar New Year, and business was brisk. Yang had just started work as an assistant in the store. An old peasant came to buy a washer. About to take money from his pocket, he noticed that his hand was muddy, and took a dust cloth from the counter and wiped his hand. Yang saw this but was too late to stop him. He was annoyed to see his cloth becoming so dirty, but before he could say anything, the peasant paid his money and left. Yang grumbled to himself: "For a few cents' worth of business, my dust cloth gets filthy. He's really the limit. . . ." Angrily he tossed the cloth into a box on the floor.

A couple of days later, Yang took some goods to the commune to sell. He was wearing a new uniform. When he pushed his cart of goods into the Chen Family Brigade, the brigade leader came to buy some oil. Yang poured the oil into the bottle, but got some of it on his new uniform. The old brigade leader immediately turned

and departed. Yang wanted to wash off the stain with soap and hot water before it dried, but remembered that he was not at home. As he looked regretfully at the spreading oil stain, suddenly the old brigade leader came running back, out of breath, carrying a basin of hot water, a piece of soap and a brand-new towel. Yang accepted these with gratitude, immediately dipped the towel in the hot water and started washing the oil stain from his uniform. A feeling of warmth permeated his whole body. He murmured his thanks.

"Don't mention it," the old brigade leader said. "Your store has been sending goods right to our doorstep for years. You are truly serving the masses well. This is nothing."

Yang looked up at the brigade leader and his heart missed a beat. The man was that old peasant who had bought the washer a few days before! He looked at the new towel in his hand and thought of the dirty dust cloth. How differently he and the old brigade leader had behaved! He flushed with shame.

After he came back to the store, he still thought of this incident. During a study meeting, he mentioned it and made a good self-criticism. Now every time he looked at the dust cloth on the counter, he felt there was some force urging him to work better for the people. He realized it was not enough to wipe the dust from the counter. More important was to clean the dust in one's mind. . . .

After work, I walked back towards my dormitory. The street lamps amid the trees shone with a pale, soft light that made the night more tranquil. The cool night air brought the fragrance of wheat from nearby fields. I strolled along, deep in thought. Yang was a new shop assistant fresh from school. He had worked for less than a year. Yet there was already a great change in his feelings towards the labouring masses. I was interested to learn more about his study and work. Since I knew he would be taking goods to the villages again tomorrow, I decided to go with him.

The night had been clear but in the morning when I opened the window, it was raining hard. I wondered whether Yang would still go. At the store I found the cart outside already laden with goods. Yang was loading and covering them with a big piece of canvas. He was waiting for me to go along.

As our cart left the road and came into the country lanes, the journey became more difficult. I helped Yang push the cart. The rain showed no sign of stopping. After we struggled on for some time, Yang noticed that I was panting hard. He stopped the cart and said: "Let's rest a little while."

I straightened myself and brushed back some wet hair from my forehead. The rain on my face was refreshingly cool. I blinked my eyes, which smarted in the lashing rain, and looked at the villages and fields around. Everything was blurred and indistinct.

I said: "Even in such a downpour you insist on taking goods to the villagers. This is most praise-worthy. I must learn from your example."

Yang wiped the rain from his face and said: "No, you are wrong. You shouldn't learn from my example, but you should learn from those real heroes who are transforming nature."

I followed his gaze and saw on the east side many peasants planting cotton between furrows of wheat, and on the west side I saw many peasants bending and transplanting rice in rain and mud. Patches of green expanded as they advanced.

Yang said with feeling: "The energy and enthusiasm of the poor and lower-middle peasants set a good example for us. Though it is hard to take goods to the countryside in rainy weather, yet it is nothing when compared with their work."

I nodded and said nothing, but I was stirred by his words.

"The shop is here, the shop is here!" Sounds of cheering could be heard as we approached the village. I looked up. Several lively kids, like merry ducklings, were pattering towards us through the mud. After they greeted Yang, they surrounded our cart and helped us push it to the brigade store-room.

The store-room of the Chen Family Brigade was fairly large. It was full of crates and bags of wheat, emitting a fragrance of newly harvested crops. Only one section by the door was vacant. Obviously this was the place cleared for our goods.

Yang went to the office next door and brought in a table and some stools. Though they were very clean, he wiped them carefully with the cloth he brought. Then he displayed on the table the various

goods he had carried in the cart. He did everything so quickly and expertly that I could hardly give him a hand. He seemed as if he had returned home.

After we had got everything ready, the clanging of a bell was heard in the distance. Yang told me that was the rest signal. I leaned by the door to watch. Villagers in the distant fields put down their tools, took up their baskets and returned in lines. Gradually they approached our door. Beaming, Yang hailed them, and business began.

After the "high tide" was over, an old peasant came. I could see at once he was the same old man who had bought the paper for the silkworm eggs. Actually he was also the brigade leader. He looked very sunburnt and in high spirits, obviously just returning from the paddy fields. His trouser legs were rolled up and his feet bare. His legs were brown and glistening. Holding a green earthenware pot, he had come to buy some salt. I passed him the paper bag containing salt and he poured it very carefully into his pot, shook the bag, folded it neatly and returned it to me. He did all this without a word, but I could see from his meticulous handling what was his intention. I remembered the incident of the paper and Yang's words: "They need to save every single cent." That remark now seemed to have a new significance.

Coming out of the store-room, we packed up and returned home. The rain had stopped and the day was clearing. A bright rainbow spanned the horizon beyond the tall chimneys of our industrial district, linking it with thousands of acres of fertile fields, a magnificent bridge linking the city and the countryside.

Illustrated by Lu Chen

Li Hai-chi

Beside a Train Window

The accent of all three seemed the same,
From their smiles I judged them to be sisters.
But on the train journey as they sat chatting by the window,
I learned more about them and from where they came.

Three years before these friends had finished middle-school,
Then returned together to their native countryside.
Although in school they'd studied in the same class,
Back in the commune they'd joined three separate brigades.

Now on this train journey they were together again,
All three boosting the wonders of their commune.
One described the blasting of a rocky mountainside,
And told of clear water flowing in the new canal.

I noticed all their hands were roughened by toil,
To their clothes clung the sweet aroma of the soil;
When each opened her kit-bag to show the others,
I looked too. They were all filled with golden corn.

It came from their experimental farm, I learned,
From fields reclaimed from rock-strewn land,
Such crops have beauty far surpassing that of flowers,
As these girls, all from shock-brigades, well knew.

Through the window as the train raced on, full of pride,
The girls watched ripening crops stretch far and wide.
Where were they going with their corn? Can't you guess?
The provincial capital of course, to the Youth Congress.*



*The provincial congress of the Chinese Communist Youth League.

Liu Chang

In the Stable at Night

The moon is bright, the Dipper rides high,
The tree tops shiver in the cold spring breeze.

The man brings warm water in a wooden bucket,
Still holding the reins he says to his horse,
“Chestnut, young fellow, come drink your fill,
Rest well, then you’ll gain more weight,
Now you’re so strong and sleek and plump,
With your flowing mane and sturdy legs, you look
Like a dragon rising from the ocean waves!
When the trees are draped in their new spring green,
We’ll need your strength on this far-flung fertile plain,
Have you noticed the new fields waiting for the plough?
You must be prepared to make your contribution now!

The fields of our brigade will be our battleground,
In the very front line you’ll be needed for action.”

With tossing mane, Chestnut neighs his consent,
Laughing, the man glances at the Dipper, well content.



Chin Chun-sheng

*Night Patrol in
the Commune Orchard*

The moon is bright, the breeze is cool,
It's late at night and all is still,
When with rifle on shoulder I go on duty,
To patrol and guard our commune orchard.

To the rippling music of a mountain freshet,
I listen with care and bated breath;
The trees rustle, disturbed by the wind,
I step slowly ever watchful and alert.

On each side of the winding hill-path I climb,
Are our fruit-laden peach and pear trees;
I step delicately along the moonlit trail,
Not wanting to awaken the sleeping birds.

So I climb upward ever vigilant,
Not causing a single peach or pear to drop;
I pick my steps with the greatest care,
With straining eyes and ears I watch and listen.

The fragrance of ripening fruit fills the air,
Till at last, dawn comes slowly creeping o'er our orchard.
Standing on a high ridge I see it spread below me,
A proud soldier am I, guarding our motherland.

Whirling Snow Brings in the Spring

The first instalment of excerpts from the novel *Whirling Snow Brings in the Spring* (Part One) appeared in our last issue. Sung Tieh-pao comes to Lake Reflection Hill with a group of workers to get the iron mine there into production. Their task is to drive the 1,500-metre main tunnel. Before his arrival, Ting Chih-chin who has usurped a leading position at provisional headquarters has closed the entrance to the main shaft and allowed another miner Chang Chung to remove the skip hoist at the branch shaft for use elsewhere, thus preventing Sung and his team from going underground to work. Provisional headquarters also transfers half of Sung's men to help install a blast furnace at the nearby steel plant, another handicap to promptly starting work on the main tunnel. But Sung Tieh-pao and his men overcome one obstacle after another, finally construction on the tunnel begins. We print below a second instalment which goes on from here.

— The Editors

1

The night was very still. In the new thatched huts all the workers in Sung's company were asleep. However, in two beds in the company office Sung and Uncle Chin, a visitor from his old village, were

still discussing the achievements of the cultural revolution, the way industry and agriculture were forging ahead, and the transformation of this mountain region. This led to a comparison with the past, and their hearts burned with anger at the recollection of all they had suffered in the old society.

Apropos of this Uncle Chin remarked: "That swine Moneybags Fei has a younger brother working in your mine, so I've heard."

"In our mine! Fei's younger brother?" Sung was staggered.

"Fei Cheh, his name is. Must be the same man. He's said to have worked for the Japanese in the coal mine too."

Fei Cheh was the engineer with grizzled hair whom Ting had been hauling over the coals when Sung first called on him. Sung had got to know Fei later when he went to the research department to consult reference material. The man seemed unassuming and hard-working, always asking for criticism and admitting that having worked so long in the old society he had many backward ideas. Sung's general impression of him had not been bad.

"So Fei Cheh is Moneybags Fei's younger brother. Our mining engineer. . . ." he muttered blankly.

Uncle Chin sat up in bed. "I've also heard that he studied in Japan."

"Who told you that?" asked Sung.

The old man reflected. "I heard it from your sister."

"How long ago was that?"

"When she was working in the landlord's family." The old man sighed. "A fine lass she was, your sister. . . . Folk said a fisherman saved her from drowning that day Fei knocked her into the river, but though I asked around I never did find that particular fisherman. . . ."

Uncle Chin had been nodding with exhaustion. Now he dropped off. Outside, the snow was falling thick and fast. Soon the window-panes were bordered with white and frosted over with fantastic patterns which glittered in the lamplight.

Sung tiptoed over to the other bed. When he saw that the old man was sound asleep he gently laid his padded coat over Uncle Chin's quilt, then put the light out and got back into bed. He could

not close his eyes, however. The knowledge that Fei Cheh the landlord's brother had studied in Japan and worked for the Japanese while his elder sister, whom he had long thought dead, had been rescued by a fisherman drove all thought of sleep from his mind. He recalled the last time he had seen Mei-chen.

When he was seven his father, an underground Party member, had to leave home. Knowing that his family would find it hard to make ends meet, Sung Chang-keng wanted his son to work as a cowherd for his uncle, a landlord; but his mother feared Tieh-pao would be badly treated there. When at last she agreed to it the boy refused to go, not because he was afraid but out of reluctance to leave his sister Mei-chen. Fei's son had been pestering her, and Tieh-pao, small as he was, felt that his presence was some protection for her. Mei-chen assured him that she could cope with the young bully and urged him to go, promising that on his return in three years' time she would tell him how their father had fought against the Japanese aggressors. So Tieh-pao let himself be talked into going. Although his uncle's house was barely seven miles away, not once was he allowed to visit his home. And when the three years were up his miserly uncle forced him to make up for some days lost through illness. Not until April that year did he get away.

On the day of his departure he set off at dawn, walking beside the river. The sun, redder and brighter than usual, scattered the morning mist to reveal the fresh green mountains dotted with flowers. The river was high, flowing fast after heavy rain. Tieh-pao swung his sack off his shoulder and scooped out a handful of rice. He thought: This is fine rice; it'll make good cakes. Replacing the rice and shouldering the sack once more, he bounded along in high spirits. Hadn't Mei-chen promised, after he'd worked for three years, to tell him all about their father's adventures? He had earned only five pounds of rice, but this was enough for his purpose. The evening before he left home Mei-chen had urged him: "Do as I say, Tieh-pao. To save mum worry, go and work for our uncle. When you come back I'll make you some rice-cakes, sweet rice-cakes with sugar. . . ." All these years he'd been longing to see his sister again. Now he was bringing her the rice he had earned to make sweet cakes

which they could enjoy together. Though his dad was probably still away from home, he was looking forward to treating his mother and sister.

Presently he left the road and climbed to a rock halfway up the hill to retrieve a bundle of firewood which he had cut the previous day and left there. As he bent to pick up the firewood, he noticed that his trousers were too short to cover the welts on his legs. Knowing that the sight of these would distress his mother, he loosened his belt to let his trousers down, inwardly cursing his uncle for giving him twelve strokes with a bamboo cane for nothing but a trifle.

Tieh-pao proceeded along the bank to the town. There he exchanged his firewood for four sugar-plums which he pocketed carefully before going on. Soon he could see the bay across the river where an old fisherman was casting a net. Absence makes the heart grow fonder. This seemed to him an ideal spot for fishing and, on this happy day, he wished the old fisherman an extra fine catch. Rounding the next hill would bring him in sight of home. In his excitement he broke into a gallop, which took him in no time to the door of their cottage. And there was his mother, picking some wild herbs.

"Mum!" he shouted. "Mum!"

Not stopping to wipe her hands, his mother hugged her ten-year-old son to her. With tears in her eyes but a smile on her lips, she stroked his rumpled hair.

Tieh-pao pointed at the sack. "I've brought five pounds of rice, mum. Big grains too."

His mother examined the rice then exclaimed angrily: "Son, all landlords are black-hearted fiends. This rice has been soaked in water."

Tieh-pao clenched his small fists. "Can it still be used to make cakes?" he demanded anxiously. Assured that it could he asked with a smile: "Where's sister?"

After a short hesitation his mother said: "She's gone out." And she told him that his father had not yet come back. This did not worry Tieh-pao, who assumed that his dad was busy fighting the enemy.

He then produced the sugar-plums from his pocket and asked his mother to make the cakes and be sure to put the sweets in while he went to fetch Mei-chen. "I suppose she's out picking wild vegetables," he said. "I know where she's likely to be. I won't be long." As he whirled to go, his mother called him back. Her grave face made him ask: "What's wrong, mum?"

"Your sister's working in the landlord's house."

The boy was too shocked to speak.

A few months before this, at New Year, Fei had made his usual round of the village to dun the poor for debts. Sung Chang-keng's father had died four years previously and since they had no money to bury him a kind-hearted neighbour, without a word to them, had borrowed one peck of rice from Moneybags Fei in order to make a coffin. Fei demanded exorbitant interest. In four years they paid him more than two pecks of rice, but he claimed that they still owed two and a half pecks. Taking advantage of Sung Chang-keng's absence from home, Fei determined to get hold of twelve-year-old Mei-chen to be his slave girl. Mrs. Sung refused to sell the girl to him, insisting that he wait till her husband came back.

"You expect him back?" Fei sneered. "You can wait till my beard turns white and he won't come back."

"How can you say such a thing?" she demanded hotly.

"Never mind. That debt has got to be paid today. The only way is to give us the girl as payment."

Hearing this dispute, Mei-chen came out and said: "Don't take on so, mum. I'll go. I'm not afraid."

The neighbours also urged Mrs. Sung to agree because the landlord, all-powerful in the village, was capable of any wickedness. When Sung returned, they said, he could fetch back his daughter. So with the neighbours as witnesses Mrs. Sung agreed not to sell the girl but to let her work for the Fei family until such time as her father should return.

Reassured on this score although still rather bewildered, Tieh-pao urged his mother to make the rice-cakes at once so that he could take some to Mei-chen.

"Don't be in such a hurry, son," said Mrs. Sung. "If you take the cakes now and the landlord sees that we have rice, he'll demand payment again. Better wait till dark, and then I'll go and fetch her."

Although bursting with impatience, Tieh-pao knew that his mother was right. As he cursed the landlord for being such a tyrant, his eye fell on the lotus leaves in a nearby pond. "Go ahead and make the cakes, mum," he cried. "I know how to hide them so that Moneybags Fei won't see them." It had started to rain, but he ran straight out to the pond.

The pond was fairly shallow and not too cold. With the help of a bamboo stick the boy waded out to pick two lotus leaves and hurriedly carried these home.

"You want to wrap up the cakes in these leaves?" asked his mother.

Tieh-pao nodded. "If the landlord's at home, I won't give sister the cakes." He had another plan which he kept to himself: If the coast was clear he would fix a time to hear his sister's stories about their father.

Tieh-pao had rolled up his trouser legs before wading into the pond. As his mother started unrolling them he gave a cry of pain. She asked what was the matter.

"My leg's itching," Tieh-pao lied.

"Nonsense. Show me."

When she saw the welts her eyes filled with tears.

"I scratched myself climbing a tree," the boy insisted. "I shall be more careful next time." But his mother was not taken in. The deep, long welts on his legs could only have been made with a cane.

"Did your uncle often beat you?" she asked indignantly.

Tieh-pao nodded mutely, turning away his head to hide the tears in his eyes.

For a long time neither spoke.

At last his sorely tried mother said: "The day will come when we poor folk get our own back."

"What'll that be like, mum?"

"I don't rightly know. We'll take the land from the landlords, for one thing, so that they can't trample over us any more. They'll have to take orders from us!"

This reminded T'ieh-pao of something. "Those men up in the mountains are fighting for us poor folk, aren't they, mum?" he asked.

"Who told you that? Children mustn't talk about such things."

The boy smiled. "I know what I'm talking about." He lowered his voice. "Is my dad up there in the mountains?"

In a flash she put her hand over his mouth. "No, he isn't," she whispered sternly. "And don't you go telling people that he is."

T'ieh-pao did not believe this. He answered solemnly: "All right. I won't let on. Even if things are hard at home, we should be happy knowing dad's fighting for freedom. Won't you tell me about some of the battles he's fought?"

His answer warmed his mother's heart. But again she warned him: "You must never breathe a word about these things. And in fact your father isn't in the mountains, so it's no use your asking me for stories about him."

T'ieh-pao did not press the point, confident that his sister would tell him what he wanted to know. His mind going off at a tangent, he said: "Guess the first thing I'll do when we get our own back, mum."

"How can I possibly guess, son?"

"I'll give my uncle a good dousing with cold water. How could he soak that rice of mine, the dirty dog? After all, we're relatives, aren't we?"

His mother listened, wide-eyed.

"Then I'll make Moneybags Fei put on a paper hat and parade him through the streets."

"What else?"

"After we've got land and cleared our debt, I'll buy some white sugar to make such good cakes that the landlord's little bastard will turn green with envy."

Now they smelt the fragrance of the rice in the pan. "The rice is ready," said Mrs. Sung cheerfully. "Let's make the cakes."

While doing this she told T'ieh-pao that these cakes should really be made of glutinous rice and fried in oil. Since they didn't have the right ingredients and this rice had been soaked in water, they would have to knead it firmly and bake it instead. As soon as the cakes were

ready, T'ieh-pao picked out the biggest, wrapped it in the lotus leaves and put it inside his coat. Although it was still drizzling outside, the boy was so eager to go and see his sister that Mrs. Sung hadn't the heart to stop him.

The river was racing and gurgling. The sky was overcast, sure sign of a big downpour in the offing. With the warm cake next to his chest, T'ieh-pao thought how happy Mei-chen would be to see him. He sped across the little bridge and round a bend, which brought him in sight of an old elm tree on the bank near the landlord's house. The tree's thick foliage overspread a rock on which he and his sister had often played. One of their games was throwing up seeds and seeing who could catch the most as they came down. Mei-chen had such deft fingers that no other child in the whole village could beat her. And yet she often lost to T'ieh-pao. Only later did he realize that she did this deliberately.

As T'ieh-pao approached the tree, he saw someone sitting on the rock holding a rice-bowl. It looked like his sister. As he quickened his pace she stood up.

Just as he was about to call her name, the landlord darted out from behind the tree. He lashed out viciously with his cane at Mei-chen. Caught unawares, she slipped and fell into the river, which instantly carried her off.

Thunder crashed. The downpour started. T'ieh-pao rushed to the river bank shouting to his sister. But already she was nowhere to be seen: the swift current had borne her away. T'ieh-pao's cake fell into the river and came apart. The rice sank to the bottom while the lotus leaves, with a piece of sweet sticking to them, drifted downstream. . . .

Denying all responsibility, Fei claimed that Mei-chen had struck his son and then jumped into the river. He forced T'ieh-pao to work for him in her place.

Recalling these scenes from the past, Sung clenched his fists. It was very late now and still snowing hard. But this new information about Fei Cheh struck him as so significant that he jumped out of bed and dressed. Quietly laying his quilt on Uncle Chin's bed in place

of his own padded coat, he put this on and went out, making his way through the flurrying snow to find Party Secretary Yao.

2

Kuo Ping-yi and his crew in the tunnel were blasting a passage to the branch shaft. Now they came to a huge fissure. From this gap fell rocks weighing several tons, while pebbles rained down like hailstones. Work had to halt.

Handling fissures of this sort is hazardous. Miners may be killed or maimed by the falling rocks. This is why they call such places "tiger-jaws". Kuo, however, had years of experience. Squatting near the gap, he waited till a big rock fell, blocking the chasm below, and some smaller rocks filled up the crevices; then he signalled to his men to fetch props. His crew knew that after old Yen Lao-hsiang, now in the store-room, Kuo had the greatest skill in handling props.

When they brought the props, Kuo was squatting before the gap surveying it intently. The miners quietly put the timber down, not wanting to disturb him. Like a physician making a diagnosis, Kuo strained his ears to catch all the sounds overhead and analyse their meaning. As he rose to his feet ready for action, Chu Fu-ming came running up.

"Well, Comrade Kuo?" Chu demanded anxiously. "How long will it take to solve this problem? Will twelve big props be enough? If not, we can fetch more from the stores. We mustn't let this hold us up too long."

"Don't worry, Comrade Chu. This isn't serious," Kuo assured him. "Three big props will be enough." Examining the timber brought he said: "But we need a log as well." He indicated the width needed with his hands. "It doesn't have to be too long. Four metres will do."

"That's all right. We have that length. Get your men to fetch it at once," replied Chu readily. Privately he had his doubts whether three props would be enough for such a large gap. He added: "We have plenty more props if you want them. Just take what you need. . . . I'll go and see about that log for you."

Chu went with two workers to the store-room while Kuo set about fixing up the props.

Rocks were falling sporadically. Experienced enough to judge when a fresh fall would start, Kuo made use of the intervals between them to clear the ground. Then he put up two short, thick struts, one on each side, with a piece of timber above them. He did this four times, each time jumping out of danger a split second before more stones fell. It looked as if he was courting death, yet he came through unscratched.

Now the large log arrived. But Chu did not come back, having been detained by some people on urgent business. The log was brought by the two youngsters Li and Lu.

"What are you two doing here?" demanded Kuo.

"We've come to learn," said Young Lu with a smile. "To see how you prop open a tiger's jaw."

Young Li said: "Comrade Sung wants me to tell you that the new skip hoist for the branch shaft has arrived. He hopes, when you have time, you'll go up and see if we can't install it ourselves."

"All right," said Kuo. "As soon as I've finished here I'll go up." He turned to Lu. "There's no mystery about this. . . ." Before the words were out of his mouth, he took a great leap sideways. Crash! Several rocks came hurtling down.

"How on earth did you know, Master Kuo?" demanded Lu. "Just after you jumped clear it started laying eggs."

Kuo chuckled. "The hen always lets me know before she lays."

"How?"

"By clucking."

"You're kidding," they protested.

"No, that's the truth," Kuo insisted. "Before a fall of rocks some small fragments always break off first, loosening the whole rock face. Otherwise it wouldn't cave in. When I hear that noise, I know what to expect. Then I jump clear. There's no mystery about it."

"Why can't we hear it then?" asked Li.

"If you listen carefully you will," said Kuo.

"But just now you were talking with us. How could you hear such a faint sound?" Lu was still sceptical.

"While talking I kept my ears open. Listen! It's starting again."

The two youngsters pricked up their ears. Yes, a muffled rasping could be heard high overhead. Loose stones began to fall.

Lu was impressed. "Seems there's a lot we have to learn."

Smiling, Kuo picked up the big log they had brought and said: "Come here and have a look."

Kuo shone his lamp on the fissure. Above the third frame, just over his head, hung a rock the size of a bed with jagged edges like the fangs of a wolf.

"Will it fall?" asked Lu nervously.

"Most likely it will," said Kuo. "See the cracks all round it? That's what this big log is for. You'd better stand clear."

The two youngsters backed away from the danger zone, apprehensively watching Kuo as he propped the log against the beam of the third frame. This done he shouted: "Beat it! Quick!"

As Li and Lu ducked back the rock crashed down, raising a cloud of dust. The blast knocked the two youngsters over. Flying pebbles smashed their lamps. Blinded by the dust and frantic, they called Kuo's name. His calm answer came clearly through the choking air: "Don't worry. I'm all right."

When the dust subsided a little, they saw that the rock had smashed the beam but the big log had prevented it from landing on Kuo's head. The rock itself had broken into two, one piece falling on each side, leaving Kuo unscathed in the middle crouching under the log. What's more, the two halves of the broken rock had shielded him from the ricocheting pebbles.

Kuo straightened up and let go of the log, remarking: "We don't need this any more." He then replaced the beam and got his men to bring the three big props to lay over the four frames, after which they piled on more timber to make a solid roof.

This finished, Kuo vaulted down from the frame and told his crew to carry on driving the tunnel. Then he turned to Li and Lu. "Come on. Let's go and see the new skip hoist."

Lu asked: "Will no more rocks fall?"

"How can they?" Kuo replied. "Now the gaps are stuffed with timber, the rocks won't work loose."

Li understood and nodded.

They walked up the inclined shaft to the surface, and there met Chu who had just hurried over.

He panted: "Have you enough men for the job?"

"What job?" asked Kuo.

"Propping up the fissure."

"That's already done."

"How many big props did you use?"

"Three."

This took Chu's breath away. He did not believe that the job could be done so quickly, with so few props. However experienced a miner Kuo might be, this seemed too good to be true. In fact, to Chu, it was impossible. He therefore went down to check up on the result and to discover just how the thing had been done. He found the men below hard at work on the tunnel with the roof apparently quite safely propped up. Chu was loud in his praise of Kuo's ingenuity.

3

Late one night Sung was studying Chairman Mao's works by lamp-light. He read: "**How do the counter-revolutionaries carry on their double-dealing tactics? How do they succeed in deceiving us by presenting a false appearance, while secretly doing things we did not foresee? All this is unknown to thousands upon thousands of men of goodwill. For this reason, many counter-revolutionaries have wormed their way into our ranks. Our people are not keen-sighted; they are not good at distinguishing bad people from good ones. We know how to tell the bad from the good when they function in normal conditions, but are not good at seeing through certain people who function in unusual conditions.**"

Sung read this passage intently, then carefully considered its significance. It was already past his usual bed-time but he did not feel like sleeping. He left the hostel to pace the bank of the lake.

From the kitchen emerged a shadowy figure carrying a basket and pail. He knew it was the cook Young Chen taking a meal to Chen

Kuang-yao's crew who were on the night shift in the tunnel. Sung's company had two cooks, but the older one had had some trouble at home and had been called away suddenly. Although other workers sometimes lent him a hand, Young Chen was very busy doing the work of two men.

Sung hailed him and said: "You turn in now, Chen. I'm going down anyway. I'll take them their supper." This, he knew, was the only way to persuade the cook to let him take his place.

Young Chen grinned. "Why are you going down in the middle of the night?"

Sung made up some excuse which the youngster believed. Taking over the food, he said: "Tomorrow I'll find someone to help you out. It's too much for one man, cooking for eighty people in three different shifts. Who do you think would be best?"

"I can cope," Young Chen protested. "The others always pitch in to help with odd jobs; so I'm not really rushed off my feet. It's the tunnelling that's important. We mustn't take anyone away from that."

Impressed by the lad's earnestness, Sung said: "All right. I'll see what can be done."

The snow on the ground was a gleaming white in the moonlight. Only under the trees were there patches of darker grey. A cotton-padded basket of steamed bread in his right hand and a covered pail of pork and scrambled eggs in his left, Sung made his way to the shaft. The winding-room over the branch shaft was a makeshift structure of bamboo, mats and asphalt felt. The snow on its roof had just been cleared away, lest its weight cause the shed to collapse. Sung found two workers there: Old Kao and a ruddy-faced miner known as Darkie. When Sung asked Kao how the new skip hoist was going, it was Darkie who hastened to assure him that this was a fine hoist with an excellent dynamo.

Giving them their food, Sung reminded them to be careful of their brazier, as a spark falling on the matting might easily start a fire. With a nod Old Kao moved the brazier further away from the wall.

Sung then went to the telephone operator's room and asked the man on duty: "Why don't you put more charcoal in your brazier? It's freezing in here."

"This is good enough," replied the old operator. "Before Liberation, in cold weather like this, we used to go down the shaft with nothing but a sack over our shoulders. Now we're working in the office minding the telephone, and the management's given us a brazier too. We should economize on charcoal." He chuckled.

Asked what problems there were, the operator told Sung that they had only one line down to the tunnel and no way of ringing up the main office. In case of emergency, they ought to be able to ring up headquarters direct instead of running to the repair shop in the back to make a call. At night, especially, that would be more convenient. Sung told him that all the shafts had this problem, and steps would be taken to solve it.

After leaving some supper for the operator, Sung met a party of militiamen headed by a cadre from the security section. He greeted this patrol, then stepped into the cage.

More than one hundred metres of tunnel had now been excavated. Chen Kuang-yao was roaring "Whirl fast, my fine drill!" when he heard Young Li call out to Sung. Turning round Chen cried: "Here's Tieh-pao with our supper. Let's knock off to enjoy our midnight meal, then do another 3.2 metres."

After they had eaten and cleared up, Sung went to examine the work face. "The rock looks very damp," he said to Chen. "To the right here some water is seeping through. If we drive straight on, the tunnel may be flooded. Suppose we ring up the office to propose veering a little to the left?"

Chen was puzzled by the seepage of water. "The technician who was here today didn't say anything about underground water ahead," he muttered. "Why should the rock be so damp?"

"Better stop drilling for the time being," said Sung gravely. "Ring up the technicians and ask them to check up on the geological data. We must get the situation clear. The underground formation here is tricky. It's quite on the cards that we may run into water. Better drive the tunnel to the left."

Chen agreed with Sung's analysis. He told his crew to stop work while he put through a call to the office.

Taking the food containers, Sung quickly returned to the surface. The telephone operator was talking over the phone to Chen as he left.

The road back to their quarters ran past the foot of a hill. When Sung reached the bend he turned and looked back. A furtive figure was approaching the shaft. What business could he have so late at night? And down in the tunnel, it seemed, they were close to underground water. His suspicions aroused, Sung halted to see where the man was going. When he saw him heading straight towards the branch shaft, he started back himself.

Before he reached the pit-head, he heard scuffling in the gully just ahead. Racing over there, he found Darkie on the ground struggling with a man who was kneeling on top of him. Sung dropped his basket and dashed to the rescue. Between them, he and Darkie overpowered the other man. At this juncture, smoke and flames belched out of the winding-room. The pit-head was on fire!

"I've sprained my ankle," panted Darkie. "Leave him to me. You go and put out the fire." Since Darkie's assailant had been trussed up, Sung dashed without a word to the winding-room.

When he reached the branch shaft, Sung heard the phone ringing on and on, unanswered. Where was the operator? Sung had no time to take the call himself. He must first put out the fire. If the winding-room burnt down, especially if the big dynamo was damaged, there would be no way of operating the skip hoist, the men underground would be cut off, and work on the tunnel would have to stop.

In the winding-room flames were already licking the roof. The matting walls were on fire. Old Kao who had switched off the dynamo could be heard coughing, choked by the acrid fumes of burning asphalt. He had managed to cover the valuable machine with a large sheet of iron to protect it in case the roof fell. Now he was staggering, on the verge of collapse. As Sung sprang to his side the old worker gasped: "Quick . . . save the dynamo . . ." Then he slumped to the ground.



Sung carried Old Kao outside and having laid him down in the fresh air dashed back to the winding-room. He grabbed a dustpan, scooped up sand from a tank and scattered it round the dynamo in the hope of preventing the fire from spreading there. Every second the smoke grew denser, the fumes more acrid. His lungs seemed bursting, his head was in a whirl. Leaping over planks which had caught fire, he spread the sand as fast as ever he could. Above the howling of the wind outside the telephone still shrilled insistently. The bamboo on the roof was crackling like gunfire. Fragments of flaming asphalt felt and matting kept fluttering down on Sung's cap and coat. But not stopping to brush them off, with a stupendous effort he picked up the tank and staggered with it towards the dynamo. As he emptied what was left of the sand on the ground, his legs buckled under him. Crouching there he went on shovelling sand with the dustpan.

By now the fire could be seen some distance away. Men who had not yet turned in started hurrying to the branch shaft. Others roused from their beds rushed there too. They leaped across ditches and jumped down hillsides, advancing fearlessly, forgetful of themselves, like soldiers in combat against the enemy. Party Secretary Yao Yu-chuan always stayed up late. He was strolling outside headquarters when he heard the news and his first thought was: Sabotage! But why set fire to the winding-room? Was this tied up with conditions underground? He immediately sounded the alarm and told the head of the security section to post men to watch for suspicious characters. Then he set off at a run to the branch shaft.

In the winding-room Sung had reached the end of his tether. As he pushed a pan of sand forward he collapsed. There was still a gap in the sand round the dynamo. He must fill that in at all costs. Panting hard, he thrust forward again. Crack! A massive bamboo beam in the burning roof snapped, dangling over the gap which Sung was trying to fill. It would certainly fall on him if he moved forward; but unless he took action the dynamo would catch fire. Clenching his teeth, Sung inched towards the blazing bamboo.

The bamboo crackled, lurching lower and lower. Glaring up at the flames just over his head he swore: "All right. Come down. D'you take me for a coward? Workers armed with Marxism-Leninism-Mao Tsetung Thought aren't afraid of fire." Again he strained forward. Having no strength left in his hands to push, he shoved the sand with his shoulder. Great beads of sweat from his temples dripped on the sand.

As Sung completed the rampart of sand the bamboo crashed down, knocking him unconscious. Searing pain in his hands which flames were licking revived him. He saw that although the bamboo was still burning beside him, it had not touched the dynamo. However, part of the rampart of sand was broken and three wires leading through that gap were alight.

"Can I make it?" Sung wondered. "I must." If he could get close enough to roll over the flames, that would keep the fire at bay until reinforcements arrived. By now smoke and flames hid the wires from his sight. He could only strain forward blindly. As his groping hands found the wires and he heaved himself over them, the telephone rang urgently again. What had happened in the tunnel? Why did no one answer the phone? At last Sung heard footsteps approaching. But before he could call out he fainted away.

It was Old Kao whom Sung had carried outside, who had tottered back after regaining consciousness. He found Sung lying in the flames and smoke. Then Yao Yu-chuan rushed into the burning building. As he carried Sung out, others ran up to fight the fire.

4

The conference at the ministry was over. The iron mine's army representative Yuan Chien did not return immediately to his post because the authorities had given him two mysteries to unravel. Yuan now had before him two letters: one written recently by Ting Chih-chin to a man in the ministry who had years ago led the work in the guerrillas' mountain base; the other an old charred letter from which the addressee's name had disappeared, signed with a Japanese

name: Kaimizu. Yuan Chien had been asked to study both these letters and report his views on them to the ministry before carrying out more detailed investigations.

Yuan first read Ting Chih-chin's letter several times. It contained serious allegations against Yao Yu-chuan. First Ting expressed his doubts about Yao's past. He said that the sudden arrest in 1944 of Sung Chang-keng, leader of the underground Party at the coal mine, meant that some renegade must have betrayed Sung to the enemy. There were only two other Party members there: Ting, who had received the news in time to lie low in a relative's house for a fortnight before going to the mountain base; and Yao who had remained in the coal mine. Furthermore, after the mine's destruction by our guerrillas, Yao had been told to take the miners to the base, but instead he took them to work in another coal mine. This made Ting suspect Yao of having had connections with the Japanese.

The second charge was that during the construction of the iron mine Yao had carried out an adventurist line and displayed sectarian tendencies. While driving the tunnel it was fairly certain that they would run into underground water, and the bed of the lake might cave in too. Unless precautionary measures were taken in time, all the effort and money expended in the last ten years might be wasted and that would be an irreparable loss.

According to Ting, Yao stood so well with the provincial bureau that if he urged the provincial authorities to investigate him they would be reluctant to do so and Ting might find himself in trouble instead. This was why, in the interest of the Party and the revolution, he was writing this letter to his former chief. And since he himself was involved in what had happened at the coal mine, he was willing to stand investigation too.

The other letter, which had no envelope and lacked the addressee's name, had been sent in by another organization. Only a couple of lines were left. These read:

...Sung went as arranged to... (The rest of this sentence had been burnt out) ... could not be found. Come back immediately. This business is urgent.

Kaimizu

The letter head still bore the word "Colliery". Unfortunately the name of the colliery was missing. This charred paper was pasted on another sheet, at the bottom of which was an explanatory note:

I got this letter from my foster-father who was using it to light his pipe. I was only twelve at that time (1944). I kept the letter, thinking it might have some bearing on my father's death. So now I am handing it in to the authorities.

Sung Mei-chen
4 March 1952

With this was an accompanying note:

We have made inquiries at the site of the former coal mine and from the local people's government. The old colliery was destroyed and the miners who worked there can no longer be traced. There are no files to refer to. We questioned some of the old villagers there, but none knew the circumstances of Sung Chang-keng's arrest. We talked to Comrade Sung Mei-chen too, but she was unable to supply any other material shedding light on this problem. We can only file this letter for the time being.

There followed the signatures of the people responsible for the investigation.

Yuan Chien made a careful study of these two letters. From what he knew of Yao, he found it hard to believe him a renegade. Ting, on the other hand, was a dark horse. He often talked in an ultra-Left way, yet his actions belied his words. However, Yuan knew the complexity of class struggle. He must get to the bottom of this business by acting according to principle, not jumping to conclusions before he had unearthed all the facts of the case. In particular he must guard against letting his favourable opinion of Yao make him subjective, or he might be misled by appearances.

After thinking things over Yuan jotted down his conclusions:

1. The situation is highly complicated. If Ting is making groundless accusations, he must feel that his own history stands scrutiny. In this case, very careful investigations will have to be made before we can get at the truth.

2. I must go and see Sung Chang-keng's daughter Mei-chen and find out exactly when and how she came by this letter, who her foster-

father was, why she felt that this letter might shed light on her father's death etc. The people conducting the previous inquiry may have acquired this information. But I shall ask her again.

3. Why did Ting write this letter at this particular time? According to him, he was afraid before that the business could not be cleared up; but now, having been through the cultural revolution, he is willing to stick his neck out by giving this information. This sounds fairly plausible. But it may not be the truth. It may be because Yao's transfer to the iron mine has sharpened the struggle there, forcing Ting's hand. This may be what lies behind his allegations.

4. If there is some plot afoot in the iron mine, hidden enemies may be working through certain local cadres. Ting says in his letter that the tunnelling is bound to be complicated by underground water, yet the geological material only refers to this as a possibility. Does Ting possess more scientific data, or is there going to be sabotage?

After making his report to the ministry, Yuan Chien left Peking. He lost no time in taking these notes of his to the Party secretary of the Metallurgical Bureau in his province.

After hearing Yuan's report, the bureau Party secretary told him that the provincial Party committee had made a thorough investigation of Yao before appointing him vice Party secretary. He himself had been in charge of the investigation. The points raised by Ting in his letter had already been checked, and Yao was in the clear. It was true that Sung's arrest had been very sudden, but Yao himself had only escaped thanks to Kuo's promptitude in warning him not to leave the pit, where he had been hidden by the miners until the Party instructed him to leave. It was also true that Yao had been told to take some miners to the guerrilla base; but when they reached the river they found the way blocked by the Japanese and therefore had to go to another mine, where he managed eventually to re-establish contact with the Party. Then Yao was sent elsewhere on Party work and had to leave his old mates Kuo and Chen. All this had been carefully checked. When the ex-guerrilla in the ministry received

Ting's letter and went into the matter, his evidence corroborated the results of the investigation and Yao's innocence was confirmed. Of course Ting could not know this; hence the confident tone of his letter. The Party secretary's advice to Yuan Chien was to make a thorough investigation of Ting.

After offering Yuan some tea, the Party secretary explained to him that when they appointed the iron mine's new management they had not at first intended to include Ting. It was Yao who had suggested including him so as not to arouse his suspicion. It was Yao too who had proposed transferring Sung Tieh-pao there. Not only was Sung's company needed as a task force; they also wanted to see how Ting would react to the old miners who had been at the Pingshan Colliery. And certain significant facts had already been noticed. One was Ting's posting Yen Lao-hsiang to the store-room for dynamite, where he would not come into contact with many people. This might be because Old Yen knew so much about the former colliery, including Ting's doings there.

The Party secretary went on to tell Yuan: "After I reported to the ministry about Yao and Ting, they agreed with the action we took. They made inquiries through the army and soon found out the whereabouts of Sung Mei-chen since her demobilization. She and her husband were assigned in May this year to the Toleng Lake Steel Mill. I agree that you should go and find out what you can from her before we plan our next move. We must also enlist the help of the security bureau. They've made a detailed study of the set-up in the mountains and analysed clues to enemy activities. They have done a good deal of work there. We should also analyse the situation with Comrade Yao, as he is the one with first-hand knowledge of it. It's essential, of course, to keep open minds and be prepared for surprises. If our investigations disprove our theories, we must make other plans."

Finally the Party secretary urged Yuan Chien to remain in the bureau for the time being to investigate Ting's case. The Metallurgical Bureau would notify the mine of the decisions of the conference.

So as soon as Yuan's preparations were completed he went with an assistant to the steel mill to see Sung T'ieh-pao's long-lost sister Mei-chen, now vice Party secretary of the furnace workshop.

For twenty-seven years Mei-chen had been trying unsuccessfully to find her brother. She remembered clearly how when she was nine and T'ieh-pao seven, he had gone to herd cows for their landlord uncle and not come home for three years. When he was nearly due back, she had gathered some walnuts and caltrops to give him a treat. She remembered promising before he left home to make him sweet rice-cakes, but they had no rice, much less sugar. The walnuts and caltrops would be a substitute, she was sure T'ieh-pao would understand. But just then Moneybags Fei had seized her as a slave girl to work off her family's debt. Although only twelve she had worked hard for the landlord, cooking, washing and cleaning for a dozen people, as well as grinding flour and feeding the pigs. She toiled till late at night and was up every day before dawn. Her own trials made her think of T'ieh-pao, two years younger than she, working for their landlord uncle. Could he stand all the hardships? She worried about her brother and longed for his return. The day that T'ieh-pao came home, a poor woman with a child in her arms came to the landlord's house to beg for food. Hearing the hungry child's cries, Fei stormed out with a stick to drive them away. Mei-chen took her own meal and slipped out of the back gate to catch up with the woman and give it to her. But her kind act was spotted by the landlord's son, who immediately told his father. Fei rushed out in fury and found Mei-chen with her rice bowl under the elm. He struck her so hard that she fell into the river. The current carried her to the bay downstream where Fu-keng, an old fisherman, rescued her and took her home in his boat. When Mei-chen came to she wanted to go home but Old Fu-keng dissuaded her, for fear of what the landlord might do to her. A few days later he went alone by boat to relieve her family's anxiety. He came back with bad news: the landlord had taken T'ieh-pao to work in her place, but while herding cattle in the mountains the boy had disappeared — people thought he had been carried off by a tiger. Then Fei had burnt down their cottage and her mother had fled. So Mei-chen stayed on with the

old fisherman as his foster-daughter. Later she received more bad news: her father Sung Chang-keng had been seized by the Japanese at the coal mine and murdered.

The year before Liberation the old fisherman died. Then Mei-chen and some other young villagers joined the guerrilla forces, and subsequently she went south with the People's Liberation Army. She had written to the local government for news of her mother and brother; but although inquiries were made they produced no results. Finally she traced her mother to a commune in another province, but there was still no word of T'ieh-pao. She heard from the local government that Fei had been executed for his crimes and his son had died of illness. Little did she dream that T'ieh-pao was now a cadre in the new iron mine and a branch Party secretary too.

It was evening when Yuan Chien went to the steel mill. After all he had heard about Sung Chang-keng from Yao and others, he was very moved by the sight of the staunch miner's daughter. In an army uniform, tall, in her mid-thirties, she had the poise of a cadre with long experience of political work. Withholding his news of her brother for the moment, Yuan told her he had come to make inquiries about the letter she had sent more than ten years ago to the authorities.

Mei-chen sipped some tea as she thought back, then embarked on her account of the circumstances.

"It was in the autumn of 1944," she said. "One evening just before supper I went to the river to meet my foster-father. It was too dark to see anything on the water, but as his boat approached I judged from the sound that it was heavier than usual. I thought he must have brought back a big catch. When he reached the shore, I saw that he had with him a man in a long gown and hat. In the country only landlords dressed like that. I was afraid Fei had sent someone to take me back." She smiled reminiscently.

"Was it before the Moon Festival or after?" put in Yuan.

"A few days after the festival. I know that because my foster-father had given me some lotus root to stop me from feeling homesick, and I kept it for several days."

"The man with Old Fu-keng, was he tall or short?"

"I can't say. Because I was small, to me all grown-ups seemed tall."

Yuan asked her to go on and she continued: "After that man stepped ashore he produced a handful of money to pay for his fare, but my foster-father took only fifty cents. Then we went home while the stranger went on his way. A little later, though, we heard the dog barking. The man had come back. He said it was too dark to go on and asked us to put him up for the night. My foster-father told him our place was too small and urged him to go on to the next town; but he was so insistent that finally we agreed to let him sleep in our kitchen on some straw."

"Did he have supper with you?"

"Yes, he did. He didn't fancy the fish I cooked and couldn't stomach our unpolished rice; so I gave him that piece of lotus root I had kept. He offered to pay for it, but my foster-father wouldn't take any money."

Yuan nodded and urged her to tell him every detail.

"After supper the stranger went to sleep on the straw. The next morning when I got up, he had gone. My foster-father said he left at the crack of dawn. As I picked up some straw to light the fire, I found a charred piece of paper. We thought the stranger had dropped it by mistake and my foster-father hurried off to return it, but couldn't find the man. We put it aside for a time, but he never came back for it. So one day my foster-father took it to light his pipe. By the time I got it from him, another piece had been burnt."

"What made you save the letter?"

"I thought the stranger might still come back for it."

"And you kept it for so many years?"

"I was so fond of my foster-father that after his death I hung on to all his things, including this paper. After I joined the army I learned to read, and when I came home to clear things up I found the letter again. I was struck by the date on it, which coincided with the time of my father's death. Thinking it might have some bearing on his case, I handed it in to the authorities."

"Did you notice which way that man went?"

"No."

Questioned about the man's age, accent and appearance, Mei-chen could supply no additional information. Nor did she know where he had boarded the boat.

As they drank tea, Yuan thought over what she had told him. That man had crossed the river on about the twentieth of the eighth lunar month in 1944. The old fisherman did not know him. Apparently he had money to throw about, was not used to the food of poor fisher-folk and afraid of travelling in the dark or of showing himself in town. He had either been too preoccupied to notice the loss of his letter or else dared not return to ask for it.

Then Yuan turned to Mei-chen with another question. "Your brother's name is Tieh-pao, isn't it?"

"How did you know that, comrade? Is there any news of him?"

"He's very near here. At the new iron mine."

Mei-chen nearly dropped her cup. "How is he?" she demanded breathlessly.

Yuan laughed. "Doing very well. He's a cadre in our headquarters, leader of a crack company and its Party secretary."

Tears of joy welled up in Mei-chen's eyes and her mind flashed back to the past. She saw again the bitter days of their childhood, her head-strong young brother who hated injustice. . . . His childish voice rang again in her ears. She wanted to spring up and fly straight to her brother. But remembering her position and Yuan's business with her, she asked: "When would it be convenient for me to go to your iron mine?"

"I understand how you feel, comrade," he answered. "But just wait a few more days. Then we'll send a car to fetch you or bring Tieh-pao here." Mei-chen nodded her agreement.

Finally Yuan asked after Mrs. Sung. Mei-chen told him that when transferred to the steel plant she had left her mother and her small child at home. It was now very late. As Yuan said good night he urged her not to let excitement keep her awake. At this, Mei-chen simply smiled.

The ambulance arrived quickly on the scene. Sung and Old Kao were rushed to hospital while the miners swiftly put out the fire and repaired the damage in the winding-room to get the cage working again. As Yao was directing the men, the telephone operator raced over to report a fresh disaster. Underground water had burst through the wall of the tunnel!

Yao ran to the operator's room and rang down to the tunnel. Fifteen minutes ticked away; still no one answered the phone. Yao realized that all the men below must be busy fighting the flood. That meant that the situation was very serious. He urged Chu to speed up the repair work so that they could go down the shaft. Chu, equally anxious, was setting off at a run when Yao added: "Get Ting to install pumps here right away."

That same moment a lorry screeched to a halt and Ting Chih-chin jumped off it. As soon as he heard of the flood he had rounded up some men to bring several tons of pumping equipment over.

Finally someone down below answered the phone. It was Young Li.

"How bad is the flooding?" asked Yao.

"Pretty grim," the youngster panted. "Old Yu San-kuei was swept off his feet. We're trying hard to stop the hole." Before Yao could put any more questions he heard Chen's booming voice mustering the men. Young Li cried: "We're mounting another assault, Comrade Yao. We'll report back presently." Then he left the phone.

The fire in the winding-room had been extinguished. The men not engaged in repair work gathered anxiously round the telephone or at the mouth of the shaft. Yao, holding the receiver, explained the situation down below.

Over the line came the sound of rushing water, then a sudden crash. Above the roar, louder now, they heard Chen's hoarse bass: "Keep clear, Young Lu!"

Lu, his voice trembling with emotion, protested: "You're bleeding, Master Chen. Let me have a go."

"Out of my way!" Chen barked.

The boom of water diminished sufficiently for them to hear the clang of hammers. Crash! More rocks fell. Anxious voices called Chen's name. There was no answer, only a thunderous crescendo of rushing water. Then Yao listening with bated breath heard Chen's hoarse voice: "Old Yao . . . I can't stop the water. . . . I've fallen down on my job. . . ."

With tears in his eyes Yao called back: "You're doing fine. We're all learning from your spirit. Together we'll lick the flood."

Then Huang Ssu-yuan, a stalwart old miner, reported that Chen was faint from exhaustion and injuries. He asked for orders.

"Make Old Chen rest," said Yao. "Keep calm. Move the important equipment to a higher level."

Presently above the hammering, whistle blasts and sound of men splashing through the water, they again heard Young Li's voice, this time much steadier. He asked whether Yao had any further instructions, for the water was rising so fast that in another ten minutes the line would be flooded. He was standing chest-deep in the water now.

Yao asked him: "Any casualties? How is Chen? What valuable equipment still has to be moved?"

Li replied that Chen and Young Lu were the only men injured, and that not too seriously. All that remained to be salvaged was one loading machine.

"Leave the loading machine in the tunnel," ordered Yao. "It's too heavy to lug up the ladder. Your whole crew must move up to the inclined shaft 160 metres below sea-level."

"Right. The whole crew is to move up to the inclined shaft," Li repeated. "Old Chen wants you to tell all the comrades this on behalf of the twelve of us here: as soon as the cage is operating again, we'll join you in the fight to control the flood."

Yao now sought out the telephone operator to ask just when the fire had started and the underground water had burst through the rock. He learned that after Sung's return to the surface Chen had told the operator to notify headquarters of the seepage of water and ask permission to veer to the left. The operator had gone to the winding-room and got Darkie to keep an eye on the phone while he went to the repair shop to ring up the office. The technician on

duty informed him that according to their data there was no water ahead and Chen had no right to change the plan. When the operator returned to his post, the winding-room was in flames and Darkie had gone. The telephone was ringing frantically. As he picked it up to pass on the technician's message, Chen bellowed to him that the tunnel was being flooded and he must notify Yao immediately. He rushed back to the repair shop; but before he got through to headquarters Yao arrived. He concluded indignantly:

"There's been dirty work here."

Yao made no comment but sent some of Sung's men to search for Darkie and look out for suspicious footprints in the snow.

What had happened in the tunnel?

When Sung ran to the winding-room to put out the fire, Chen was waiting below by the phone for a reply from the office. Yu San-kuei, Young Li, Young Lu and some other men kept on drilling, while the rest of the crew stood by. Suddenly Yu's drill started jerking. As he tightened his grip on it a jet of water hurled him over backwards to land several metres away. The tremendous force behind this jet tore loose stones from the opposite wall ten metres distant. As Yu was struggling to his feet, Huang Ssu-yuan pushed him down to avoid the jet of water. In more than twenty years of mining Huang had never seen anything comparable to this. Hauling Yu out of danger, he yelled to Young Li to report this at once to Chen.

Chen immediately left the phone and ran back to the work face. He saw at a glance that the trouble was serious. The hole Yu had drilled in the right corner of the work face must be stopped at once before it became any larger. If they succeeded in blocking it, they could drive to the left and carry on with the job. But tremendous strength, grit and courage would be needed to stem that rush of water. Chen mustered his crew and told them what was at stake. To a man they pledged their readiness to fight and give their lives if need be for the revolution. Chen announced that he and Huang would mount the first attack; the rest could follow in turn, all but Young Li and Young Lu who were new to the job. The youngsters, though

eager to join in, did not argue. Instead they rounded up the necessary tools and materials. In a few minutes all was ready.

Chen and Huang, ducking low to avoid the jet of water, carried a beam bound with hempen cord up to the hole. Chen took his stand to its right, with two men behind him. Huang and two others lined up on the left. Two other miners stood near by with hammers, ready to hammer the beam as soon as it was rammed in.

The water was spurting out with a roar like thunder. Gripping the beam as hard as he could, Chen raised it to within two inches of the jet of water. Huang's powerful hands fastened around it too. They did not let the rest join in as too many hands would make it difficult to insert the beam accurately. The other four were to help hold the beam once Chen and Huang had plugged it in the hole.

"One, two, three!" Chen lunged forward. The rushing water pushed the beam away, splattering the rocks and men with the force of bullets. However, they persisted and finally got the beam into the hole. The four others helped to hold it, while sledge-hammers pounded it hard. But the next moment a fresh jet of water tore the beam from their hands and set them staggering. The hammer which one of the miners was swinging shot out of his hands, crashing on a steel plate.

The hole had grown larger. The column of water was increasing in force. Chen and his men analysed the reasons for their failure and prepared to make a second attempt. Only then did they feel their skin smarting where the water had lashed it as if with a whip.

"We'd already got the beam in. It wouldn't have come out unless we relaxed our grip," Huang pointed out.

"It was my fault," Chen acknowledged. "I was taking another breath when the water suddenly wrenched it out of my hands."

Huang nodded. "That's the problem. We have to breathe. What can we do about it?"

"The force behind the jet is fantastic," said Yu. "If we had a more powerful pump to counteract it, we could stop the hole more easily."

"That's useless talk," Huang retorted. "We've no such pump in our mine. Even if we had, there's no cage to bring it down."

Chen decided they must report at once to headquarters. Leaving Huang in charge of the discussion, he went to ring up. This was when the operator got his message.

Young Lu made a proposal which met with approval. This was to fasten a rope to the beam, so that while Chen and Huang held it five men on either side could pull on the rope. The man posted by the phone could wield the hammer. They also decided to prop up some timber to give the men pulling the rope better leverage, and to wrap less cord round the tip of the beam to facilitate its insertion.

Yu suggested: "This time let's rope ourselves to the pole so that we can't let go."

When Yao rang up from the surface, they were launching their second attack. Braving the great spout of water, Chen and Huang thrust the tip of the beam into the hole; the men propped against the timber behind them pulled the rope taut; and the telephone operator hammered. After ten minutes of this the leak was stopped. The man with the hammer gave a few final blows after which they unroped themselves, able to breathe more freely. But then came another crash. A fresh jet of water carrying splinters of rock hurled the beam out again — broken in two. So the second attempt had failed.

The cisterns had long since filled up and the water in the tunnel was up to their knees. The hole had grown even larger, the din of the spouting water even more deafening. Chen sent Young Lu to the phone to report to Yao.

Chen now made a supreme effort for the third charge. Taking off his jacket and tossing it into the water, he called his men together for a briefing. Then he advanced with the beam assisted by Yu who had taken the place of Old Huang, now worn out. They had strengthened the rope with thick wire and the men pulled with all their might, their shouts reverberating through the tunnel. But hard as the hammer struck, the beam kept being thrust back. As Chen made a desperate effort to insert it, the spike suddenly broke off and slashed his ear. Blood trickled down his chin. Wiping it with one hand he seized hold of another beam and, glaring fiercely, made ready to charge

again. Young Lu dashed forward to take his place, but waving him aside Chen charged with a roar. The hole was plugged and the beam hammered in.

Chen lurched back, panting, with his men to sit on a rock already immersed in water. But the torrent burst out again, discharging the beam together with rocks and debris. Caught by the jet Chen fell, knocking down Young Lu behind him. The youngster gashed his hand on a sharp rock.

The flood was out of control now and the men were completely exhausted. Chen staggered to the phone with a heavy heart to report to Yao that he had failed in his task. When he came over faint, Huang took the phone.

Then with tremendous energy these twelve men salvaged their dynamo. First they dismantled it, lugged it to the ladder and roped it securely; then carrying their drills they climbed the ladder, leaving only Chen down below. When he gave the order, his crew started to pull. They had got the dynamo half-way up when their strength ran out and they could haul it no further. Chen, climbing the ladder, took some of its weight on his shoulder. So between them, sweating and straining, they got it up at last to the inclined shaft. If Yao had not ordered them to leave the loading machine, they would have tried to salvage that as well. When they safely reached the higher level, Huang used the speaking tube there to report the position to Yao.

By the time Yao brought a rescue party down, the water had reached the bottom of the inclined shaft. It was steadily rising. In another half hour this shaft too would be under water. Chen was feverish and half delirious after his exertions and long immersion in water. As his men took off his wet clothes and put on him some of their drier things, he muttered: "Stop it. We must stop it . . . must save the mine. . . ." Yao wrapped his own padded coat round Chen, whom they carried to the cage. It was clear now that to stop the flood they must first dismantle the cage and fix up a pump to drain the shaft and tunnel. Only then could they go down.

As Yao was directing this work, the man who had gone to look for Darkie returned. He reported that Darkie had been trussed up

and half buried in the snow in a nearby gully. Kuo had discovered him first. Now Darkie had been taken to hospital.

"And where is Kuo now?" Yao asked.

The man replied that Kuo had gone in search of the scoundrels who had set on Darkie.

In fact, as soon as Kuo discovered that Darkie was missing he followed the footprints in the snow to the gully, where he found his mate half buried in a snow-drift. He had been beaten up, then bound and gagged. Darkie told him that when the telephone operator went to the repair shop to ring up headquarters, he himself had gone to the operator's office. While he was there a man slipped in and filched a small dynamo. When Darkie tried to stop him, this fellow took to his heels and ran to the gully. There he whirled round suddenly and knocked Darkie down. The two of them were fighting when Sung arrived on the scene, and between them Sung and he caught the thief. Then Sung dashed off to put out the fire in the winding-room, leaving Darkie to keep an eye on their prisoner. But another man overpowered him from behind. As the two scoundrels were gagging him the alarm sounded. They hastily buried him in the snow with the small dynamo and hurried away. From the remarks they exchanged while tying him up it was obvious that they had lured him away so that they could set fire to the winding-room.

By now three other men had followed Kuo to the gully. Hearing that the two ruffians were wearing boots and dressed like miners, Kuo told two men to take Darkie to hospital and the third to report the situation to Yao, while he himself searched for the two saboteurs. Warned of possible danger, he said: "They must have got well away. But I want to find out in which direction they went."

He tracked the two men's footprints to the highway where they were lost in the heavily trampled slush. By hunting around he found the prints again, but presently they vanished. He noticed that the snow here lay unusually thick on the ground, and when he brushed the top layer away he found the footprints beneath. He trailed them until they disappeared once more on a frozen path leading up to Chinyun Mountain. It looked as if the saboteurs came from the moun-

tain. Whether they had accomplices in the mine or not still remained to be seen.

Kuo was turning back when he was hailed by Old Han and Sun Teh-chang, who offered to accompany him up the mountain. The two of them with Chang Chung and a security officer had been discussing how to strengthen the militia when they heard that the winding-room was in flames. Leaving others to fight the fire they set off in search of suspicious characters; and having learned that Kuo had found some footprints they hurried after him; for Kuo did not know the way up the mountain too well, and the crafty enemy might double back to throw pursuers off the scent. So Chang Chung and the security officer had cycled to the end of the path leading down to the highway, sending Han and Sun to find Kuo and continue up the mountain.

"The swine have had a long start," said Kuo. "Think we can overtake them?"

"It's hard to go fast on the mountain," answered Sun. "We may still catch them."

When they had climbed a little way Han pointed at a bush. "Look, there's the path back to the road."

Kuo examined the ground carefully. There were no footprints. But when they reached the path itself they found one set of the same prints.

Han commented: "This fellow is foxy. He's been covering up his tracks."

Kuo said: "Only one set of footprints here. Quite likely one of them comes from Chinyun Mountain."

"You two follow this path while I go and get some local people to search for the other fellow," Sun suggested.

"Right. We mustn't let the bastards get away," agreed Han.

As Han and Kuo were trailing the footprints, Chang Chung and the security officer reached the other end of the path and hid themselves behind two big trees to keep watch. Soon, sure enough, a man wearing miner's boots came down the path. After looking furtively round, he continued towards the road.

The security officer stepped out and challenged him. The man gave a guilty start then glanced quickly around, truculently demanding to know why he had been stopped.

"You know all right," retorted the officer.

Seeing that the place was deserted the man cut and ran, then wheeled round to aim a kick at the officer. As the latter dodged the man raced for the road. But Chang Chung was ready for him. "Tricky, eh?" he swore. Slipping off his padded jacket he leapt on to the highway. One foot on a stone, his left hand on his hip, he calmly eyed the scoundrel who pulled up abruptly.

"Come on, you bastard," growled Chang. "What are you waiting for?"

As the man stooped to pull a dagger from his boot, the security officer jumped on him from behind. . . .

Meanwhile a pump was being installed over the branch shaft where Chu and some workers had lowered themselves by ropes to fix the pipes. Since this job was going smoothly, Yao left them to it and stood near by in the moonlight thinking things over. It seemed the enemy was extremely wily. Could they force his hand and make him panic? That wouldn't be easy. The enemy was acting under cover while they were in the open. The sabotage had clearly been carefully planned. Even so, some incriminating evidence must have been left. It should not be hard to find the two men who had attacked Darkie, especially as the security officer had already enlisted the help of the local armed forces. Still, so far the enemy had shown himself adept at keeping his activities secret and turning the situation to his own advantage. Yao decided that he must rely on the masses. If he rallied the workers to discuss the problem, they would surely arrive at the truth and ferret out the hidden adversary.

For some time Yao had had his suspicions about Ting Chih-chin and, in particular, Ting's underground activities at the coal mine under Japanese occupation. Yao, working in the pit, had little personal contact with him then. Sung Chang-keng had acted as their liaison man. But he remembered Sung telling him that he had urged the local Party leadership to transfer one of their members elsewhere

because the enemy had become a little suspicious of him. That Party member, Yao later learned, was Ting. Sung's sudden arrest had taken Yao by surprise. And Ting had left the mine immediately after it. After Liberation they worked in different places, but he knew from some old comrades that Ting had not gone straight from the mine to the guerrilla base. When eventually he reached the base he had some wounds, yet he refused to go to the clinic for treatment. Since Ting had not taken part in any battle nor been injured in any accident during work, how had he come by those wounds? And why refuse medical treatment? Yao found this suspicious. However, after Ting's transfer to the iron mine Yao had acted according to principle, maintaining his vigilance but not jumping to hasty conclusions. He had therefore never mentioned his suspicions to anyone but the Party secretary of the Metallurgical Bureau. One had to take a responsible attitude when a man's whole political future was at stake. Sung Tieh-pao's report about happenings at the mine and certain other things which Yao had discovered convinced him that the complications here were in some way connected with Ting. Now the flood in the tunnel and the fire in the winding-room gave him further food for thought. They must rely fully on the masses, he thought, and have discussions of the problems while memories were still fresh so that all the facts would be known and the enemy fully exposed.

At this point he heard someone calling: "Is that Old Yao?"

Yao turned and saw Ting approaching. He answered: "Yes. What is it, Old Ting?"

Ting handed him some sheets of paper. "Here's a list of names from various companies to deal with the flood."

Yao scanned the list briefly. "Are so many needed?" he asked.

"Well, we can withdraw Sung's company," said Ting. "Most of his men are injured or done in. They need to rest and regroup. Besides, both the flood and the fire happened in their work area. If we assign a key position to them, the masses may think. . . ." He left the sentence unfinished but his meaning was clear enough.

"Just as we suspected!" thought Yao. "You're so puffed up with your own cleverness that you've overshot the mark. While the

miners are worrying about the flood, you're fishing in troubled waters, trying to smear good comrades and put the blame for the accidents on Sung. How ludicrous! This only shows your hatred for Sung and the rest of us. Well, don't gloat too soon. The first round isn't over yet. Just you wait. All your dirty tricks are going to be exposed in the bright light of day."

Yao did not let his anger appear on his face. After a thoughtful pause he said to Ting: "I don't think that's a good idea. Although both accidents happened in Sung's work area, the root of the trouble may lie somewhere else. After all, his men worked like heroes to fight the flood and the fire. Even if there's an enemy agent among them, that doesn't warrant us suspecting them all. So how can we withdraw them? I don't think other companies will complain if we leave them to drain the tunnel. Though Sung is in hospital and Chen is laid up, they still have veteran miners like Kuo and Huang. Besides, you're here to help them: that makes a big difference. I'm not in favour of withdrawing this company."

Since this was unanswerable, Ting regretted having spoken too hastily. This reflected badly on him and might have aroused Yao's suspicion. He must tread carefully. However, he took comfort from the knowledge that this underground water came from a source which could never be drained dry. So what could Yao do? Let Sung take on the job: he was bound to fail. And when the ministry heard of the fiasco they would believe Ting's charges. Then the whole situation in the mine would change. Yao would be out on a limb.

Disassembling what was in his mind he said: "Old Yao, your analysis is correct. That's the way to handle things. Even if there's some counter-revolutionary in Sung's company, we can mobilize the masses to keep watch. I'll go and discuss it now with the various companies and we'll form a smaller but more effective task force." He gave a foxy smile. Meeting Yao's shrewd eyes he reminded himself: "This man is tough. I must look out or he may do me down."

Yao was asking himself: "Why is this fellow smiling? Does he think we can't lick the flood? Well, he's mistaken. The more tricks he tries, the quicker he'll show his true colours."

The moon had disappeared behind the clouds, a high wind was lashing the trees; but the winter plum was blooming in the bitter cold. Yao looked at his watch: nearly five. Turning eastward he took a deep breath and continued his stroll. He thought: "Let the winter wind rampage all night; it can't delay the dawn. Soon the red sun will be shining over these mountains."

6

Two bulldozers and two bucket dredges sent by the Toleng Lake Steel Mill were roaring non-stop by the river. In perfect co-ordination, they were rapidly carving out a new river-bed. Local peasants were pitching in too, some digging with picks and shovels, but most of them carrying crates of earth to dam the river. Peasants and workers were working shoulder to shoulder to bring the flood under control so that the miners could complete the tunnel and get the iron mine into production by spring.

How had this come about? How was the new river-bed connected with the iron mine?

Since Sung Tieh-pao's arrival at the mine, his dealings with the research department had led him to doubt the reliability of their surveying work. He had also heard from Old Han that the technicians often handed out inaccurate information. The geological strata through which the main tunnel was being driven were complicated. They must be on the alert for sabotage. On the basis of his long experience of mining what Sung feared was not difficulties but ignorance of the true situation, for that made it possible to be fooled by the enemy. The technicians had said they might run into underground pools, not into underground streams. To check up on this, Sung went to the local commune to consult some old peasants. Uncle Chin took him to see an elderly hunter who told him that more than fifty years ago a serious drought had pretty well dried up Toleng Lake, yet there had still been water in the river. From this Sung inferred that the river might well be the source of the underground pools mentioned. He reported this to Yao.

Yao had given much thought to the problems in this mine before his appointment as its Party secretary. He was certain that there were enemies in the place seizing every chance to sabotage construction. What more likely than that they would utilize the complex geological conditions to make trouble? He had therefore asked the Metallurgical Bureau to give him the original survey data and to get a research institute to ascertain whether the lake bed was porous and whether the underground water near the tunnel could have come from some underground stream. Once reliable answers to these questions were received, if the enemy played any tricks they would only expose themselves. And now Yao had received quite definite answers: the lake bed was non-porous; there was no underground stream near the mine; there might, however, be some underground water which had flowed down from above. The research department in the mine had reported that the lake bed was non-porous but had given no specific information regarding an underground stream or the possibility of water flowing in from some other source.

Yao had reported the institute's answers as well as Sung's information from the commune to the Party committee of the Metallurgical Bureau and to the Party nucleus in the mine, but had not made this known to all those at headquarters.

Sung Tieh-pao, recuperating in hospital, heard about the flooding and was worried. If the water flooding the branch shaft came from outside, they must find its source and block it. This was a tall order, especially in winter when the river was frozen over and the water below icy cold. But he made up his mind to find the source of the flood. Too impatient to wait any longer, he left the hospital one afternoon and went to the brigade to consult Uncle Chin, who immediately tried to dissuade him.

"Don't worry about me, uncle," said Sung. "I feel fine."

"No," insisted the old man. "You're not fit to go. Wait till I've discussed this with Chen and Kuo tomorrow."

"Just get me a boat to take a look at the river," pleaded Sung. "This business is burning me up. I was counting on you, uncle. Don't let me down."

"The river's frozen; how can you row a boat? Wait a few days, and I'll take you out with Kuo and Chen."

"I've seen the ice," Sung countered. "It's not thick. Let me break the ice at the prow with a pole while you row. I just can't wait. Our company can tunnel thirty to forty metres a day. We can't afford to hold up the work."

"All right," agreed Uncle Chin reluctantly. "Wait here while I go and get things ready."

A long time passed before the old man came back and the two of them boarded the boat. Sung broke the ice in front while Uncle Chin rowed. Soon they reached a stretch of the river called Crane's Beak, where Sung announced that the ice was considerably thinner.

"It's deep here and the current's fast: that's why," explained Uncle Chin.

Sung scanned the river carefully. Soon, there was no ice ahead, only a fine ripple in the water. To determine the speed of the current, he broke up some ice some distance from the place and gave it a shove with his pole; but the motion of the boat and the sluggishness of the river made it hard to estimate the undercurrent. When he thrust his right hand into the stream, it at once became too numb to detect any movement of water.

Looking up, Sung saw the distant lights of the mine where his comrades were hard at work draining the branch shaft. He seemed to hear them urging each other on to ensure the completion of the project by spring. The water was being pumped out into Lake Toleng, but apparently more water was pouring incessantly into the tunnel, perhaps through a gap immediately under his boat. Unless this gap was closed, all his comrades' efforts would be in vain. Sung could hardly wait to trace the source of the underground water.

Springing to his feet he turned to beg Uncle Chin: "I want to ask your permission for something, uncle."

"What's all this politeness? Permission for what?"

"To dive down here."

"What!" Uncle Chin was aghast. "Dive into such icy water? No, I can't let you."

"At the branch shaft our comrades are working in the water."

"But you're only just out of hospital."

"That doesn't matter. I just want to find out if there's a whirlpool below. I can judge that by the suction, without straining myself."

"But if there's a whirlpool, man, you'll be dragged down."

"I shall rope myself so that you can haul me up."

Uncle Chin would not have it. He put down his oar and got up to restrain Sung. But Sung had already slipped off his padded jacket and knotted a rope round his waist. Tossing the other end of the rope to Old Chin, he dived overboard. Sung was a powerful swimmer. But as he dived down an agonizing pain shot through his injured left arm, and his head and chest seemed to be bursting. All of a sudden he was thrown off balance as the water seized him and spun him round and round, at the same time sucking him down. Uncle Chin, however, tugged with all his might on the rope and finally succeeded in hauling him up, unconscious.

When Sung came to his ears were aching and buzzing, his head was splitting. Vaguely aware that someone was chafing his numbed limbs and changing his clothes, he opened his eyes with an effort to see Kuo and Chen standing beside Uncle Chin. The boat by which they had come was moored alongside.

Rubbing his chin, Chen boomed: "All right, Tieh-pao?"

"I'm fine," Sung answered. "Only a little dizzy." He told them that the vortex which had sucked him down was almost certainly the source of the water flooding the mine. He only wished he had stayed below long enough to pin-point the place.



"I'll go and find out," Chen volunteered, promptly unbuckling his belt.

"Hold on a second!" Kuo grabbed his arm. "Wait till Tieh-pao's explained the situation in detail."

They urged Sung to have a good rest while they dived down.

"What brought you here?" Sung asked. "Did you hit on the same idea?"

Chen explained that Uncle Chin had rung them up, whereupon they had set out at once and borrowed a boat from the brigade. Then Sung realized what had kept the old man so long.

When Chu received the news by phone that the source of the underground water had been found, he called all those concerned, including some brigade cadres, to Crane's Beak for a meeting. They decided to dig a new channel to deflect the river here, then stop the hole leading to the tunnel. The next morning the Toleng Lake

Steel Mill sent over bulldozers and dredges and the work started. By evening the new river-bed was ready and most of the machines were driven away, leaving only one bulldozer to shift the excavated earth to the bank, ready to dam the river there the next day. Then the peasants and workers dispersed, leaving Sung, Old Han and a brigade leader to draw up a detailed plan of work for the next day.

As the moon rose high in the sky the last bulldozer, its task finished, rumbled away. Workers returning to the mine were still climbing the winding mountain road. Two men walked slowly behind: Ting Chih-chin and Fei Cheh.

When the others were out of earshot Ting rounded on the engineer. "Damn you!" he swore. "You assured me there was an underground stream — what's become of it now? You've nearly spoilt the whole show."

"Geological surveys can only be fifty per cent accurate," Fei Cheh retorted. "Scientific analyses take different forms. Don't just harp on my mistake over the underground stream. Remember that I was absolutely correct in my calculation of where they'd meet underground water."

"What's the use of that now?"

Fei ignored this, hotly resenting Ting's arrogance. How dared he give himself such airs when the two of them were alone? "You'd better cool down," he said grimly. "Any answer yet to your letter to the ministry? It may boomerang back at you, you know. Watch out."

"Watch out?" snapped Ting. "What for? The tunnel's already flooded, isn't it? Unless you turn informer, they won't get anything from me. Don't worry."

"When you're caught, it'll be too late."

Ting considered Fei's attitude preposterous. He thought: "You sent a bungler to start the fire and he got nabbed by Chang Chung. This is a real headache. But you didn't report it to me at once, and you're griping at me instead. If I don't pay you back, you'll think I'm under your thumb."

He drawled: "My dear engineer, the fellows you use seem quite useless. I hope you can manage better than that yourself."

Fei snorted, but quickly got himself under control. "Let's not waste time bickering," he replied. "You'd better take those people seriously. Yao, Sung and Sun are dangerous, and so are their friends. Then there's the army representative Yuan Chien. What's he up to now? What keeps him away so long?"

Ting was silent.

Fei continued: "Yao's known for some time that this river is the source of the flood in the mine, but he didn't let us know. Why? One of our men was caught by Chang Chung, but again they didn't tell us. You only learned of it accidentally because you're on good terms with Chang and he happened to let it out. Quite obviously, they're not only watching us but watching people who are close to us. . . ." He sighed. Their long-laid schemes were being frustrated. All might yet be lost.

"Have you any news?" Ting asked.

"Yes, I have. But you'd better take some tranquillizers before you hear it."

"Blast you. . . . What is it?"

"Listen. They've discovered the other man I sent on that job, but they haven't arrested him."

"Did he go to them and own up?" Ting sounded worried.

"No, they haven't touched him, I tell you."

"Why not?"

"Evidently they want to give him rope to lead them to the rest of us," Fei answered shrewdly.

"What shall we do then?" Ting was consternated.

Fei eyed him contemptuously. "Watch it! Don't lose your head."

"But . . . this is frightful. What if he looks up his contacts?"

"You don't have to worry about that. He's an old hand at this game."

"But how many of you are there? Why not put me in the picture?"

"There's no need for you to know. It would do you no good."

"Well, what shall we do? Just wait for them to arrest us?"

Ting took some tablets from his pocket and swallowed them.

"You panic far too easily. They'll find it hard to get any dirt on us. If we keep quiet they won't catch us."

"What if they find out?" Ting insisted.

Fei bit his lip, then burst out fiercely: "In that case we'll drag them to hell with us!" He gave an involuntary shudder.

Brakes screeched and a horn honked loudly. They turned and saw the bulldozer just behind them. The irate girl in the driver's seat yelled: "What's the idea? Are you deaf? Want to go to hell?"

Fei and Ting stepped silently to the side of the road. They had been too engrossed in talk to hear the bulldozer coming. The girl, with a final glare at them, drove on.

The draining of the branch shaft was proceeding successfully. But one day during a power cut the water rose again, sweeping away the suction pipe of the large pump. Young Li and Young Lu at once volunteered to retrieve it. Chu hesitated to authorize this, since the water was still several metres deep and this was no easy job for inexperienced youngsters.

"Old Sun and I can help them," offered Chang Chung.

The two youngsters' faces brightened. And Chu, looking from Chang to Sun, agreed gladly to the proposal.

When the water was finally drained, Sung led a crew down to continue driving the tunnel. Chen chased after them with his drill and asked to join in. Sung pointed out that this was not his shift. "You must make an exception," declared Chen, rubbing his chin. "Tomorrow's New Year, 1969. Let's set a new record together to celebrate." Then and there he started bawling his song: "Whirl fast, my fine drill. . . ."

Not wanting to dampen his enthusiasm, Sung had to agree. A new year was coming and Yao would soon be back. A new stage had also been reached in the struggle at the iron mine.

Illustrated by Chen Yu-hsien

Afterword

Part One of *Whirling Snow Brings in the Spring* ends here with the damming of the river and bringing the flood in the mine under control. How does the story unfold in Part Two? What happens to the chief characters? With these questions in mind we called on the author whose answer we print below:

I started this novel in December 1971, and finished Part One in July the following year. I am still working on Part Two. Before writing the novel I had worked for some time at an iron mine in eastern China.

If you want me to go into the story of Part Two I must first tell you about the theme for the whole novel. The chief thread running through the story is the driving of the iron mine's main underground tunnel, around which unfolds a fierce contest between the people and the enemy. Two sub-plots deal with the mystery of the arrest of the hero Sung Tieh-pao's father by the Japanese more than twenty years previously in a nearby colliery; and with the sabotage and trouble in the iron mine after the death of its leading cadre Shih Kai. The main theme links up the class struggle with the fight to get the iron mine into operation, reflecting the situation in the mine from various angles; while the sub-plots bring out the sharpening of the conflicts, showing that the present struggle is a continuation of those in the past and disclosing its protracted, complex nature.

The clash between the people and the hidden enemy is manifested mainly through the conflicts between Sung Tieh-pao and Ting Chih-chin. As these develop, the struggle becomes clearer and clearer. When Sung first takes his men to the iron mine and makes investigations to solve the problems holding up their work, there seem on the surface no sharp contradictions between him and Ting; but the incidents at this time shed light on subsequent developments. Then we see Sung and Ting clash indirectly as Sung tries to unite with Chang

Chung who is prejudiced against him, as he foils Ting's attempts at sabotage during the fire in the winding-room and the flooding of the mine. Though there is no head-on confrontation as yet between Sung and Ting, the ground for this is laid. The conflict between these two men comes into the open in Part Two of this novel.

The driving of the main tunnel is held up by the fire and flood in Part One. In Part Two, further trouble occurs when there is a caving-in due to geological fault. When this happens all the forces are mobilized and a fierce struggle ensues. Sung faces up to this difficulty fearlessly; with Chang Chung, Kuo and others he investigates the fault and triumphs over this major obstacle, while Ting who attempts to sabotage by trying to take advantage of the caving-in is shown up.

The collapse of the fault brings Part Two to a climax. This is preceded by minor incidents revolving around the conflict between Sung and Ting. Through these incidents Chang Chung finally comes to understand the truth. Some other characters introduced in Part One also become more politically conscious and unite with Sung and his men. Sung is re-united after long last with his mother and sister, who help to clear up certain mysteries dating from more than twenty years ago.

When flowers blossom in spring, Sung and Chang move on together to responsible posts in a new construction project in Chinyun Mountain, and with this the whole story ends.

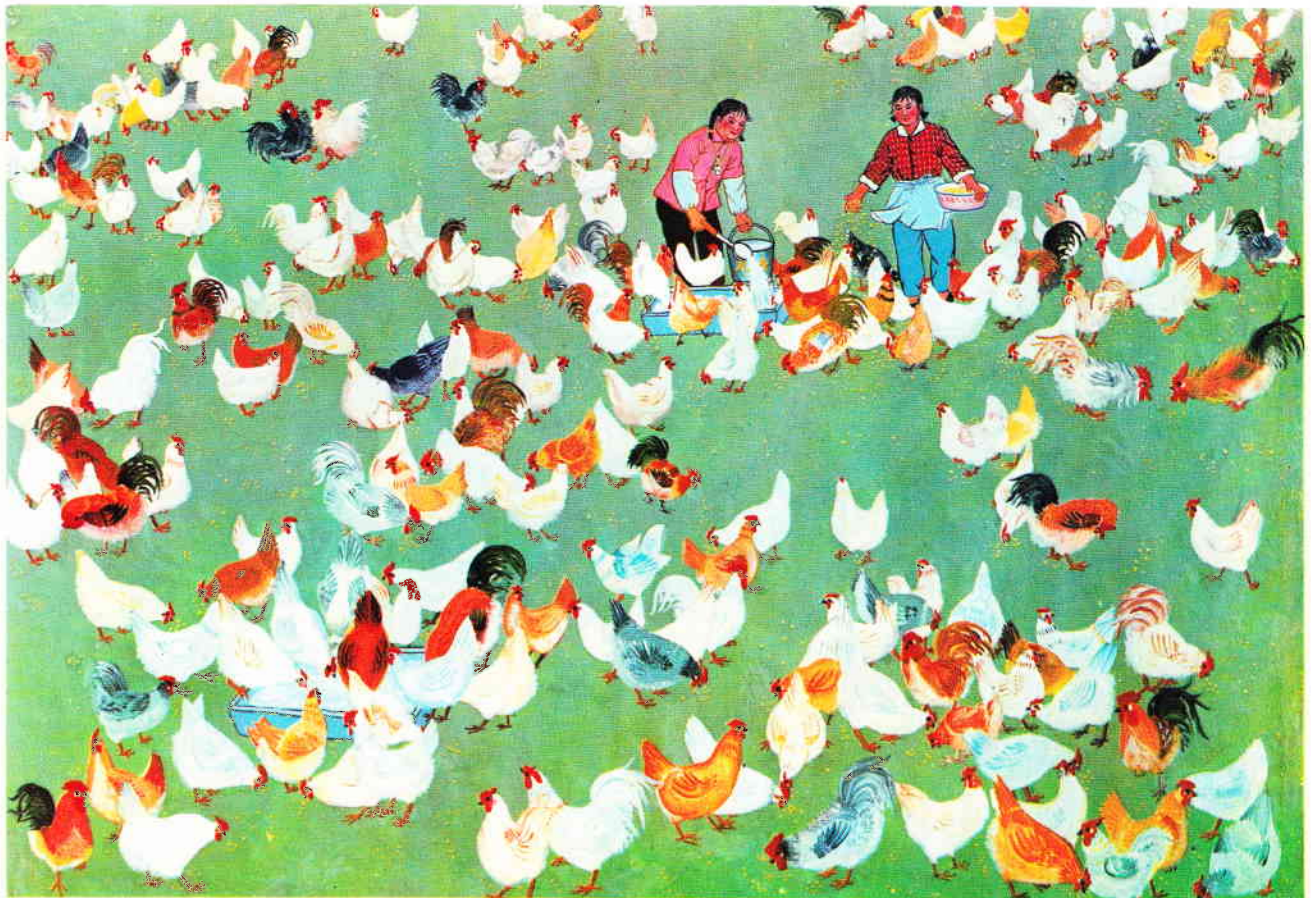


The Old Party Secretary by Liu Chih-teh



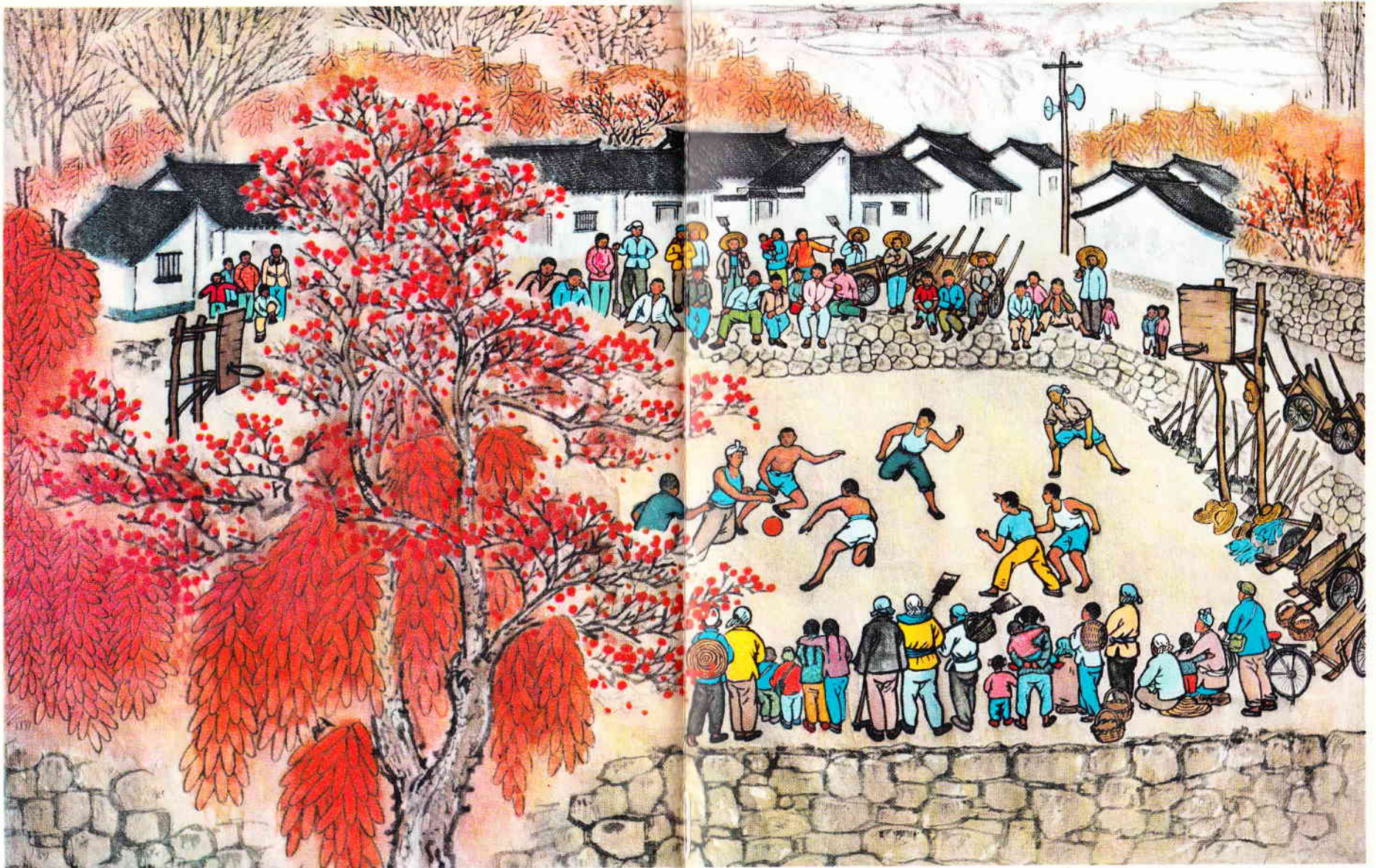
Spring Hoeing

by Li Feng-lan



The Brigade's Chicken Farm

by Ma Ya-li



A Basketball Match by Pai Tien-hsueh



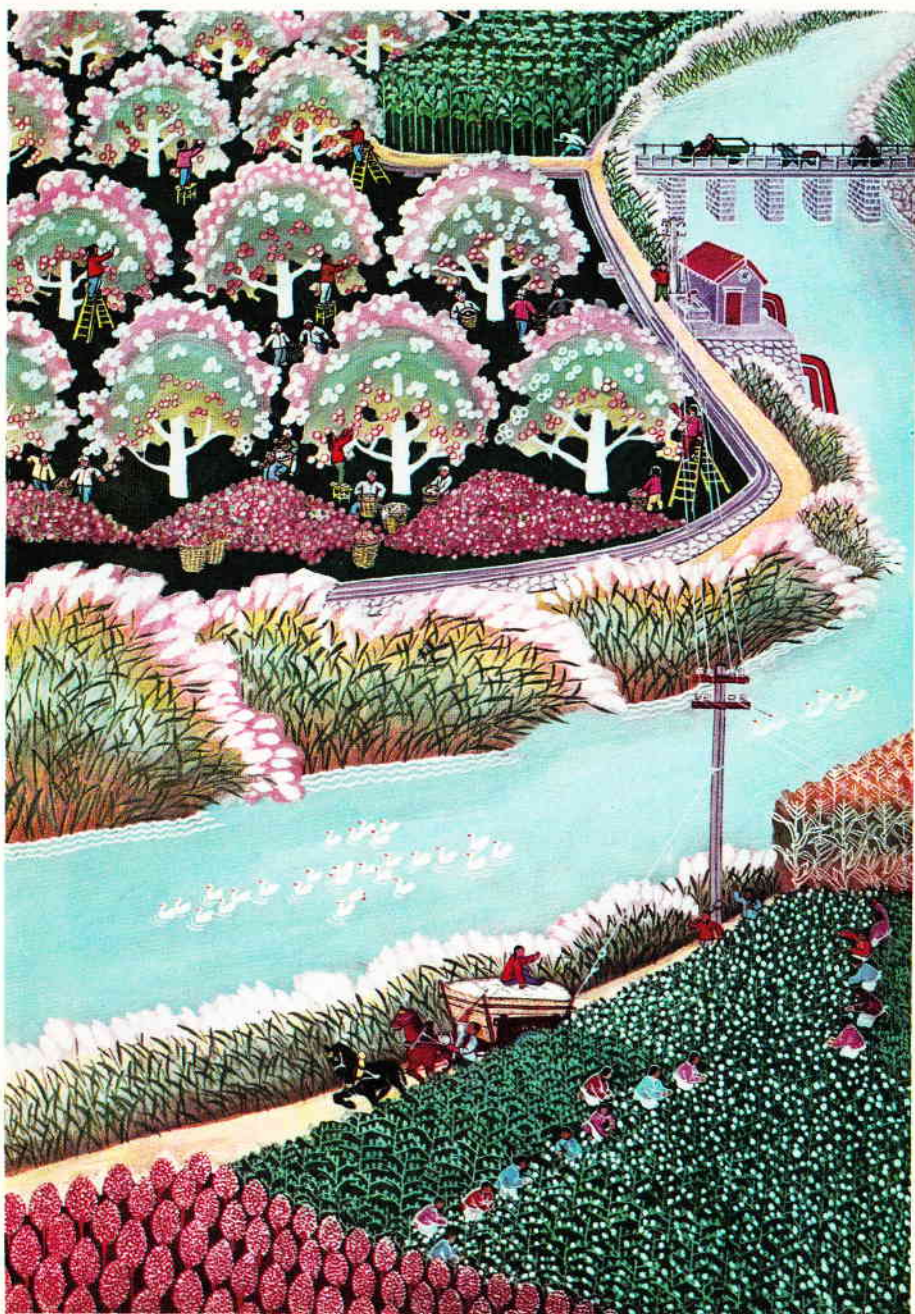
Target Practice

by Chang Chun-hsia



Diligence and Thrift

by Chang Lin



On the Banks of the Laoho River

by Cheng Min-sheng

Hsiang Ming

Two Poems

Pearl Fishing

When out to sea we sail to harvest pearls
Gay pennants flutter in the morning mist.
As each wave rolls on, so do my thoughts,
Recalling the lives of us pearl-fishers in the past.

When my grandad dived for the precious pearls
Among the jagged rocks and shoals,
From the silent depths the killer-sharks would glide;
Daily he faced the perils of the sea and sudden death.

But the ladies of the court demanded gems;
Their officials were far fiercer than the tiger-sharks.
So, with only a hempen rope and basket,
He dived into the seas of bitterness,
Baskets full of sorrow he hauled up from the deep,
Full to the brim with human anguish.

When my dad went pearl fishing
He was lashed by knife-sharp winds,
While mountainous waves reared their foaming heads.
Life was still full of bitterness,
For Chiang Kai-shek's gang and local bandits
Demanded rents and taxes exorbitantly high.
So, with only a torn net and an oar
He drifted all day on the stormy seas.
And when his sweat-laden net he'd filled
All he hauled up was tears.

Now when we go pearl fishing,
We choose days bright and clear.
Sea-gulls swoop around our boat
While we sail along our sun-lit way.
Wind and waves provide our battle drums
The rosy sky o'erhead gives its blessing.
With loyal hearts and fiery zeal
We tame the waters as we dive.
Down we go with joy and laughter
To haul up loads of happiness.

Laden with riches to the harbour we race,
The siren announcing our good harvest.
Why are you following our boat, bright moon?
Do you wish to be a gleaming, lustrous pearl
Giving your splendour to serve the people too?



Pearl Farming

Why are pearls so rare and precious?
Many legends give some sort of answer.
Some say they are distilled from sunlight and moonglow,
Others, that they are the tears of forsaken mermaids.

Why are pearls so fair and lustrous?
Many poets have mulled over this riddle.
Some comparing them to the rare red sea-coral,
Others, to the rainbow's radiance in a misty sky.

But we workers at a pearl farm know the real answer,
For we know the truth that only practice gives.
And although we're workers, not writers or poets,
Our hearts are full of fire and passion.

In the spring, when sunrise gilds the waters,
In glass tanks we place our precious mollusks,
And watch them grow through sun-lit hours
Hoping the pearls will glow with the light of a spring dawn.

In summer when the rainbow arches the horizon
We prepare an ideal sea-farm for our oysters,
Transferring them to grow in warm, clear sea-water,
Hoping the pearls will shine with the iridescence of a rainbow.

In autumn when moonlight sheds its lustre on the translucent sea
We wade through the water to guard our precious shells,

Lest they be molested by crabs or other fierce sea-scavengers,
Hoping the pearls will gleam as does the unclouded moon.

When winter skies with glittering stars are studded,
We brave the biting wind to guard our harvest,
And see the mollusks do not perish in the bitter cold,
Hoping the pearls will reflect the incandescence of the stars.

Why are pearls so rare and precious?
With care and watchfulness we've solved the riddle.
Why are pearls so fair and lustrous?
Our year of loving labour has given us the true answer.



Hsin Wen

Painting for the Revolution

— *Peasant Paintings from Huhsien*

In October this year an exhibition of 179 paintings by peasants of Huhsien County in Shensi Province was shown in the Peking Art Gallery. In previous years, too, such paintings have been included in national fine art exhibitions. But this was the first one specifically devoted to them. Their distinctive style won the acclaim of art lovers in Peking.

Huhsien County is one of the province's advanced areas in socialist agricultural production and construction. Its peasants have gathered good harvests for years and along with this, rapidly developed artistic activities. The story began in 1958 in a period of vigorous economic and cultural growth. It was then that the peasants of Huhsien took up their brushes to occupy cultural and ideological positions in the countryside for the proletariat. In these circumstances, the county Party committee initiated an art class for peasants working on an irrigation construction site. Teachers from the county's Hall of Culture and the Shensi Academy of Fine Arts

were asked to help them create murals and artistic inscriptions. Inspired by the heroic spirit and stirring deeds of their fellow workers in building socialism, the learners began to do paintings as well. Since these portrayed themes and figures familiar to the peasants, they proved very popular with the masses, though artistically these paintings still lacked polish.

For some 15 years now the Huhsien peasants have kept this spare-time activity going and, particularly since the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution began, developed it to a marked extent. In recent years they have shown their works countless times, in village streets and lanes, beside the fields and on construction sites. The exhibits depicted village and family histories, gave education in the class struggle, showed the campaign in the countryside to emulate the Tachai brigade (the red banner in agricultural production for all China) and the exploits of labour heroes. They served to educate the peasant masses and also to train a new contingent of artists, mostly rank-and-file commune members and the rest production brigade cadres, bare-foot doctors, teachers and young intellectuals returning to the villages after finishing school. All these peasants, who now number more than five hundred, are both skilled in farming and active in spare-time art creation.

Under the guidance of Chairman Mao's revolutionary line on art and the leadership of the Party organizations at various levels, the Huhsien artists have produced over forty thousand works in the last 15 years, including murals, New-Year pictures, serial pictures, woodcuts, scissor-cuts and traditional-style Chinese paintings. In accomplishing this, they have adhered to the principle of artistic activity in spare time only, doing small-scale pieces in a variety of styles and economizing on materials. Their creations have played a positive role in the three great revolutionary movements — class struggle, struggle for production and scientific experiment.

Everyone who saw the Huhsien peasant paintings is attracted by their rich and varied content and their warm and sharply defined images. The peasants' brushes evoke for us many scenes of ardent labour — in opening up mountains, building dams, drilling wells, digging canals and tunnels, deepening river-beds, collecting manure,

planting, ploughing, hoeing and harvesting. And the themes include many aspects of rural life: going to the fields, delivering grain to the state, fish breeding, sheep herding, poultry raising, political and cultural studying, youngsters at ball games, doctors visiting the sick, militia training and others. All vividly reflect the abounding vitality, revolutionary spirit and ideals of China's poor and lower-middle peasants.

Many of these peasant paintings have achieved fair success in integrating ideological content and artistic form. Some not only clearly portray the appearance of persons, but also convey their feelings and emotions, uniting vividness with harmony. Take Liu Chih-teh's *The Old Party Secretary*, a portrait of a typical character. During a break in field work, the old Party secretary plunges deep into his reading of *Anti-Dubring*. His unlit pipe and the forgotten match box held in one hand show the deep interest of this cadre at the grass-root level in the study of Marxist theory. Capturing a fleeting moment from the life of the typical character, the artist delineates his figure with strokes that are terse yet brings out fully both the Party secretary's diligent joining with commune members in labour and the political awareness which prompts him to make use of every free moment for study. Liu Chih-teh is acquainted with the life and thinking of many Party secretaries and has spent endless hours sketching from their life; this is the reason he could produce such a picture.

In *Diligence and Thrift* by Chang Lin, two stockmen, one old and the other young, both of them simple and frank, are sitting mending a broken muzzle, with their herd of oxen in the background. The thought conveyed is that, even though their production team is now doing well, the old stockman remains meticulously thrifty with regard to collective property. He is shown teaching the young man how to mend the muzzle, an emphasis on the need for such frugality, and this sterling quality of his is brought out through carefully painted detail. Other paintings dealing with labour succeed in conveying the working people's hard struggle with nature and their revolutionary optimism through scenes with dozens, or sometimes as many as a hundred figures, different in pose, action and attire against backgrounds of lofty mountains, wide fields or turbulent waters. And these too

are rich in vitality, warmth and intensity, giving a good picture of the working people's cheerful, hard-working spirit.

The Huhsien paintings display characteristics entirely their own in their use of colour: lavish, bright and strong, with warm and fluid brushwork. Take Li Feng-lan's *Spring Hoeing*. Most painters use green to represent the spring. But she boldly employs a combination of highly contrasting colours in her own distinctive style. In this painting, more than a dozen women, differing in mood and expression, are shown hoeing — meticulously, deftly and cheerfully. Rows of emerald green wheat stretch into the distance, taking up the centre of the canvas. Peach blossoms in full bloom provide a contrast of colour. Swallows circle low. All these elements combine into a vivid scene of spring, youth and verve, which the bright, colourful clothing of the women echoes. This painting is the fruit of the artist's year-round participation in collective labour. Not only does Li Feng-lan have a full understanding of the thought and feelings of her comrades, but she herself is full of love for the new socialist countryside and confident of its bright future. Her deep feelings for the things around her is the reason she could produce such a painting.

In composition the Huhsien painters use traditional methods of perspective so that mountains and streams, vast fields and crops, houses and trees, figures and carts are well integrated in the canvas. The artists give play to their revolutionary ideals, and to their courage to break with conventions. Basing themselves on the realities of their own lives, they successfully integrate realism and artistic exaggeration. Good arrangement and skilful composition prevent any sense of crowding while bringing out to the full the vastness of our countryside and the remarkable changes in day-to-day rural life. These traits of the Huhsien paintings show that the peasant artists, because they understand and respect the traditional tastes of the masses, can create works which immediately attract the masses.

How is it that after working industriously the year round, the peasant artists still have the energy and will to devote their spare time to painting? Many of them give a simple answer: "We paint for the revolution!"

The peasant paintings of Huhsien once again show that the labouring people, who with their own wisdom are creating a land of beauty, a socialist new China, are equally capable of using their own artistic vision to depict this beautiful land on canvas, to create proud images of proletarian heroes and celebrate their boldness and revolutionary ideals. Not only are the peasant artists doing their share politically and in the economic field for the revolutionary cause of the proletariat, they are also making a remarkable contribution to it through creative art as well.

This is exemplified by the history of Liu Chih-teh and Li Feng-lan both typical of the peasant artists of Huhsien, who sent them as representatives to the conference that selected exhibits for the National Fine Arts Exhibition of 1972.

Liu Chih-teh, now in his thirties, is Party branch secretary of a production brigade in Chintu Commune. His father was very poor and before Liberation had to support the whole family on tiny earnings from making paper flowers. They were cruelly exploited and oppressed by the landlord class. Liu had loved pictures from childhood. Because his home was by a highroad in the town of Chintu where people from the countryside were in the habit of buying chests and trunks, he saw a lot of these painted with feudal designs such as "Plentiful Sons". The young man had an intense dislike for such feudal rubbish, and became eager to take over this position for revolutionary art, so for more than ten years he spent his spare time painting chests and trunks for the commune members, who liked his new themes centring on the people's communes and portraying heroic people. After he was elected Party secretary of his brigade, he led its members in both political activities and construction, helping the brigade to raise its output by leaps and bounds, so that it soon became one of the county's advanced units. All the while, he went on painting in his spare time, using art to spread Party policies and spur the work of the brigade by explaining the tasks before it. In the past ten years, he has painted more than five hundred pictures.

Li Feng-lan, a woman just turning forty, was born in a poor peasant family. She had no chance to study in childhood and learned to read only after Liberation. Clever with her hands from her early years,

she was fond of looking at pictures and of making paper-cuts for window decoration, a folk art popular in Shensi. Li Feng-lan really learned to paint only after she joined the spare-time art class on an irrigation construction site in 1958. There she studied Chairman Mao's *Talks at the Yenan Forum on Literature and Art*, acquired some painting technique and completed her first work, *Heroes Chain the Dragon*, a large poster about the building of a dam. Today, in addition to four children, Feng-lan has three aged dependents to care for, which makes her household duties very heavy. She also does her full share of collective farm work in her brigade and some social work, since she is very popular among the masses. "I have never let painting interfere with or hold me back from collective labour," she told us. She carries sketch books to the fields, and has filled many of them during the short work breaks. Then late at night when all is quiet, she paints. Thanks to her diligence and perseverance, her work has improved a great deal in the past fifteen years. She has completed more than three hundred paintings.

In recent years, many young people who have graduated from middle schools and colleges have gone back to their home village to take part in rural socialist construction, and this too has swelled the ranks of spare-time artists. Helped by the veterans, these younger artists have produced many paintings including some outstanding ones. The painters of *Target Practice* and *The Brigade's Chicken Farm*, which are reproduced in this issue of our magazine, are young women still in their teens. *Target Practice* shows commune members, happy in a year of peace and good harvest, yet maintaining a high sense of revolutionary vigilance and high-spiritedly practising target shooting whenever they have a few moments to spare. *The Brigade's Chicken Farm* is a lively portrayal of hundreds of chickens of different sizes and colours against a background of green fields.

The basic reason why the Huhsien peasant paintings are vigorous and vital is that they are firmly rooted in rural life. Many of them were painted to commend good deeds by fine people. Others portray important local events such as battles against drought, the popularization of scientific farming, work in basic construction, the building

of dams, etc. Some were created to expose the crimes of the class enemy and educate the people.

The Class Education Exhibition of Niutung Commune was held recently in the Huhsien county town. It included eighty paintings showing vividly the sanguinary oppression and exploitation to which the working people of the area were subjected by the Kuomintang reactionaries, landlords and capitalists before Liberation. Its purpose was to remind people living in the new society never to forget class suffering and keep alive the memory of past bitterness.

The masses welcome these paintings. They say, "Revolutionary paintings are a mighty force, the people love them and they bring the enemy down. When poor and lower-middle peasants master culture, the field of art burst into flower."

Huhsien's peasant artists take a politically aware part in the three great revolutionary movements of class struggle, struggle for production and scientific experiment. They persevere in collective labour and in learning from the masses. Their motto is "We are working people who paint workers and peasants and must learn from them as well."

The spare-time art of the Huhsien peasants has already become popular and its standard is now being raised along with the progress of proletarian art. But far from satisfied the painters are now striving to contribute more to the flowering of revolutionary culture.

Tsaidan Choma, Tibetan Singer

China is a country of many nationalities. And each nationality has its own folk-songs and singers. Tsaidan Choma, the Tibetan singer, is one of them. She often travels to villages along the Yalutsangpo River, sentry posts in the Himalaya Mountains, the pastures of the north and the valleys around Lhasa, to sing Tibetan folk-songs for the liberated serfs, the frontier guards and the herdsmen. Her melodious rich voice, powered by deep feeling, moves people's hearts.

Tsaidan Choma was born thirty-seven years ago in a family of serfs on the banks of the Yalutsangpo. From the age of thirteen she had herded sheep for the serf-owner and suffered constantly from hunger and cold. However, even in those days she liked to sing, and she sang of the sorrows of the Tibetan people: "Even if the mountains turned to butter, they would only feed the rich; even if the rivers flowed with milk, not a drop would be for us."

Then Tibet was liberated, and in 1958 the Chinese Communist Party sent Tsaidan Choma to study voice in the Shanghai Conservatory of Music. There she won the love of her teachers and fellow students. They helped her to learn politics and literature as well as

singing, and explained to her the revolutionary truth contained in Chairman Mao's *Talks at the Yen-an Forum on Literature and Art*. She had much difficulty at the start. But she had one thought in her mind: "The Party wants me to become a singer for the masses of working people, and I shall not fail its hopes." So she studied music and the Han language day and night.

Soon she heard soul-stirring news: the people and the armed forces in Tibet, led by the Party, had moved with lightning rapidity to smash the armed rebellion organized by the ruling reactionary clique in Tibet, and a mighty movement of democratic reform had begun in her home district. Overwhelmed with joy, she toured factories, ports, offices and schools with songs of accusation against the oppression and exploitation of the Tibetan people by the serf-owners, and songs expressing the jubilant welcome of the liberated serfs to the democratic reform. Not only did people come to know her fine singing voice, they also gained a deeper understanding of the Tibetan people's hatred for the old society and love for the new.

After several years of study she attained a fairly high level of vocal technique and musical art. Upon graduation from the conservatory, she went back among her own people. Since then she has eagerly performed for the Tibetan masses all over the vast plateau. Often she says: "I will go and sing anywhere our workers, peasants and soldiers want me to."

One day in July 1967, with other artists of the Tibetan Song-and-Dance Troupe, she went to an army station more than 4,700 metres above sea level. Their performance at this desolate spot had an audience of more than a thousand, including soldiers, road-maintenance workers and local people, for it was a rare event. Facing the Jolmo Lungma Peak, the world's highest, she sang feelingly of the love of the liberated Tibetan serfs for our armymen. Neither the fatigue of the journey nor the lack of oxygen at that height could deter her. She sang five songs in succession and, learning that eight comrades working in the kitchen had been unable to come, she went straight there to sing again for them.

After tempering in the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution, Tsaidan Choma was elected to the Party Committee of the Tibet

Autonomous Region. She became even more modest and works even harder than before. She would help comrades in her troupe in all sorts of ways and pick the hardest jobs; in labour she fears neither dirt nor fatigue. In January last year the troupe went from Lhasa to perform in other districts. Not being in good health, she felt dizzy and ill on the bus, but persisted in going through with it, though the leadership tried to make her rest. She gave several dozen performances in a little over a month.

Last year her Party organization sent her to Nanking for medical treatment and rest. During her convalescence, she refused to be idle, but gave many performances for the people of Nanking. When local artists organized a chorus to present the song *Chairman Mao Goes over the Whole Country*, Tsaidan Choma, with deep proletarian love for our leader, enthusiastically accepted the leading part. Hearing her sing the stirring lines: "Chairman Mao goes over the whole country. . . . His kind words are deeply imprinted on our hearts," the audience burst into enthusiastic applause, because she had so successfully conveyed her deep feeling for Chairman Mao.

Tsaidan Choma considers that her happiness and new life are given to her by the Chinese Communist Party and Chairman Mao; so she has made up her mind to sing in praise of the new society, the Party and Chairman Mao. The three songs she likes best are: *Sing a Folk-Song for the Party to Hear*, *The Liberated Serfs Will Never Forget the Communist Party* and *Long Live Chairman Mao*, because the emotion in these songs is her own.

Tsaidan Choma's voice, though not remarkable for range, is extremely melodious and clear. She sings without superfluous exaggeration, and does not use variations of volume and tempo to create ornamental effects. In Tibetan folk-songs, she makes good use of the changes of scale and emphasis on cadence characteristic of their style. Through diligent study and wide experience, she has come to be one of the most accomplished folk-song artists in China.

Chen Hsing

The Philadelphia Orchestra Performs in China

The Philadelphia Orchestra, on its visit to China in September, gave four concerts in Peking and two in Shanghai. Under the baton of Mr. Eugene Ormandy, it presented over a dozen works by a wide range of composers of different periods, nations, styles and schools, exhibiting its high level of skill and musical expression.

Established in 1900, the Philadelphia Orchestra has done much in its 73 years of performance to further the spread of symphonic music. Its distinguished conductors, Eugene Ormandy and his predecessor Leopold Stokowski, put their whole hearts into building it up. Under their painstaking guidance, this ensemble developed its distinctive style: powerful and passionate, rich in tonal quality and brilliant in orchestral colour, and became recognized as one of the world's outstanding orchestras.

Mr. Ormandy has conducted the orchestra for 37 years. Though well on in years, he retains an abounding vitality. Most members of the orchestra are highly accomplished musicians of many years' standing.



The orchestra's rendition of Beethoven's Symphony No. 6 in F Major (Pastoral) took the audience through a series of vivid scenes: clear brooks flowing, the song of birds, simple and vigorous village dances, a thunderstorm sweeping down, and, finally, the fields emerging tranquil, fresh and bright once again. It gave a sensitive rendering of Beethoven's richly imaginative delineation of the countryside around Vienna in the early 19th century and of his own moods as he walked through it.

Mr. Ormandy conducted Beethoven's Symphony No. 5 in C Minor with great warmth. It was performed with fidelity, grandeur and passion. Particularly moving was the rendering of the conclusion of the third movement, rising passionately into the victory theme of the fourth. Gradually the music increases in power until it reaches a peak of triumph.

The orchestra's presentation of Brahms' Symphony No. 1 in C Minor had dignity and depth. Especially appreciated by the audience was first violinist Norman Carol's lyrical solo in the second movement and the strings' rich elaboration of the theme in the final movement.

And moving in its sincerity was Louis Rosenblatt's rendition, on the English horn, of the passage in the style of black folk music in Dvorak's Symphony No. 9 in E Minor (from the New World).

The performance of Barber's Adagio for Strings brought out the charm of these instruments, in a poetic blend of flowing melody and harmonious tone colour.

Respighi's *The Pines of Rome* is like an oil-painting of rich, vivid hues and bold lines. It portrays from different aspects the beauty and magnificence of Rome and its surrounding countryside.

The timpani of the orchestra, played with precision, control and sensitivity, were an indispensable element in bringing out the vitality and strength of many works.

During the U.S. War of Independence, Philadelphia was a rallying point for the American people in their struggle for national independence. Here the Declaration of Independence was born, and here the first capital of the United States was set up. The orchestra born in this city also has an honourable history.

We shall never forget how in 1940, when the Chinese people were fighting against Japanese aggression, Mr. Eugene Ormandy, moved by a strong sense of justice, dedicated a benefit performance to Doctor Norman Bethune and the medical service of the Chinese Eighth Route Army. In 1942, too, the orchestra performed in support of the Soviet people's war against fascist invasion.

Mr. Ormandy and the whole orchestra were very enthusiastic about the Chinese piano concerto *The Yellow River* which describes the Chinese people's struggle for national liberation. Before coming, they had already performed it in the United States. And in Peking, after consultations and rehearsals with the Chinese pianist Yin Cheng-chung, they presented it with Yin at the piano. The orchestra merged passionately with the resolute, powerful piano music. The successful joint performance was a moving expression of the deep friendship between the Chinese and American people.

In answer to repeated enthusiastic requests for an encore, Mr. Ormandy conducted the Philadelphia Orchestra in their own elabora-

tion of the Chinese north Shensi folk-song *The March of the Workers and Peasants*. To the Chinese audience the playing of this familiar tune conveyed the American musicians' warm feelings for the Chinese people.

This is the first time the artists of the Philadelphia Orchestra have come to China. They travelled great distances, as envoys of their own people, to bring friendship to the people of China. We thank the American people for their warm friendship towards the Chinese people. We thank the American musicians for their fine performances.



National Exhibition of Serial Pictures and Traditional Chinese Paintings

The National Exhibition of Serial Pictures and Traditional Chinese Paintings opened in Peking at the Peking Art Gallery on October 1, the 24th anniversary of the founding of the People's Republic of China.

On display are 97 sets of serial pictures and 186 paintings in traditional brushwork. They show vivid and magnificent scenes of China's socialist revolution and socialist construction and depict images of the worker, peasant and soldier heroes of our time.

Serial pictures, which describe a complete story in a series of drawings with explanatory captions beneath each, are popular with the masses and especially with children. Since the cultural revolution an increasing number of new pictures in serial form, all of which show improved technique, have appeared everywhere. The serial pictures displayed in the present exhibition were chosen from among them.

The traditional Chinese paintings in the exhibition show that the painters have made new and greater efforts in developing traditional Chinese art as well as in introducing useful foreign techniques. Many works by both amateur and professional artists have new content. The present exhibition demonstrates the new achievements of our artists in developing serial pictures and traditional Chinese painting.

Two Coloured Animated Films

The Little Bugler and *A Little Guard on the East Coast*, two coloured animated films produced by the Shanghai Animation Film Studio, were shown recently all over the country.

The Little Bugler is a coloured cartoon which tells the story of a boy who, maturing steadily under the loving care of the Party and the Red Army, fights heroically against the enemy in a revolutionary base area in the Ching kang Mountains, Kiangsi Province, in the period of our democratic revolution. *A Little Guard on the East Coast*, a scissor-cut film, shows the heroic deeds of children living along the coast who fear neither difficulty nor death in their struggle against the enemy.

Shanghai Dockers Perform New Work Chants

The work chant is a form of traditional Chinese folk-song. Developing out of physical labour, with a strong rhythm, it is performed by one actor leading the singing with a chorus by many others. Since the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution this traditional art form has taken on new life.

In Shanghai a fourteen-member work-chant troupe has been formed, which includes dockers, truck-drivers and seamen. For a long time members of this troupe went among the labouring people, collected and revised various work chants popular on the docks and created many new ones. *Following the Party to Make Revolution For Ever* is one of them. It reflects the bitter life of the dockers in the old society and their happiness since becoming their own masters in the new. Conveying the revolutionary enthusiasm of the young workers who are active and energetic on the docks while keeping world affairs in mind, this work chant, when staged in factories, people's communes, schools and army units, has been warmly acclaimed.

Mobile Film Projection Teams on the Grassland

The Yuku Autonomous County of south Kansu in northwest China is the home of the Yuku people, one of China's national minorities.

With high mountains and deep valleys intersecting the grassland, this county is sparsely settled by about 25,000 people only in an area of 20,000 square kilometres. Before Liberation the scattered herdsmen on this grassland never had a chance to see any films. After Liberation, especially in recent years since the cultural revolution, many mobile projection teams have been organized in this county. To enable small groups of herdsmen to see films, the teams of projectionists went from place to place on the grassland the whole year round and present film shows to the herdsmen's families wherever they can. Last year they gave more than 900 film shows to audiences totalling 240,000.



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