

Chinese Literature



JUNE 1981

We announce with deep grief to our readers that the chief editor of "Chinese Literature", the great writer Mao Dun passed away at the age of 85 on the morning of March 27, 1981, in Beijing.

Editorial Board

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Chief Editor: **MAO DUN**

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NOVEL

Zhou Keqin

Xu Mao and His Daughters

In our last issue, we published the first two chapters of "Xu Mao and His Daughters" and an interview with the author. The novel depicts life in the countryside in the politically eventful year 1975.

Xu Mao, an old peasant, who had been an activist in the co-operative movement in the fifties, has become selfish and ruthless, because he has suffered a lot from the ultra-Leftist policies in agriculture. He wanted all his nine daughters to be well married, and built up a small fortune for himself. When his fourth daughter, Xiuyun, was divorced by her husband Zheng Bairu, her father felt she had brought disgrace to the family. When he tried to marry her off again, she refused, enraging him all the more.

A work team, sent by the county Party committee to help rectify the leading body of Gourd Plain Village, arrived at this point. Zheng Bairu, who rose to power by crushing others, fears that Xiuyun, whom he treated badly, may expose how he persecuted Jin Dongsui, the former Party branch secretary and husband of Xu Mao's dead eldest daughter. He is, therefore, desperate to effect a reconciliation with Xiuyun so as to keep her mouth closed. Now follow three more chapters.

—The Editors

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Chapter V At Lianyunchang Market

THE arrival of the work team threw Xiuyun into an abyss of despair, dashing her hopes to pieces.

Early that morning, as she had stepped out of the gate on her way to fetch water from the well outside, a bucket in hand, she had run into Qi.

He had come to see Yan Shaochun about the work. As he passed Xiuyun, he glanced at the thin but lovely woman and stopped to ask gravely, "Hello, what's your name?"

Xiuyun stared at him, too surprised to reply.

"You're Xu . . . Xu Xiuyun?" Qi asked, a kind smile on his face.

Xiuyun lowered her head, even more astonished.

"Well," Qi said frankly, still smiling, "Comrade Zheng Bairu told me about you. Why not let bygones be bygones? Now, he would like . . . er . . . wants to make it up with you. That's not a bad idea. He works hard. You should help him. That's taking the interests of everyone into account. It's a question of your political attitude. How about it? Anything still worrying you?"

Before he could finish, Xiuyun had turned and left. "She's too shy to speak," he thought smiling, gazing at her receding back. "It's natural for a conservative peasant woman to behave like that. Anyway it's not a problem."

The self-righteous young man was very pleased with himself. It was more than just a personal favour to Zheng, but something politically good for the village. He had no idea that what he had said had in fact broken Xiuyun's heart. What she had dreaded the previous night had come true. With her hope in the work team destroyed, the team itself became something menacing.

"Birds of a feather!" she said in anger. "Oh! I thought only a couple of days ago. . . . It seems that I can't rely on anyone but myself."

She choked back her bitterness and determined to carry on her lone fight for the right to lead a decent life. Love, marriage and a home, which most women enjoyed, were her goals, because she had never known them.

Sensing that the people around her seemed to be uniting against her, this frail, tender woman suddenly became obstinate and firm.

Having filled a vat with water, she deftly sliced some sweet potatoes and chucked them into a pan. Then she lit the stove. Gazing at the leaping tongues of flame, she bit her lips wondering what to do next.

It was market day today. People swarmed into the narrow street of Lianyunchang.

Xiuyun worked hard and was usually too busy to go there, but this day she changed her routine.

She planned to buy two things: several yards of blue cotton to cover her father's fur coat, which must be completed before his birthday, and some presents for Jin Dongshui and his children, so that they could give them to Xu Mao at his party. She had learned from neighbours that the annual payment allocated to Jin just covered the cost of the grain ration for him and his two children. So he had no extra cash. Xiuyun, who had no dependants, was given not only her grain ration, but also twenty yuan. She had made a careful plan for the money. As for her daily expenses, she decided to raise some chickens in the coming spring, so that their eggs would bring in a tiny income.

After breakfast, she shut the door and changed her clothes.

Meanwhile, Qin appeared with Yan who was lodging with the Xus. With Qi, they were going to look at Wu Changquan's plot. Yan glanced at the little hut through trees.

In her clean dress, Xiuyun opened the door and suddenly caught sight of Yan walking towards the hut. Immediately she retreated, shutting the door with a bang. Then she peeped through the crack and saw the three of them going out of the gate. She reopened the door, saying to herself, "Humph! Just leave me alone!" She was sure that Yan would have preached at her like Qi. She could not stand any more insults.

When she entered the house of her team's book-keeper, she found several people queuing up for loans. When it came to her turn, the book-keeper asked in surprise, "What do you want such a big sum for?"

"To buy some things," Xiuyun answered cheerfully.

"But you'll get your annual payment in a couple of days! What's the hurry? Afraid you won't get it, eh?"

His wife winked at him and pretended to scold him, "Oh, stop your nonsense! Xiuyun's going to marry soon. Of course she must prepare for it!"

Xiuyun, too embarrassed to defend herself, was exasperated. Her pale face turned crimson.

"So that's it!" the lop-eared book-keeper smiled ingratiatingly towards his wife. "You'll soon fly away, eh? Ha! Ha! . . . How nice to be a woman! When a tree dies, you can always find a new one to make a nest. See a lot of the world that way!" As he was joking, his wife hit him on the shoulder with a shoe she was making, because she had married him after the death of her first husband.

The man cheerfully gave the money to Xiuyun, who took it and fled, without even checking it. She was shy and modest, not like Qiuyun.

Once outside, she took a short cut, hurrying along the riverside towards the small bridge so as to avoid anyone.

As she passed Luo's house, she spotted him squatting in the courtyard, while her sister plucked a chicken.

She heard him grumble, "What damn luck! The God of the Plague must be blind to have visited our poor house. Where shall we get money to buy oil and salt in future?"

But Qiuyun was indifferent. "Oh you! What a bum! It's only a chicken after all. No one's been killed! I bet you wouldn't have been so depressed if I had died," she said and then chuckled.

Luo smiled wryly.

"You wouldn't be eating chickens if they weren't already dead." Qiuyun tried to cheer up her husband. "Men make money. So long as you're fit and strong, you'll never starve. I'll raise more next spring. We'll have them again."

A wave of sadness swept over Xiuyun. What was wrong with the world? The Luos were diligent, honest people. They worked hard year in year out, yet they were still poor.

The sharp-eyed children caught sight of their aunt and ran towards her. Hugging her legs, they greeted her warmly.

Looking up, Qiuyun said jubilantly, while smoothing her hair, "Come on in! I'm going to throw a party today! Are you off to market?"

Luo rose to greet her too, his face breaking into a smile. Though a simple peasant, he knew not to burden his unhappy sister-in-law with their plight.

But Xiuyun asked, "How many have died?"

"Three," Qiuyun replied. "All of them!"

"So you'll give the kids a treat," Xiuyun said, feigning a smile.

"That's right," Qiuyun answered bluntly with a grin, "but he was thinking of selling them at the market. Everybody knows that chicken tastes good. Why shouldn't we treat ourselves for once? Come and have lunch with us. I'll invite father and Qin over too."

Luo smiled awkwardly.

Then Xiuyun turned to leave. But Qiuyun hurriedly put aside the wet chicken and, wiping her hands on her apron, caught up with her. She asked in a low voice, "How about it? Have you made up your mind? That man will come to father's birthday party. You must decide now."

Xiuyun went pale and replied, "I told you. I'd rather die than leave."

"Well. . . . All right then. Honestly, I was also worried about letting you go to live with a stranger. I'll send Luo to the market to ask someone from the Ergu Mountains to pass the word on to the man that the wedding is cancelled."

Xiuyun nodded gratefully. Not wanting to discuss it further, she left her sister and hurried along the path by the river.

But the children chased after her, shouting, "Come and play with us, aunty!" She stopped and fumbled in her pocket. Fishing out a five-yuan note, she turned round and lifted one of her nephews called Piglet. "Go back now. I'm busy at the moment," she told him, putting the note into his hand. "Take it," she urged. "Ask your dad to buy you a hen which will lay eggs. Now hurry!"

She gazed at the children running towards their parents, her eyes filled with tears. Then she turned and ran.

The morning mist enveloping the river banks began to disperse, revealing dappled golden sunlight on the surface of the deep blue water. The reflection of the fine twigs and strong branches of the drooping willows was soft and enchanting. What a lovely scene!

2

Ten o'clock was the peak hour at the market. The sun's warmth was shed on the serried black roofs flanking the narrow street, the scene of much activity. There was a sea of heads wrapped in white or blue cloth. People wearing black, grey or light brown cotton-padded coats were milling around. More peasants with baskets or shouldering loads kept pouring in.

Men collected round the pig and grain sellers, while women sold baskets of eggs or ducks at the street corners. Girls, in threes or fours, hand in hand, threaded through crowds, stopping at the stalls selling odds and ends, going in and out of the supply and marketing cooperative. But what they wanted was only something small like a mirror or a piece of shoe cloth.

It was the end of the winter, the slack season. Cadres held meetings to urge the peasants "to turn the slack season into a busy one". Walls and stones were plastered with slogans: "Work hard to turn our county into a Dazhai-type one!" But the peasants were not enthusiastic. What worried them was how to manage till the New Year, get more grain for the coming spring and how much relief grain they might request from the state.

The members of the Market Administrative Committee were the busiest people on such occasions. To curb "capitalism", they herded a lot of men and women, who were selling prohibited goods on the free market, into a big, dirty room to join the "study session". The dispirited pedlars were squatting on the ground, awaiting their turn to "confess their errors". Some women broke down in frustration when their sesame, walnuts or vegetable-oil, which they had hoarded bit by bit and wanted to exchange for a little

grain, needles and thread, had been confiscated. Those in power believed that only by checking "capitalism" could socialism develop. It seemed that the arch criminals, who had devastated the countryside, were the peasants themselves, who had neither power nor money.

Xu Mao had quickly sold his tobacco and then bought everything he needed for his birthday, such as vermicelli, bamboo shoots and soya-beans. But he was in no hurry to go back. The market that day lasted long, and he knew why. The annual payment had been announced and many households did not have enough wage-earners. They could not even cover the cost of the grain allocated to them. Despite a whole year's work, they were still in debt to the production brigade. As a result, they had to sell things to clear their debts. Since the crops were not doing well that year, even those who had several wage-earners did not get much money either. So there were more sellers than buyers. That was why people were reluctant to disperse. But this provided Xu Mao with a good opportunity. All his worries temporarily vanished. Rather than leave the bustling atmosphere to brood over his troubles at home, he decided to scout around for a good bargain.

He put his basket beneath a counter in his daughter Zhen's store. She was too busy serving the long queue of customers to show her father upstairs for a rest. However, she leaned over the counter and whispered coyly into his ear, "Father, Xiao Zhu's coming from town today. Come and have lunch with us?"

Having been kept in the dark, the old man stared at her, asking, "What do you mean by piglet?"*

Zhen clung to his shoulder and pretended to be angry. Blushing she said, "He's my boyfriend. I'd like you to come and meet him. If you've no objection, we can become engaged."

Xu Mao did not like the way she talked. Displeased, he pushed her arm away, snorted and walked off without a word.

In a minute, he was lost in the crowds, his irritation gone. He shrewdly surveyed the market with his eagle-eyes. Wearing an old blue cotton-padded robe and a fur cap, which had been sent

* The pronunciation of Xiao Zhu in Chinese could mean piglet too.

to him by his daughter in the northeast, he ambled along leisurely, a foot-long bamboo pipe in his hand, like an idle old peasant.

Before long he reached the middle of the street and the commune clinic. He noticed a woman standing in the throng. She was sallow, shabbily dressed, carrying in her arms a baby, whose cheeks were scarlet. But what drew his attention was a jar of cooking oil at her feet. He reckoned that it contained not less than five catties of oil.

He tried to strike up a conversation with her without mentioning the oil.

"*Aiya!* What's wrong with your baby? Is it ill?"

"Yes, uncle. Look, he's running a high fever!"

"Better hurry in and see a doctor. An injection and some medicine should cure it."

"Uncle, we saw the doctor already. I hurried here from twenty *li* away early this morning to see the doctor. But . . . but I haven't been able to buy any medicine yet."

"Why?"

"I've no money until I sell this oil."

"Cooking oil? Better watch your step! It'll be confiscated if it's discovered by the people in charge here."

"True. I don't often come here. Uncle, you're a kind-hearted man. Buy my jar of oil. Please help me!"

At that, Xu Mao could not help feeling sad. However, he took a grip on himself and said, "I don't need oil really, but your child's sick. I'll buy it and do you a favour." He put his right hand into his inner breast pocket, asking, "How much a catty?"

"Uncle, whatever you like. I don't know a thing about prices."

"All right." Though it hurt him, he said, "I'll make it easy. One yuan a catty. That's fair. A very reasonable price."

The woman heaved a sigh of relief and agreed.

As Xu Mao was weighing the jar, she interrupted hurriedly, "Four catties and a half. Better measure it yourself."

Weighing it again, he assured her, "No need. I believe you. But I didn't plan to buy this. I've no pot."

The woman added, "Take it. A jar doesn't cost much."

"That wouldn't be right! I'll buy it as a second-hand jar and give you ten cents for it. How about that?"

"As you like."

He paid the money, picked up the jar and left, while the woman went to buy the medicine.

Twenty minutes later, he could be found in a quiet corner near the grocery, half a *li* away from the main street. The market administrative people seldom came there. The jar was at his feet. Two women, who looked like workers' wives, bent down to peer at the oil.

"How much?"

Xu Mao replied reluctantly, "One yuan eighty."

"A bit expensive, isn't it?"

"Not at all."

"Any lower?"

"Perhaps, but you're buying. It's up to you to say."

"One yuan fifty, OK?"

The old man snorted his refusal. The two women left, disappointed.

In the same manner, he rejected three other customers within a short time. He lowered the price to one yuan sixty, but prospective buyers would only offer one yuan fifty. So nothing was settled.

Just then, a stout young fellow in overalls and suede shoes came up. He had a shock of long hair and a small moustache under his snub nose. Xu Mao dismissed him with a contemptuous glance, thinking he must be a loafer.

Looking about him, the young fellow asked, pointing to the jar, "Selling cooking oil?" He had a city accent.

The old man did not reply.

"Are you deaf? You seem to be an upper-middle peasant, if not a rich peasant or a landlord! Haven't you seen the notice? You're not allowed to sell cooking oil here!"

"Is he with the Market Administrative Committee?" Xu Mao wondered. "Hardly. I know all those people. There are no fools like him." So he replied coldly, "What notice? I can't

read. If you're going to the market, better get a move on. Don't waste your time joking with me."

The man stepped forward, caught him by his sleeve and, at the same time, produced a red arm band from his breast pocket. "What do you think I'm doing here?" he said fiercely. With that, he lifted the jar and grabbed the old man to take him to the "study session".

Xu Mao was exasperated. Even his eyes lost their usual gleam. Though a money-grubber, he dreaded the "study session". Before long, they attracted quite a crowd.

"Get moving!" the young man snapped the order anxiously, the oil jar in his hand. His legs giving way, Xu Mao flopped down on the kerb. Onlookers began chipping in.

"He's from the town's militia headquarters, uncle. Just your luck!"

"What headquarters? He's a con-man."

"A swindler perhaps."

"Watch your tongue! Didn't you see his red band?"

"Better give up, uncle. Pretend you've spent the money on medicine for your cold."

"Yes! You don't look poor. A few coppers won't hurt you. Anything can happen these days."

Their remarks made Xu Mao remorseful and angry. It was the first time that a cunning old man like him had faced defeat at Lianyunchang market. To kiss goodbye to a few yuan was not in itself a great loss to Xu Mao. Yet, mean as he was, it greatly upset him.

When he looked up, the young man and his jar of oil had vanished into thin air.

He dragged himself towards the market where the noise was as loud as ever. It held no attractions for him any longer. Not wanting to waste time any more, with his head down, he went to fetch his basket before going home.

All of a sudden, a man and a woman stormed out of the clinic towards him. "That's him!" the woman shouted pointing her finger at Xu Mao.

The man caught Xu Mao by his coat and snarled, "What a heartless brute!"

Xu Mao was flabbergasted. People stopped to watch what was going on.

The man began to tell them the whole story. "Comrades! Villagers! Let's make this old man see reason. This is Sister Li, a neighbour of mine." He pointed to the woman with the baby in her arms. "Her child's ill. In order to get some money to see a doctor and buy medicine, she brought four and a half catties of cooking oil here to sell. But this heartless old brute had the cheek to take advantage of her plight. He bought her oil for one yuan a catty, claiming that was fair. Bah! It's disgusting to cheat a widow with a sick child!"

The spectators were incensed and demanded, "Speak up! Is it true?"

"Where's the oil? Give it back to her! You've sold it, haven't you? How much did you sell it for?"

Some even roared, "The old rotter's profiteering! Take him to the police!"

"Take him to the commune headquarters!"

What a mess! Never having been in such a jam, Xu Mao turned ash.

Just then, a man dressed like a cadre elbowed his way through the crowd. Smiling, he told the angry people to calm down and then said, "Comrades, brothers and sisters, listen to me. It's wrong that such things should happen here in Lianyunchang."

Though his voice was a bit husky, he was a good talker. Xu Mao, in consternation, looked up. It was none other than Zheng Bairu! This irritated him even more.

"I'm done for," the old man said to himself. "My reputation's gone to the dogs!"

Fortunately Zheng easily pacified the angry crowd with his convincing words.

"Comrades! We're all brothers, like grapes on the same vine. Why should we get angry with each other? If you're right, you're right. If you're wrong, nobody will support you. Since this is a free market, there are no fixed prices. Sellers always want to

make a profit, while customers want to get a bargain. It's up to the two parties concerned. If they reach an agreement and one puts the cash down and the other hands over the goods, a deal is done. That's neither fraud, nor heartlessness. However, this old man doesn't look poor. I suggest he adds twenty cents to each catty and leave it at that."

His speech was so persuasive, that no one protested any more except Sister Li's neighbour, who still complained. When Zheng offered him a cigarette and produced a lighter to light it with, he shut up. Then Zheng stuffed a one-yuan note into Sister Li's hand.

"Villagers, I apologize to Sister Li. Why? Because this old man's a member of my family. He seldom comes to the market and doesn't know the rules and regulations or the government policies very well, because he rarely attends meetings. Please forgive him. Now I don't want to delay you any more from your shopping or visiting your relatives and friends."

Amused by his eloquence, the people dispersed. Zheng caught Xu Mao by the arm and walked him away in a hurry. Xu Mao had mixed feelings, but he was very grateful to Zheng for rescuing him.

"Better go home," Zheng suggested. "I have to go to the commune headquarters." He did not preach at the old man, but turned to leave.

3

Zhen was delighted to see her father coming to her before lunch. She wanted to take him upstairs to have a rest.

But the old man insisted on going home.

"Father!" she cried out pretending to be upset. "Have you forgotten what I just told you?"

What was it? He could not remember it for the world. His grey stubbly chin quivering, he insisted on taking his basket from under the counter.

"Father!" Zhen protested again. "You're only concerned about my older sisters' marriages but not mine, aren't you?"

He raised his eyes to look at his plump, pretty, but rather vulgarly dressed daughter. It was true that he seldom thought about her since she was never at home. How time flies! His seventh daughter was already a young woman of twenty-four!

The old man heaved a light sigh, remembering at last that she had asked him to meet her boyfriend.

This vain girl, who never gave him a cent, was not one of his favourites, but, like every parent in the world, he felt obliged to take an interest in such an important matter.

Society was, in a way, the best teacher. Though illiterate, Xu Mao was a man of experience. Regarding marriage, he had no illusions or delusions. Though many praised his daughters for their beauty and ability, he never took their advice and married them to townfolk. He wanted simple, honest, capable peasants for his sons-in-law.

But Zhen's case was different. According to custom, a peasant girl who got a regular wage should marry a city boy. Her parents believed it unwise for her to marry a peasant. If she already had a fiancé in the countryside, she would probably jilt him. Though it was most practical, it was not to Xu Mao's liking.

Now Zhen, who had found herself a city boy, was anxious to get married. To ask her father to meet him was a mere formality. Her love was far more important than her filial piety. If her father agreed, that was fine; if he did not, it did not make much difference. Despite the gaze of her colleagues and customers, she coaxed her father like a spoilt child, dragging him to the staircase.

"He's in my room. Go and see him!" Panting, she pushed him in that direction.

The customers cast inquiring glances at them. Even the shop-assistants looked up.

"Uncle Xu, go and have a look. A nice young fellow!" someone urged.

Xu Mao had no alternative. Supported by his daughter, he climbed the stairs.

They stopped at the door. Zhen called in a clear voice, "Xiao Zhu! My father's here!"

The door was opened to reveal a young man with a small moustache. At the sight of him, Xu Mao's heart missed a beat. He had a close look at him — at his moustache, snub nose, broad face and long hair. . . . As if seeing the devil, the old man, too surprised to speak, glared at him in fury. He did not want to look at him more. Turning his head, he stared at the ground. As luck would have it, he caught sight of the jar, a witness to his humiliation.

A row of seven pots and jars stood against the wall, all probably obtained by trickery. His was at one end.

The young man stood at the door, embarrassed. However, he murmured sheepishly, "Father!"

Zhen was all at sea. "What's the matter with you two?" she asked.

"It's all a mistake . . . a mistake. . . ." stammered the young man.

Xu Mao whirled round to leave. After two steps, he turned back, took the jar and stamped down the staircase in a huff. When he got down to the ground, he spat in disgust. His daughter caught up with him and asked anxiously, "Father, what's all this. . . ?"

"This is my oil!" Xu Mao announced loudly, raising the jar to show her.

"That's funny. He came straight to me from the town this morning and told me he'd bought some cooking oil on the way from a relative of his."

"Bought it?" the old man snapped. "He stole it!"

"Well?" As she began to understand, her jaw dropped.

The people in the store turned their heads.

Xu Mao outlined what had happened to him that morning. Of course, he omitted the part about Sister Li. He just accused the swindler.

"It was robbery in broad daylight!" he ended his denunciation.

The shop-assistants exchanged glances, speechless.

"Xu Zhen," a middle-aged shop-assistant came to her and asked, "what kind of a worker is Xiao Zhu? He's in a small factory, but he seldom works there. He's a con-man, that's what he is! One of my relatives happens to be his neighbour."

"Why didn't you tell her earlier?" a young man chimed in.

"I did," the man defended himself. "The other day, I warned her, 'Be careful, Zhen. There are so many bad characters around these days. You'd better watch out.' But she was so upset that she told me to mind my own business!"

This was like adding fuel to the flames. Xu Mao scolded his daughter, glaring at her, "What a bloody little fool you are!"

Petrified and angry, Zhen, white as a sheet, broke down.

The manager and the shop-assistants came to intervene. Some shouted that the fellow should be driven out of Lianyunchang; some suggested that he be sent to the commune's security department. Others wanted to shame him by parading him through the street. As they were discussing this, Zhen rushed upstairs. A second later, Xiao Zhu was thrown down the stairs, pots and jars after him, hitting him on his back and feet.

When Xu Mao and the manager went upstairs, Zhen had bolted the door and was weeping bitterly inside.

4

Opposite was a general store with large windows and glass counters. The customers there were mostly women.

Having sold their eggs or fowls, they were mooching about with empty baskets, hoping to buy some cloth for their husbands, children or themselves for the New Year. Unfortunately, the choice was limited, the quality poor. The notes clenched in their clammy hands were already damp; they still had not found anything to please them. Friends were chatting about the price and other things, while others were observing them: their ages, figures, the colour and pattern of their clothes, even their shoes.

A young woman entered, who immediately drew everyone's attention. They sized her up, with her small cloth bag over her arm.

She was in her late twenties (no longer young), wearing a semi-new blue Chinese jacket (well made, but the colour's a bit too dull for her), tall and slim (too thin), oval-faced (her chin's too pointed), her eyes revealing a trace of melancholy (what long lashes) and her face looking a little sallow (what's wrong with her?) . . .

But everybody realized that her clothes could not hide her beauty and natural charm.

The young woman elbowed her way into the crowd until she reached the counter. There she carefully looked at the cloth.

"Do you want something?" a shop-assistant asked. "What colour do you fancy?"

Pointing to a bale of black serge, Xiuyun said, "Four yards, please."

The shop-assistant deftly tore off a piece from the bale and asked again, "Anything else?"

"Some print."

"This is a shade lighter. Is that all right?"

"Well, I prefer that print with small red blossoms."

"How many yards, please? Two yards should be enough."

"No. I need two thirds of a yard."

The shop-assistant cut a strip off.

Then she pointed to the green khaki on the shelf and said, "One yard ten inches of that, please. Right."

The shop-assistant calculated and took her money. When this was done, the young woman put the three pieces of cloth into her bag and closed it. She left just as quietly as she had come. The women gazed at her until she was lost in the crowd.

She walked slowly, looking around from time to time as if waiting anxiously for somebody.

Then she bought a box of assorted sweets and four packets of fine dried noodles. Finally she came to the meat counter of the General Food Store.

There was a long queue. She heard people shouting in front, "No selling under the counter! There's a big queue."

"Do you know the rule here, feller? I've been waiting for ages!"

Xiuyun frowned, fretting she might not get any meat.

The queue moved slowly. At last it came to her turn.

"Excuse me, could I have a piece of *licai*?"* she asked.

* A term used before the "Cultural Revolution", meaning a chunk of meat that would be given to somebody as a gift, which was later thought bourgeois.

The sweating butcher, holding a chopper, glowered at her and said curtly, "We sell pork here. Not *licai*!"

Blushing, she said in embarrassment, "Please cut me a joint then."

"A joint?" asked the butcher, his voice more moderate. "Going back to see your parents?"

More embarrassed, she nodded slightly.

The man was talkative. "Haven't been here before, have you?" he said. "*Licai*! We don't say such things these days. Pork is pork. *Licai* is a word of the past. Understand?"

By then, the joint was ready.

"Three catties and a half," he announced.

She fished out the money and counted it. It was a little short. She perspired profusely.

"Now what? Not enough?"

"No. Could you put it aside for me? I'll go and get the money right away." She was thinking of going to borrow some from Zhen.

When such things occurred, the butcher grew tough, especially with a country woman.

"No!" he snapped. "Get away. Next!"

She had to make room for another. Standing outside, she felt very cross.

"Xiuyun! So you..."

A husky voice sounded suddenly behind her. Immediately she was on the alert.

Walking towards her was Zheng Bairu, carrying a hunk of pork. He stopped before her and asked in a tender voice, "Going to the market? Why are you here? Buying pork?"

"No..." She averted her eyes. It was terribly awkward to see him!

An old man, who had just bought his pork, came up and told him, "This young woman wanted to buy a joint, three and a half catties. But she hasn't brought enough money with her."

"I see. That's easily solved!" Zheng immediately produced some notes and offered them to her. "Take it!" he said.

Without a glance at it, Xiuyun refused, "Go away! I've something else to do." With that, she made to go.

"Just a minute!" Zheng called, putting the money back into his pocket. "I'll get it for you." Having said that, he stalked into the store.

"You just wait," someone said admiringly to Xiuyun. "No problem. He has a great deal of pull with them."

Taking this opportunity, Xiuyun fled into the crowd.

When Zheng came out with the joint, there was no sign of her. He sighed, disappointed.

Zheng had cudgelled his brains how to find an opportunity to talk to Xiuyun, but had failed. When he had ventured into her room, he was so careless that he had almost been caught as a thief. Sometimes he tried to catch her in the fields, but there was always someone with her. He had never expected to see her at the market. He had come here early that morning to hand in the brigade's annual payment record to the commune headquarters and report to the leaders the future plan decided upon at the Party branch committee. The commune Party secretary praised him on the spot for the good work he had done, for the high grain yield, which probably ranked the first in the whole county. He also praised him for his efficiency.

Zheng had been feeling in a good mood. Sauntering along the street, he had happened to see Xu Mao in trouble. Surely this had made a good impression on the old man. Pleased with himself, he had entered the store to see a friend of his and bought two cattles of pork without troubling to queue. Luckily, as he was going to see a widow living in a back lane, he had bumped into Xiuyun.

But she had bolted again! Dejected, he thought it over for a while and decided that he must find her. He calculated there was still hope, since Xiuyun had refused to marry the man from the Ergu Mountains. This was probably the best time to persuade her. If the worst came to the worst, he could at least control her for some time. So long as she kept her mouth shut while the work team was in the village, he was safe. When the work team left, the village would once again come under his control. Judging from

Qi's attitude, his wish to keep Xiuyun under his thumb had been successful so far.

Carrying the pork, he furtively entered the house of the widow, Wang Laosan. The two of them had ganged up since the beginning of the "Cultural Revolution". But later there had been a notice saying that persons with her record were not allowed to take part in the political movements. She lived in seclusion, expecting people like Zheng to drop in from time to time. Seeing him with the pork, she was overjoyed. Having settled him in a chair, she was about to prepare lunch. But Zheng stopped her. "I'm too busy," he explained. "I'll just pop out for a minute."

"I know what you're up to. Your ex-wife's here at the market today, right?"

"Is she?" he feigned surprise.

"Yes. I saw her just now when I was buying food."

At that, Zheng said hastily, "Then do me a favour. I want to talk to her and I'm going to bring her here."

Not willing to offer her room, she demanded, "Why can't you talk in the street?"

"Don't be jealous," Zheng soothed her. "Do you think I'm still in love with her? Not a chance! We don't get on. But you see, now the work team has entered our village. I've no idea what it's up to. I'm afraid that if they take her side, she'll be after my blood. So I must win her over and shut her mouth first."

"You're a born charmer," the woman flirted. "You're handsome. You know how to flatter women. You're a real lady-killer..."

"Stop joking!" Zheng said seriously. "Now tidy your room, will you? I'll go right away."

"What about me then? Aren't I in your way?"

"When you see her coming, you'd better hide. I'll tell her that this is a cadre's home. I'll show you my gratitude afterwards, all right?"

"No!" She deliberately teased him.

Zheng pinched her cheek and hurried away.

The sun was overhead, it was nearly noon. Xiuyun was heading for the food store to borrow some money from Zhen.

The encounter with Zheng a moment before had disturbed her. However, she had regained her self-possession. There was no need to be afraid of him. Though still threatened by him, she would continue to fight whatever the outcome.

She pressed on, beads of perspiration on her forehead, but she did not bother to wipe them off. She did not want to be stopped by anyone. She only wanted to buy the joint, which was of vital importance to her. In a way, it might affect her whole life. She put her dreams aside and went into action. She knew what she was doing would help to make her father accept Jin again at his birthday celebration.

Suddenly she seemed to hear a familiar voice calling her in the distance, "Aunty!"

Perhaps it was a boy calling some relative. She paused for a second and then carried on.

"Aunty!" It was louder.

She looked around, but saw no one. "Am I dreaming?" She walked on, blaming herself.

But all of a sudden, a little hand gripped her.

"Aunty! I've been chasing you all the way. Didn't you hear me?"

It was Changsheng! Xiuyun was delighted. Caressing his hair, she asked, "What are you doing here?"

"The school's closed for the winter vacation."

"Did you come here alone? Where's Changxiu? Hasn't she come?"

"Yes! She's here too."

"Where?" Elated, she looked around trying to spot her.

"Over there! She's with daddy."

"So your dad's here too?"

"Yes. He took me to have my hair cut. Changxiu also had her hair cut. She looks prettier now."

"Let's go and find them. Are they still in the barber's?"

"No. They're at the market."

The boy guided his aunt to them, explaining how the three of them had come there early that morning. He had no idea why his father was so happy. He had cheerfully woken them up, telling them they were going to the market to sell firewood and have their hair cut. Then they would buy some salt, fresh vegetables and pork. He was going to give them a treat. It had taken them quite a long time to sell the firewood for a little over six yuan. After that, they went straight to the barber's and then shopping. Jin had suddenly spotted some second-hand book stalls and went to look at them. The books were mostly thick, old and soiled with titles like *Soil Science*, *Hydraulic Engineering*, *Biology* and so on. Engrossed, he finally bought a few of them, forgetting the food.

"Sis and I were very upset," complained Changsheng frankly. "Daddy spent all the money on books. He told us, 'I'll collect more firewood, and we can come back again to buy pork!' I said, 'All right, we'd better bring more next time.' But Changxiu wouldn't listen. She cried, pestering dad to buy meat. We haven't had any meat for half a year! Father and I can manage, but Changxiu's too young to understand."

Xiuyun's heart ached! Wiping away a tear, she asked, "What's to be done then?"

"You can't imagine how dad loves Changxiu," the boy continued. "When she howled so much he gave in and said, 'All right, we'll buy it now. We'll buy two cattie's of pork.' He took off his sweater and put it on the basket to sell it. I said, 'Don't do that! It's cold.' But he smiled and said, 'No. Winter'll soon end. It'll be warm when spring comes.'"

Xiuyun could not bear any more. She took the boy's hand and quickly made for the stalls selling second-hand goods.

When she looked in the direction Changsheng pointed, she saw her brother-in-law standing on the kerb. Changxiu was leaning against him. Beside a shoulder pole against a wall was a basket over which was spread a brown sweater.

Jin, in a cotton-padded coat that was worn at the shoulders, stood amongst the shabbily-clad peasants, waiting for someone to help him out of his predicament. How sad! The scene at Lian-



Xiuyun grasped Changxiu's hands tightly. Jin felt uneasy, but said nothing.

yunchang in the seventies reminded one of the forties. Jin remembered clearly how, when he was Changsheng's age, his father had sold their only quilt at the same place. History repeating itself made people think. The difference was that the peasants thirty years before had looked downtrodden and ill. Despite his difficulties, Jin looked healthy and had an air of self-confidence.

Standing in the middle of the street for a few minutes, Xiuyun tried to quieten her pounding heart and hold back her tears. She became calm at last. With a tremendous effort, she tried to appear natural and fix a smile on her face, hoping that she did not seem shy. She boldly went towards Jin and called, "Dongshui!"

Changxiu, the little girl, was at first stunned. Realizing what had happened, she threw herself into Xiuyun's arms.

Jin felt uneasy seeing her there, though he showed no sign of it. But he blamed his son inwardly, "What an idiot! Why on earth bring her here?"

With her innocent eyes, Xiuyun gazed at him almost shamelessly. She did not know herself how she had mustered such courage. There was a brief moment of silence. Then she took up the sweater and looked at it. She remembered that she had knitted it ten years before when her eldest sister had bought the wool.

"Why sell it? Better keep it," she said in an authoritative tone. She put the sweater on top of the books in the basket and asked Changsheng to carry it. With one hand carrying her bundle and another holding Changxiu's hand, she urged Jin, "Let's go!" "Where to?" the boy asked curiously.

For a moment, she did not know what to say. How could she say that she had got the money for two catties of pork? That would hurt Jin's pride. After all, they were not husband and wife.

With a charming smile, she said, "Home, of course!" But as soon as she said that, she realized it was a blunder. Home? Yes, they had somewhere to go but nowhere you could call home.

"Xiuyun," Jin said, not knowing that his son had already put her in the picture, "you go ahead first. I've still got something to do here." He did not want to mention buying food.

Seeing his hesitation, she was swept again by a wave of grief.

A strong man with ideals ground down by such problems! Yet she could do nothing to help him. What was to be done?

Just then, Zheng Bairu, who had been searching everywhere for Xiuyun, came up to them.

He looked indignant. He had never thought that he would find them together openly at the market! His lips were twisted with pain, showing his agony. His eyes, however, gleamed craftily.

It all happened so suddenly. Jin felt embarrassed. He did not know how to explain to Zheng, or to the villagers later, what had really occurred. However, he stepped forward and asked Zheng confidently, "Are you looking for me?"

Zheng shook his head in contempt, as if he had caught them doing something immoral.

As Zheng was victoriously about to say something nasty, Xiuyun stepped forward to Jin and said in a relaxed tone, "We must hurry! What are you standing about here for?"

Jin shot her a questioning glance and noticed that she was composed, her eyes like two pools of calm water.

Jin wanted to say something, but thought better of it.

"Let's go and buy some pork for the children first!" she said.

Zheng gritted his teeth, gazing at their receding figures, his eyes narrowed to slits.

"Shit! So it's him! Well, Jin Dongshui, let's see who laughs last. You want to topple me through her? Not a chance!"

With these thoughts, Zheng left the market. Instead of going back to his lover, he headed for Gourd Plain Village in a great hurry. He must take action right away!

Chapter VI Love and Hate

Along the riverside to the west of the plain there was a stretch of higher land with spongy, dark brown soil, which produced the best crops in the area. The wheat looked green and sturdy. In between the patches of wheat, there were squares of yellow, pink and purple blossoms. The whole looked like a chess-board.

The pink were pea blossoms, which had just opened, like young girls looking up from their sleep at the winter sun. The purple were bean blossoms, buried deep among dark green leaves, coyly spreading their petals. The yellow was rape with tiny flowers that gave off a sweet scent in the chilly wind.

It seemed strange to see such a riot of colour in the bleak plain. Like a jewel, it attracted all the peasants.

This was the experimental plot of Wu Changquan's scientific group.

That day, Qin accompanied Yan and Qi to inspect it. She was elated, her heart beat fast.

To this simple, honest country girl, there was no need to have a long courtship. What was there to talk about? Having considered carefully what she knew and had heard about Wu, she could easily decide. She was not as sentimental as some educated city girls, nor as ignorant about her future husband as her mother's generation. One word could settle a girl's future.

Qin did not know when she first decided that she must find a mate, who would share her views, willingly listen to her and work with her in improving life in the countryside. In this respect, she was different from her sisters. She wanted her husband to be her equal. Xiuyun, for instance, was innocent and kind-hearted, and had vague ideas that her duty was to be a good wife, a devoted mother. Zhen preferred a man a little weaker than herself, whom she could twist round her little finger. Qiuyun's love and hatred surfaced only after her marriage. She loved her husband for his honesty, but hated him for his weakness. Qin had been born after Liberation. Her idea of family life was different. She loved those who worked hard for the people. As a secretary of the Youth League branch, she was often disgusted by family quarrels over trivial things like a jacket, a pair of socks or a few cents.

Her love had become stronger after her talk with Wu's mother. It was like a rising river in spring. The self-effacing, young pragmatist with his tall figure, broad shoulders, handsome face, slight frown and dishevelled hair . . . had found a place in her heart. Whenever she thought of him, her cheeks burned, her heart pounded.

However, she tried hard to control her passion. One thing troubled her: Was it correct for a Youth League branch secretary to fall in love at this time?

Soon, Wu, standing beside her, was answering Yan's questions about his experiments.

Talking about farming loosened the tongue of this inarticulate, rather curt young man. He always tried his best to convince his listeners that only science could enrich the peasants' lives and facilitate construction. But Qi interrupted him from time to time, saying that he did not pay enough attention to politics.

"What's the use of good crops if the struggle between the two political lines has not been settled?"

Ignoring him, Wu continued excitedly, "This is a new strain I got from the Provincial Agricultural Research Institute. I wrote asking them for it. Look, it's different from other wheat. The stalk's short and sturdy. It's immune to rust or powdery mildew. It's terrific! Wheat rust alone wipes out thirty per cent of the total crop in our area. Now, over there is a strain which ripens early. It's good for intercropping."

Qi grew impatient, irritated that nobody took any notice of him. So he turned to Qin intending to give her a few tips about Youth League work.

Qin stood to one side. She was trying hard to calm her confused mind so that she could follow their conversation. However, she was unable to concentrate. Wu's strength and deep voice kept distracting her. She was so in love with him that her cheeks grew pink, her eyes gleamed with happiness. Qi was stunned by her beauty when he turned to look at her. For the first time in his life, he was attracted to a girl. He was speechless.

Qi shook himself awake from his short trance. This was dangerous, he warned himself. He remembered clearly the warning in the newspaper: "To indulge in love is something bourgeois. It can disarm a revolutionary. . . ."

In this respect, Qin and Qi shared the same view. The moment she noticed Qi looking at her, she became calm, and forced a stern expression on her face. Seeing her glance, Qi asked brusquely, "How many members are there in your branch?"

"Twenty-one."

"How many people are eligible to join?"

"Around eighty."

"How are you getting on with your studies and criticism of *Outlaws of the Marsh*?"*

"Not too well, I'm afraid. We haven't a copy of the book. No one's read it, so how can we criticize it?"

"That doesn't matter. There are articles about it in the newspapers. You can always get ideas from them. Just do your work. How many articles did you write criticizing Confucius and Lin Biao last year?"

"I don't remember."

"On average? A rough figure?"

"About. . . ."

Distracted again, Qin looked away. Wu and Yan had left the wheat patch for the tapestried pea plot.

"Well? You don't remember? Is there any record?" Qi asked.

"I beg your pardon, what were you saying?" Qin asked flustered.

Now Qi was put off his stride. "Well, er, how many. . . how many members are there in your branch?"

Qin sobered up and said smilingly, "Twenty-one. I just told you!"

"Hm. . . ."

For the first time Qi blushed scarlet before a girl.

Qin was no fool and knew what this meant. She quickly left him to catch up with the other two. Qi gazed blankly at her back.

Yan, waving her hand, called over Qin and Qi.

"How about asking Changquan to give us a lecture?" she said when the two were nearer. She addressed him as Changquan, like a close friend.

Wu felt at ease talking to her; even his melancholy eyes lit up. When happy, his swarthy, drawn face became handsome, which careless people never noticed usually.

He picked a flower with two fingers and opened the petals to show it to Yan, saying, "This plant can stand frost and is drought-

* An epic classical novel about a 12th-century peasant uprising.

resistant. It grows well even in poor soil and helps to make the soil more fertile. The seeds have a high portion of protein and starch. But for the time being, the yield's still not very high."

"How can you raise the yield?" Yan asked.

"We're experimenting."

"Any results?"

"Not yet."

Pointing at the two patches, Yan continued, "Take this one for instance, what would be the yield per *mu*?"

As Wu was about to answer, Yan stopped him and, turning to Qi, asked, "Now you guess, Qi."

He in fact knew nothing about farming. Bored by their talking shop, he had been day-dreaming. He flushed.

Seeing his dilemma, Yan turned to Qin, "What do you think?"

After a brief calculation, she replied, "Generally speaking, one *mu* of land can yield more than a hundred catties of peas. With this plot, it's probably more than two hundred."

To cover his embarrassment, Qi chimed in, taking up Qin's cue, "More than that I should say. A pea is much larger than a grain of wheat. If one *mu* of wheat can yield several hundred catties, then one *mu* of peas can produce more than a thousand catties, can't it?"

Yan burst out laughing, while Qin smothered a giggle with her hand.

Wu gaped, staring at Qi. He had never thought Qi could be so stupid.

Realizing he had blundered, Qi tried to brazen it out, demanding, "What's so funny?"

"Don't be fooled by the flowers," Wu explained. "Most of them won't be pollinated, so the yield will be pretty low."

"Why?" Qin asked, puzzled.

"These flowers are called pre-frost flowers, most of which will not bear peas. The seeds were sown too early."

Then Wu stepped forward and, pointing to another two strips, said, "Look at those. They have no blossoms yet, but they're bound to give a high yield. When they are in bloom, one flower means one pod." He walked further leaving the others behind

bewildered. "We're experimenting to find out the best sowing time from these nine patches."

"Good," Yan said, nodding in approval, "it's worth doing."

Qin uttered a slight sound of astonishment. She felt ashamed of her ignorance. Lowering her eyes, she looked unhappy, wondering miserably, "Am I... I good enough for him? Could he love an ignorant person like me?"

Qi was also looking very serious. With his hands behind his back, he snapped his fingers loudly, thinking to himself, "Pity! Qin's a peasant. If only she was a state cadre. An eligible girl..."

2

With all the noise left behind, Xiuyun felt as if there were only the four of them in the world.

The bundle under her arm, she took Changxiu by the hand. Changsheng walked beside her, and Jin brought up the rear. It looked as if the outcasts of Gourd Plain Village would one day establish a home of their own. With Xiuyun at the head, they walked on. She showed no sign of shyness or fear. Her pale face had a tinge of colour.

The General Food Store was closed. Not a soul was at the gate, except for a few stray dogs sniffing about. Xiuyun halted, staring at the shutters in disappointment.

Jin, following Xiuyun, was in a dilemma. Her sudden appearance had surprised him, but her behaviour puzzled him even more. It had all happened so fast that he was thrown off balance. "Why are you asking for trouble, Xiuyun?" he wondered. "Haven't you suffered enough from those slanders in the past? Aren't you afraid?"

Jin had had more worries and anxieties than Xiuyun. Though living in a small thatched shed with his children, he had thought a great deal about the terrible situation in the village and the future of the Party and the state. He was burning with anxiety. Night after night, he lay awake. He missed those days when he and others had worked to improve life in the countryside; he still believed in his plans for the village.

When Changxiu called out for her mother in her sleep, he could not help missing his wife. However, he knew that society came before his own life. At a time when the Party and the state were in such difficulties, there could be no personal happiness for him. He tried to put all his sufferings behind him and ruthlessly suppress his own desires. He buried himself in his dreams of the future. He was sure that one day his plans would be useful. He never gave any thought to women. Could anyone replace his wife? No, of course not!

Though a Communist, Jin was stubborn like all peasants. He would have nothing to do with women, if that would avoid sparking off rumours, which might harm him and his cause. When criticized for opposing Dazhai Brigade, he had not been afraid. But after his wife's death when Changxiu had gone to live with Xiuyun, there had been a lot of gossip about them, which had made Jin furious. As a result, he overlooked something important. Though he thought of everything in the village, he never gave any thought to Xiuyun's feelings or her future. He never realized that he should be concerned about her too. Her problem was a social problem, her life epitomized the society.

Since he did not see it that way, he was nonplussed by Xiuyun's boldness.

Xiuyun turned to Changsheng and said, intending Jin to hear her, "What a shame! It's closed early!"

She felt sorry, both her face and words showed her embarrassment. She tried to steal a glance at Jin but only met his cold, evasive gaze.

Collecting himself, Jin tried to control his emotions as he took Changxiu's hand and said, "Let's go home, dear. It's late."

The girl wrenched herself away from him and tightly hugged Xiuyun. With her face turned away from her father, she protested, "No! I'll go with aunty to buy pork."

Her brother tried to persuade her, "The butcher's closed. We'll come back again in a couple of days."

"No, no. . . ." She clutched Xiuyun tightly.

Jin felt put on the spot. However, he found a way to mollify

her. Squatting down, he coaxed, "Now, be a good girl. I'll catch a big fish for you when we're home."

"But dad," Changsheng broke in innocently, "it's too cold!"

"Nonsense!" Jin replied. "I'm not afraid of cold! I'll get Changxiu a large, plump silver carp. It's delicious!"

But the little girl ignored him, hiding herself behind Xiuyun's bundle.

Xiuyun pleaded, "They're hungry. There's a restaurant over there. Let's. . ."

But she blushed at the word "Let's". Before she could continue, Jin, exasperated, roughly lifted Changxiu by her arm and carried her away without even saying good-bye to Xiuyun. What a harsh man!

Changsheng hesitated for a moment and then reluctantly followed his father, but kept looking back at his aunt.

Changxiu had been taken by surprise. Then she wailed and waved her arms about, screaming, "Aunty, aunty! I want my aunty!"

Xiuyun stood motionless, biting her lips. Even after Jin and his children had disappeared, Xiuyun could still hear Changxiu's cries. She broke down, buried her head in her hands and wept. Humiliation and disappointment overwhelmed her. What a wretched life!

The sun was bright and warm at noon, but Xiuyun was in no mood to enjoy it. Soon the peasants dispersed leaving the market deserted and quiet. A cloud covered the sun. A northerly wind began blowing, tossing up bits of straw and paper from the street.

Xiuyun calmed herself, wiped her face clean and headed for the village. She walked quickly, passing many peasants going home, men shouldering their loads and women carrying their baskets. She hurried over a solitary loess hill ridge, almost running down the slope. Very soon, the bridge spanning Willow River was in sight. She paused by a big tree, gazing across the river at the patchwork of fields in the distance. But she could see no more of Jin and his children, for a clump of grey mulberry trees on the river bank blocked her view. Changxiu's crying had also faded

away. Suddenly, she felt defeated and tired, as though something vital had been lost for ever.

3

Xu Mao had never felt so washed out. His lank frame was a little stooped. With his basket on his back, he dragged himself along, looking old and haggard. When he reached home, there was no smoke curling up from the kitchen chimney. Qin and Yan were not back. Xiuyun's hut seemed also deserted. He heaved a long sigh and, having put down his load, plonked down on the cold stone step.

The cottage was empty. The washing Xiuyun had hung out on the trees to dry was lying scattered on the ground. Hens were huddled together dozing off in the areas of sunlight. The brown dog lay on the ground, gazing at the sky. The grunts of the hungry pigs in the pigsty made the courtyard even more lonely.

No magnolia blooms, no apricot blossoms. Only a few red leaves fluttering on the branches of the pear trees. The canna looked old and weary. The courtyard was overshadowed by cypress trees. Only winter plums were flowering, a sign of spring approaching. But winter seemed reluctant to leave. For the first time, Xu Mao, who had always been proud of his spacious, quiet cottage, found everything dull and lifeless.

He neither swept the ground strewn with fallen leaves and hens' droppings, nor took out his wallet to count his money, as he always did on market day. He was too exhausted. Troubles lay ahead. Frustrated and lonely, humiliated and insulted, his mind went numb.

Xu Mao had learned a few tricks at the market. This was not the first time he had made a profit by trickery. But he had never imagined anyone like the young man who had walked off with his oil without paying a cent! "Big fish swallows small fish; small fish eats shrimps." Had the old days come back again?

It was awful, remembering the pleading look of that poor woman who had been desperate to buy medicine for her sick child. Xu Mao had been in similar situations himself before, but he had for-

gotten all about them. Yet he had taken advantage of her plight. She was a fellow peasant! How had he stooped so low, he who had once been a team leader during the cooperative movement?

These awful scenes and cries kept flashing into his mind. It was too much for him. His head swam, his throat was dry. He felt too weak to stand up. Then he was seized by a fit of coughing, which racked him. His shoulders slumped even more.

But that was not all.

Long Qing appeared, his eyes red and swollen. Unable to see Xu Mao's expression, he said cheerfully, "Well, have you been to the market today?"

Xu grunted a reply, shifting his position. Then he asked woodenly, "Looking for Yan?"

Long shook his head and, pulling over a bench, sat down. He had come specially to see Xu Mao. He said with a smile, which looked more like a grimace of pain, "What a quiet place this is! Qin's still. . ."

"Not back yet, the little chit!"

"Qin's probably having lunch at Changquan's home. She showed Yan round his experimental plot. Now they are going to see Jin Dongshui."

With a grim look, Xu Mao wondered why he had come.

"Changquan's a fine young man!" Long had a very favourable opinion of him. "After leaving school, he's devoted himself to farming and spent a lot of time on research projects. He's also a good book-keeper. All his accounts are neat and clear. Not one slip." He paused, made an effort to raise his eyes to see Xu Mao's response and then continued, "He's got gumption. He's honest and brave. A promising boy, really."

But Xu Mao did not have a very high opinion of him. To him, Wu was stupid to be so devoted to the collective. He was not the man to build up the family fortunes. Xu Mao did not care a fig whether or not he was promising. He was too preoccupied with his own worries!

"Well, what do you think of him?" Long asked point-blank.

Xu Mao shook his head. Suddenly he realized what Long was

driving at. A father of nine daughters, he had had a lot of experience dealing with match-makers. They would first sing the praises of the young men and then tell him how well-off their families were. Xu Mao was on his guard.

"Qin's a good girl too," Long went on. "Wu's mother has for a long time. . . ."

Staring at him, Xu Mao asked, "What?"

"Aunt Jin has only one son. She wants to find him a good wife."

Xu Mao shook his head and looked away signifying there was nothing more to be said on the subject.

"Nowadays, of course, such things should not be arranged by parents or outsiders. Young people fall in love before you realize it."

"Oh?" Xu Mao turned back to him, in surprise and indignation.

Unaware of this, Long continued, "That's how it is now. But parents ought to show their concern. It's a lot better to court openly. Well, Qin's still young, only twenty, isn't she?"

Xu Mao went pale, his beard trembling. He was certain that Wu and Qin were having a secret affair. Or else why should Long talk like that?

A clever man, Xu Mao had long ago planned Qin's future. He would never part with her. Instead, he would find a husband who would live with them. But he would not accept a fool like Wu, who did not know how to run a home. He was sure that such a son-in-law would easily part with all their wealth for the sake of others.

Now what he had dreaded had happened, and he was the last to know.

Having acted as Aunt Jin's ambassador, Long rose to go.

Instead of seeing him off, Xu Mao stood there angrily.

Shortly after Long had left, Qiuyun's ten-year-old son entered. Dressed in a short cotton-padded coat, his nose running, he called out cheerfully, "Grandpa!" Then he told Xu Mao about the chickens and invited him to lunch.

"No! No!" The glum old man refused. His look frightened the child. Guessing something must be wrong, he backed away and, whirling round ran out. Before long, Qiuyun hurried in. As soon

as she entered the gate, she fired at him, "Father, what is it? Did we offend you? Are we too poor? We can still afford to treat you to a meal once in a while." Xu Mao was cornered. It seemed that he had no choice but to go.

Qiuyun came forward and leaning closer to him said in a loud but serious voice, "Listen, do you think I'm only inviting you for lunch? There's nothing special about chicken. But I've something to talk over with you! Xiuyun's. . . . Oh, come on. Hurry up! Zheng Bairu's waiting for you in our house."

"Oh?" The startled old man was pushed and dragged out of the gate.

4

Zheng Bairu had left the market and hurried straight back to his elder half-sister's home. They had had the same mother but different fathers. A buxom woman of forty, Zheng Baixiang was nicknamed "Fatty". She was also a vicious gossip. Though her husband was an honest and talented primary school teacher, he could do nothing to change her. One rumour could smear or ruin a person's reputation. In such troubled times, people did their best to steer clear of her. She was so notorious that even her brother, after being made a cadre, kept his distance.

But now he was forced to turn to her for help.

Her room was dirty and untidy, and a pungent, mouldy smell filled it. Her husband came home only once a week, so apart from him, nobody swept the floor, which was filthy. Though she was smartly dressed, she was bursting out of her satin-covered, cotton-padded jacket. She was wearing perfume. But all her children's clothes were worn to rags. They looked like beggars. Covering his nose with a handkerchief, Zheng bluntly told her two pieces of news and asked her to spread them as quickly as possible. With that, he hurried to Luo's.

If nobody liked gossiping, life would be a lot easier. Unfortunately, it isn't like that. Zheng Baixiang, pretending to stitch up a shoe sole, waited at the entrance to the village. Within minutes, she had passed on a juicy bit of gossip to those returning

from the market or from gathering firewood in the fields. She also dropped in at some homes to pass on the news to the women busy preparing the meals. At least a dozen people were staggered by what she told them.

"Ah-ah-ah!"

"Goodness! Can that really be true?"

Curiosity dulled their usual sharpness and scepticism. They did not doubt a word. Very soon the rumour had got around. Of course, there were all kinds of reasons for this. Some people were concerned about Jin Dongshui and Xiuyun; some wanted to save Xu Mao's reputation; others merely wanted to show that they were in the know. All were anxious to pass it on to their relatives and friends.

"Haven't you heard? Something fishy was going on at the Xus. Jin sneaked into Xiuyun's room three nights ago!"

"Didn't you see Jin and Xiuyun at the market this morning? Guess when the affair started? There's been talk about them for two years!"

"What a nice little story! Surely Xu Mao won't allow his daughter to carry on with a man under his own roof."

"Xiuyun's the limit! Old Xu values his reputation. What a pity!"

"What did Zheng Bairu say? Heard anything?"

By the time Xu Mao was pulled into Qiuyun's house and made to sit down at the table, lunch was ready. Zheng Bairu rose to greet him and said with great respect, "Father!"

Xu Mao felt terribly embarrassed, not only because Zheng had addressed him in a way which was not really appropriate now, but also because he had been rescued by him earlier. He mumbled a reply.

As both guests were silent, the atmosphere was tense. The children, though hungry, dared not start.

"Zuhua's not back from the market yet," Qiuyun explained. "But no need to wait for him. Help yourselves!"

"Keep some chicken for my brother," Zheng said casually, as if he had been on good terms with them all along. A moment ago, finding Luo out and fearing Qiuyun, he had been fidgeting about,

not knowing how to deal with her. But to his surprise, she had been very friendly and even invited him to stay for lunch.

"Oh, there's plenty," Qiuyun urged them. "Don't be polite. Help yourselves!" With this, she picked out the boneless pieces with chopsticks and put them on her father's plate.

Zheng also served Xu Mao. Like Qiuyun, he gave him a drumstick.

The children were well-behaved, eating and laughing. But they were too young to understand what the death of chickens meant to such a poor family. On the contrary, they felt fortunate to have something nice to eat. Everyone began to enjoy himself. Xu Mao found the cheap but potent sweet potato spirit delicious. Having downed a few cups, he relaxed, his vision somewhat blurred. In this state, he was vulnerable to flattery.

"Father, I've got something to discuss with you," Qiuyun began. "I ought to have told you earlier, but I've been very busy lately. Luckily Zheng Bairu's here today. We'll put all our cards on the table." Turning to Zheng, she urged him, "Now you speak what's on your mind."

Zheng, hoping to talk to Luo, had been uneasy when Xu Mao appeared. Now he was delighted. However, he pretended to be sorry, his face slightly red, darting a glance at Xu Mao from time to time. After a brief moment of silence, he said in a husky voice, "Father, I was a fool to act so stupidly. It's all my fault. I regret it very much. Please, forgive me. I hope you will encourage Xiuyun to make it up with me. If our marriage can be mended, I'll take all the blame."

He stopped. Qiuyun queried, "Yes? Is that all?"

"Yes, that's all," Zheng replied humbly. "I would have said all this to father earlier but. . ."

"But what?" Qiuyun pressed.

"I was worried father wouldn't forgive me."

Qiuyun's face brightened up. She looked at Xu Mao expecting him to say something. But he was silent, his eyes shut. She turned again to Zheng and stressed, "Nobody forced you to say anything. You mustn't go back on your words later."

Zheng nodded obediently.

Pleased with herself, she continued, "We Xus have guts. We never flatter anyone. Now you've come and admitted your faults, that's fine. But you must give us your word. We'll not let you get away with it if you dare bully Xiuyun again!"

Zheng nodded.

Self-righteously, she went on lecturing him, "Ask yourself, what did Xiuyun ever do to hurt you? What did she do wrong? She had a baby, but it died. You can't blame her for that?"

Zheng kept nodding.

Elated, she asked Xu Mao, "Father, is there any chance of a reconciliation? What's your opinion?"

Xu Mao was touched by Zheng's attitude and words. He had no objections, but found it hard to speak. Blinking his bleary eyes, he first glanced at his daughter then at Zheng. But he said nothing, and again silence reigned.

Qiuyun anxiously snapped, "Heavens! What do you think? It's up to you. As for Xiuyun, I'll talk it over with her. In fact, I mentioned it to her a couple of days ago. This morning, Zuhua sent word to the man in the Ergu Mountains to call off their marriage. This was also Xiuyun's wish."

The old man opened his mouth at last, "It's up to you. I wash my hands of it."

At this, Qiuyun lost her temper. "Father!" she bellowed. "How can you say that? Mother's dead. How can you wash your hands of an important matter like your daughter's marriage?"

Zheng's fears were calmed. He was sure that Xu Mao supported him. Now there was only Xiuyun. But he had already thought of that. According to his calculations, once the rumours reached the ears of Xu Mao and Qiuyun, they would throw Xiuyun out of the house. Then he would act.

In the course of this conversation, the children finished the chicken, so there was nothing left to eat with the rice. Rather embarrassed, Qiuyun scolded them, "You're too greedy, aren't you?"

Zheng, thinking there was no point in remaining, was about to leave.

As luck would have it, Luo walked in at that moment, agitated

and carrying two hens. He was so disturbed that he forgot to greet his father-in-law and Zheng, nor did he speak a word to his wife. He stood there dumbly.

"What's got into you?" Qiuyun snapped. "Have you seen a ghost?"

Luo always showed his feelings. Moved to tears by Xiuyun's generosity in giving him money to buy hens, he had cheerfully walked to the market, deciding to tell his children never to forget their aunt's kindness. At the market, after a long time of hesitating, selecting and bargaining, he finally bought two young hens. He also happened to meet a friend from the Ergu Mountains and asked him to inform the widower not to come to Xu Mao's birthday party. Surely he would understand that meant the marriage was off.

Near his home, a woman with a bundle of firewood stopped him. "Zuhua!" she called nervously. "It's a scandal! I just heard that something funny was going on at the Xus. Three nights ago, Jin. . . Jin Dongshui sneaked into Xiuyun's room. It can't be true, can it? They know all the disgusting details."

Luo was shocked. He felt the world spinning round. Dizzily, he stumbled home.

Zheng stood up to take his arm, asking, "What's wrong? Are you all right?"

"Get a grip on yourself!" Qiuyun commanded curtly. "It makes me sick to look at you."

"Now, now! Relax!" Xu Mao tried to calm him. He reckoned that Luo, a simple character, who seldom went to the market, must have been frightened by a thief trying to steal his wallet.

Zheng helped him on to a low stool, while Qiuyun poured him half a bowl of hot water. Then she felt his forehead and demanded, "What is it? Hurry up!"

"They. . . ." He gulped the water and, looking up, blurted out, "Everybody's talking about it. They say. . . ." He stole a glance at Xu Mao and went on, "It was three nights ago. . . . Something went wrong, very wrong."

At this, the old man's heart missed a beat.

Zheng understood at once, his eyes gleamed with hardly dis-

cernible delight.

Anxious to get to the bottom of the matter, Qiuyun shook her husband's shoulder demanding impatiently, "What's the matter? All this stammering and faltering? Blast!"

"How can it be true? It can't be true!" Luo cried out, but nobody except Zheng was able to make head or tail of it. Then he repeated what the woman had told him. Immediately Qiuyun saw red. Rolling up her sleeves as if preparing for a fight, she cursed, "Hell! Which bastard started this muck-raking? Who said it? I'll go and beat the shit out of him." So saying, she charged towards the door.

"Father! What's...?" Zheng suddenly cried out.

Qiuyun, who was already out of the door, turned and found her father was as white as a sheet, his eyes glazed. Running to him, she cried out, "Father! You..."

Xu Mao raised his clenched fist, banged it on the table and then collapsed.

The room was in a turmoil. After some time, he came to. They settled him in a rickety chair, and gradually his breathing became even again. His lips were trembling, but he said nothing. At last, with a groan, he struggled to get up to go. But the others would not let him and forced him back down again.

His collapse confirmed the scandal.

Qiuyun seemed less sure of herself. "Father!" she asked in an angry tone. "Is it true? Xiuyun... and Jin...?"

Of course, Xu Mao knew about the "thief incident". Despite his efforts to hush it up, it had leaked out. But he had never imagined that his eldest son-in-law was to blame!

"Oh, God! What have I ever done to deserve this?" he burst out all of a sudden. This dispelled all doubts.

"So that's it!" Qiuyun's wrath was now focused on Xiuyun. "Shameless bitch!" she cursed inwardly. "Honest indeed! The reputation of us Xus has gone to the dogs!"

Zheng sighed too, showing his surprise and pity. But he said, "You can't blame Xiuyun. Surely I know her well? Blame Jin Dongshui. I can hardly bear to talk about him. Only this morning, I saw him with her at the market."

"Really? This morning?" Qiuyun and Luo asked in unison.

"Yes," Zheng replied and, lowering his head, continued, "I'm partly to blame. It wouldn't have happened if I hadn't divorced her in the first place."

Luo, more sober, was so affected that he was close to tears. About to say something to Zheng, he was suddenly shocked at the sight of Xiuyun approaching their house.

Miserably, Xiuyun had crossed the small bridge and headed for home along the river. Suddenly she remembered that Qiuyun and Luo had invited her to lunch. Since Qiuyun was easily ruffled she thought she would be upset if she did not keep her promise. Besides, it was rather lonely, spending the rest of the day in her hut. So she took a shortcut to their home through the field.

She first saw Luo's astonished stare and then Qiuyun's indignant glare. Her father shifted himself a little and turned away. Finally she met the icy gaze of Zheng!

"What on earth is all this about?" Xiuyun halted, surprised. "Has everybody turned against me?" These years, she had experienced all kinds of snubs and unhappiness. But she had never before been in such a situation. Her heart broke! Clenching her teeth, she fought back her tears and turned to go.

Zheng hurried out and called, "Xiuyun! Just a minute!"

His voice sent a chill down her spine. She quickened her steps, heading for home. Skirting the paddy-fields, she was almost running across the withered grass.

Zheng turned round and said solemnly to the angry but rather disconcerted onlookers, "Father, Qiuyun and Zuhua, please don't worry. Don't blame her. I don't. Whatever it takes, I'll mend our broken marriage. Please help me."

To their surprise, he sounded sincere and magnanimous.

Luo offered his hand to Zheng with an apologetic grin. Qiuyun sighed with relief that the scandal had not deterred him. If that were the case, Xiuyun would be a terrible burden to them.

Xu Mao scrutinized Zheng as if for the first time. He felt ashamed to think he had distrusted such a fine son-in-law.

What a fool he had been!

Then they sat down to eat again. Both the adults and children

were hungry. But Xu Mao had lost his appetite. It had all been too much for him. As for the future, he was not as optimistic as the Luos.

Chapter IX Late at Night

Lying in Xiuyun's bed, Zhen felt as exhausted as if she had not an ounce of strength left in her body. The sound of her father's coughing made her start.

Nobody had bothered to prepare supper. Qin had returned for a minute and hurriedly left with Yan again. Running here and there, they seemed like ants on a hot pan. And Xiuyun had not yet shown up. The large courtyard was as silent as a graveyard. Zhen decided to go back to her store the following day.

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The dog's sudden barking sent shivers down Zhen's spine. Pulling the quilt over her head, she cursed, "Blast! Who the devil is it? Coming at this time of the night! Hope the dog bites you!" Curling up in the warm bed, she did not bother to investigate who it was.

It was Zheng Bairu.

The Xus, except Xiuyun, had become friendly again to Zheng. Xu Mao and the Luos found him kinder. However, the brown dog had never liked him. As always, it growled ferociously barring his way.

Zheng had to hold it off with his bare hands. Gradually he skirted the trees, moving cautiously towards the little hut.

Zheng was a gambler! To him, the whole world was a gambling-den. Even joining the Party was a game. Like all gamblers, he worried that he would one day lose everything, even when he was winning. He was haunted by such fears. Since the arrival of the work team, he had not had a peaceful night. Through fair or foul means he had won Qi's trust and seemed to hold all the cards. Yet he was fully aware that the stakes were high. Though his many criminal acts were unknown, he could never deceive Xiuyun. He was not worried about his petty crimes, but the major ones, like setting fire to Jin Dongshui's home. Though no one had suspected him, there was the fear that Xiuyun knew the truth.

This nagged at him constantly. That evening after he had returned from a mass meeting, he had bumped into a close friend, who worked in the commune headquarters. The nervous man gave him the unexpected news that, at the work team leader's suggestion, the district Party committee had decided to criticize Zheng. The man warned him to brazen it out.

"They're pretty quick!" He frowned as he pictured Yan's genial, calm face. She had moved so fast even a crafty man like Zheng had been outsmarted.

"Ruthless bitch!" he swore. "Stabbing me in the back!"

However, he was nothing if not an experienced gambler. He considered the situation carefully, certain he was above suspicion. Xiuyun was the only stumbling-block. So far his plan to effect a reconciliation with her had gone well. As long as he could silence her, he could cope. What a headache!

"What a bloody fool I was to divorce her!" he cursed himself as he made his way through the night rain. "I wouldn't have been in such a fix!" Thinking of his lover, who was visibly pregnant and who had pressed him to marry her the previous month, he became more irritable. Such lapses, however, would not land him in jail. No, Xiuyun was the greatest threat to him.

Xu Mao's dog was very fierce. Zheng retreated. Once he reached the little hut, the dog drew back. Zheng jumped on to the step in front of the hut and gave the door a light push. It swung open, so he slipped in and closed it behind him. Inside was pitch dark.

Hearing someone enter and grope his way towards the bed, Zhen trembled, too petrified to utter a sound.

Mistaking Zhen for Xiuyun, Zheng went down on his knees.

"Are you awake, Xiuyun!" he whispered. "Xiuyun! Don't you recognize my voice? . . . I'm waiting for your reply. It's been days. Xiuyun talked to you, didn't she? And Comrade Qi backs it. Xiuyun, it was all my fault. Try to forget the past. From now on, I promise. . . ."

Recognizing Zheng's voice, Zhen, holding her breath, grew calmer. If she remained still and silent, Zheng would keep on pestering her. Yet she could not move since she had only her

underwear on. She was in a terrible quandary.

Zheng pleaded, "I hear the gossip about you and Jin Dongshui has upset you a lot. I don't believe a word of it. Even if you were carried away for a moment, I wouldn't blame you."

"Heavens! What did he mean?" Zhen was bewildered.

"Forgive me, Xiuyun, I beg you. I'm on my knees. If you won't, I'll remain here like this."

Before Zheng had entered the courtyard, Xu Mao, lying in his bed, had heard his dog barking. Then it stopped. He was certain someone was prowling around. But who could it be? There was not a sound outside. A thief? He knew that Qin was not yet back. To show there was someone at home, he called out, "Qin, who's there?"

It was so weak that it did not seem like his own voice. Hearing no response, he clambered down from the bed. He threw a coat over his shoulders, put on his slippers, grabbed a shoulder pole and went outside. Standing on the high step, he listened hard.

But there was only the sound of water dripping from the eaves. After a while, there suddenly came a piercing scream from the little hut. It was Zhen!

Startled, he jumped down and dashed there.

Zheng, having pleaded for some time in vain, had finally reached out to touch the quilt. Scared out of her wits, Zhen had shrieked.

But Zheng was still adamant, "I won't get up till you agree."

Xu Mao, horrified, barred the door of the hut. But suddenly he felt faint, his head whirled. Then he heard Zhen yell, "Get out!"

Only then did Zheng realize he was talking to Zhen. He rose to his feet astounded. Before he knew what had happened, the shoulder pole had crashed down on his back.

Just then, Xiuyun suddenly appeared, looking like a ghost, drenched to the skin, her hair hanging down over her shoulders.

2

"Clear out, the lot of you!" Xiuyun ordered.

Zhen, having dressed, struck a match and lit the lamp with a trembling hand. Xiuyun was deathly pale. She gathered her long

hair and wrung it out. Without looking at anyone, she snapped again, "Get out, all of you!"

It was not her usual voice.

Hesitatingly, Zheng slipped away.

Xu Mao stalked off, supported by his shoulder pole.

Zhen hugged Xiuyun and inquired in astonishment, "What's the matter with you?"

Still wringing out her wet hair, Xiuyun did not bother to answer, nor did she ask what had happened in her room. She had no interest in such things. She was frighteningly calm. Even her reputation did not worry her any more. She did not so much as glance at her sister.

Her strange behaviour frightened Zhen. Was this Xiuyun? Or a ghost? Very worried, she left and joined her father on the high step, staring at the hut.

When Zhen had left, Xiuyun banged the door shut and pushed a bench against it. She quickly peeled off her wet clothes, and combed her hair in front of the mirror; her black, soft, glossy hair, which she had loved as a small girl. Before she had married, she had worn it in two long pigtailed, which bounced jauntily on her back. But her girlhood had ended abruptly. Winding her hair into a bun, she had begun her long, sad life in Zheng's brick house.

It was difficult to put her wet hair into a bun, so she let it hang loose over her shoulders. Then she started. From a cupboard, she took out a bundle in which were a coat printed with red blossoms, a pair of green trousers, the sweets and noodles she had bought at the market.

As she was about to leave, she caught sight of the unfinished fur coat on her make-shift table. She sat down again to sew it by the kerosene lamp. Soon she had finished stitching up the collar and buttons. Then she folded and laid it neatly on the bed.

As though seeing her room for the last time, she stood looking around. Blowing out the light, she stepped outside, leaving the door ajar.

Xu Mao, still on the step, said feebly to Zhen, "Go and bring her back! I . . . I've . . . wronged her!"

"Father, are you feeling all right?" Zhen was mystified.



Xu Mao, still on the step, said feebly to Zhen, "Go and bring her back! I... I've... wronged her!"

He shook his head and explained, "I was blind. But not any more. Zheng Bairu's a scoundrel! Xiuyun's suffered so much!"

This baffled Zhen all the more.

Banging his pole on the ground, he cried out with all his might, "Hurry up! They're driving her to her death! Oh, my poor Xiuyun!"

He was swaying about, so Zhen first helped him to bed, before going off in pursuit of Xiuyun.

It was wet and windy. The sky was black. Zhen strained her eyes but could see nothing. Cupping her hands round her mouth, she shouted at the top of her voice, "Xiuyun! Xiuyun! Where are you?"

In the howling wind, her voice was very faint.

On hearing it, however, Xiuyun halted and looked back. Though it was too dark to see her sister, her eyes brimmed over with tears. Zhen's voice reminded her of her father. Like all dutiful daughters, she bore her father no grudge, though he had sometimes ruthlessly maltreated her. But it was not entirely his fault.

She turned round and trudged on.

Now Pear Orchard was in sight. Dogs' barking echoed through the fields. Bare pear-tree branches stretched upwards, undaunted in the rain. Around her was open country except for a small path, covered with grass, leading to the middle of Gourd Plain. Xiuyun suddenly slowed down.

"Am I right . . . to go this way?" she hesitated.

"But is there any other way?" she wondered as she quickened her steps. As if speaking to her dead eldest sister she pleaded, "Suyun! Take pity on us few lost souls. Please bless us!"

3

Zhen's shouting was drowned by the wind and rain. She stumbled along, her heart in her mouth. From time to time, she stopped to seek the direction.

She had no idea what had really happened. Her father's behaviour disturbed her. But his words, "They're driving her to her death!" urged her mechanically onwards over the muddy field.

She was terrified of the dark, because she still believed in ghosts. As a little girl, she had heard a lot of ghost stories, in which there were women spirits, with their hair hanging down over their shoulders. Xiuyun had looked exactly like one. An old tree, a boulder, a broken bamboo all unnerved her.

She also feared encountering someone, particularly Zheng Bairu. He had just run away and might still be nearby lurking about. At thought of him, her heart beat faster. Imagine! He had almost climbed into the bed!

Apart from Xiuyun, Zhen probably knew him best. Three years before, he had used her desire to work in town as an excuse to seduce her.

"Damn you! You bastard!" she swore, at the same time cursing herself for getting mixed up with such a character.

She was afraid. A defenceless young girl. . . .

She halted and, leaning against a tree, tried to see where she was. She was certain that she was already in Pear Orchard. The path in front led to the wild, narrow part of Gourd Plain. There was nothing there except the little pump shed where Jin Dongshui and his children lived. The desolate spot frightened her.

She was angry with her father for making such a fuss, sending her out when he was too upset to think clearly.

"Why should Xiuyun want to commit suicide? 'They're driving her to her death!' Who? Zheng Bairu? Maybe. He's putting pressure on her to go back to him, isn't he?" Yet she still could not see why her sister should want to kill herself.

She was desperate to turn back, but what could she tell her father? She feared his temper more.

What should she do?

In fact, Xiuyun was not far ahead. She would have heard if Zhen had called, even in a low voice. But Zhen did not, afraid of attracting stray dogs or prowlers.

The cold wind swept the fields.

Lying in bed, Xu Mao, exhausted from all the excitement, was brooding over what had happened. The awful truth began to dawn on him. This made him reconsider his judgement of those around him.

He cursed aloud, "Zheng Bairu! You bloody bastard! Shit! You dirty son of a bitch!"

The angry man spat out a torrent of abuse, which normally he never used.

Then he cursed himself, "What a damn fool I was! What got into me?"

All the questions in his mind were now solved. All the Xus' troubles of the past few years were connected with Zheng's rise to power. Life had been different with Jin Dongshui as Party secretary.

A grave lesson!

It was not easy to know oneself, let alone someone else. Xu Mao had at last seen through Zheng. He finally realized his cruelty to Xiuyun. He regretted treating her so badly and feared that it was perhaps already too late to make amends.

Slowly he sat up, straining his ears to listen for any sound in the courtyard, anxious for Zhen's return.

Only the rain dripped steadily from the eaves. Xu Mao was full of apprehension.

4

Zheng Bairu did not feel much pain when he was hit. But after a few steps he had to lean against the stone wall, his side aching unbearably.

"Did he tear my muscles?" he wondered, gingerly stretching his hand to feel his side.

"Hell! It's my spine!"

There was a big lump on his backbone. He broke out into a cold sweat, his legs giving way, and slumped down on the cold muddy ground.

He remained there, unheeded of time. Then he noticed Xiuyun running out, a small bundle in her hand, heading for Pear Orchard.

"Is she going to Jin Dongshui? Then I'm done for!" He groaned through his clenched teeth. If he could have moved, he would have strangled her. But his injury was so serious that he had no strength to stand up.

Then he saw Zhen giving chase, shouting, "Xiuyun!"

"I must get the hell out of here!" he thought.

On all fours he began to crawl along the soggy ground.

Like many scoundrels, he had tenacity. He dared not be seen there like that. He had to get home. If people later asked him what had happened, he could concoct a story, absolving himself from blame.

Suddenly in front of him a torch flashed. Someone was approaching.

"Damn it!" He looked round trying to find a place to hide. On both sides were water-logged fields. There was not a single tree or boulder. Where could he conceal himself?

A bright idea suddenly occurred to him. He rolled over to the left and flopped into the paddy-field.

Instantly the man holding the torch demanded, "Who is it?"

It was Qi's voice.

Zheng cried out at once, "Oh! My God!"

Qi ran towards him, catching Zheng in the beam. He was lying in the water.

Startled, Qi asked, "Zheng! What's the matter? Are you hurt?"

Seeing Zheng had difficulty in climbing up on to the path, Qi rolled up his sleeves and yanked him to his feet.

"Oh! Comrade Qi! Ouch! My back!"

"Hurt your back?"

"Yes."

"Can you walk?"

"No. It's too painful."

"Well, in that case, I'll fetch someone to take you to the village clinic."

Very concerned about him, Qi ran to a cottage near by and found two young men to help him. They put Zheng into a big basket and carried him to the clinic.

Qi washed the mud off his hands in the water and, flashing his torch, walked on.

He was going to see Qin.

This grave, dogmatic young man regarded love as something indecent. But recently he had felt miserable if Qin was out of sight for even a moment. Whenever there was a meeting, he would

send for her. He sponsored her to join the Party; recommended her to work as a cadre in other places. His favouritism was so apparent that nobody was deceived. But he refused to admit to himself that he was in love. How could he do that? Yes, he often went to see her, but it was all for the sake of the work. Nevertheless, his mind was full of Qin. He was in fact head over heels in love!

Xu Mao's brown dog barked, refusing to let him in. He waited, hoping Qin would come out to greet him, kick the dog aside and courteously welcome him in.

But no one stirred.

"That's strange!"

He was disappointed. Then he shouted, "Comrade Qin! Your dog's so fierce! Please come and rescue me!" It did not sound like him, so ridiculously affected.

"Who is it?"

Xu Mao's angry voice unmanned him. Bracing himself, Qi said calmly, "It's me, uncle."

"Qin's not home," Xu Mao called from the door of his living-room.

"Not home? Where is she then?"

"She went out with Yan."

"Oh?" Qi was taken aback. "So Yan's back from the meeting? When did she come back? Where did she go?"

Not feeling like prolonging the conversation Xu Mao replied shortly, "How should I know?"

Qi's enthusiasm disappeared. He felt he had made a mistake. His leader was already back without his knowing. Yan must have brought some important instructions from above. He must hear them immediately. Besides, he had a lot to report to her.

He turned to leave at once.

After a few steps he stopped. Shining his torch over the dark fields, he wondered where Yan was.

5

Yan and Qin were in the pump shed.

For once, Jin Dongshui's little room was full of life. After Wu Changquan had entered, Long Qing arrived too. Seeing

Yan sitting there he became uneasy. Jin, however, was in high spirits.

"There's something on your mind or you wouldn't have come in such foul weather," Jin said. "We were just discussing our new plan. Now what's the matter? We've nothing to hide from them."

Yan liked Long Qing. With a smile, she joked, "So you've a secret, eh? We'll go if it's not for our ears."

"Uncle," Qin ventured smiling, "your eyes are sore. It's pitch black, and the road's slippery. You must have something urgent to say, right?"

The perspiration stood out on his forehead. "I'm used to these paths," he said. "Nothing urgent, really. Well..."

"Well," Changsheng mimicked him, which set everyone laughing. When they had quietened down, Long began to speak.

"I came to talk to Jin about two things. I don't think Yan will mind. First, the movement. We've had quite a number of meetings recently, but it's all been a bit low key. Hadn't we hoped to arouse the villagers' enthusiasm by publicizing the future plan? Unfortunately it didn't work. We did make a lot of noise about our plan, and Qi spoke at the meetings, but so far people aren't interested. What's a "man-made plain"? Isn't Gourd Plain already flat enough? It's nonsense! If we waste all our man-power on that all winter, instead of collecting manure and repairing the gullies and ditches, we'll be in a right mess when it comes to the spring sowing. Besides, we must enlarge this pump station at once or our yield will be affected again if another drought occurs next year. Whatever the slogans, it's our brigade that always suffers!"

Wu broke in, "Don't worry. We were just talking about it. Jin's got a good idea. I'm sure you'll agree. We'll tackle the urgent work now, but always bear in mind the long-term prospects. You're absolutely right. We need a power station, and we can also cultivate another two hundred *mu* by changing the river course. What do you think?"

Long was all smiles now. Eying Yan and Jin, he said, "That's splendid! Our villagers will be delighted to hear this."

Yan put in, "You said you had two things to discuss. Now what was the other point?"

"Well..." Long pursed his lips. He glanced at Jin, waved his hand and said casually, "Forget it! That's all I want to say."

"That won't do!" Jin pressed him. "We've never hidden anything from each other. You mustn't keep it to yourself."

Long turned red. When he was on the point of speaking, he looked at Qin and hesitated again.

Seeing this, Qin guessed what was in his mind. She quickly lowered her head, her face darkening.

Yan reckoned there must be something wrong. Then she said seriously to Long, "We are three Party members and two Youth League members. But you don't have to speak."

Changsheng piped up, "And I'm a Young Pioneer!"

This brought fresh laughter.

"It's only a piece of gossip," Long began, darting an uneasy glance at Jin. He took out a handkerchief to dab his eyes and went on, "Someone told me it two days ago. It upset me very much. Now don't lose your temper, Jin. Yes, it's about you. They say that a few nights ago, you... you went to the Xus..."

"What do you mean? Out with it!" Jin demanded. His face grim, he was on the verge of an explosion.

Yan asked Long hastily, "When was it?"

Qin lowered her head even more.

"Absolute crap!" Wu banged his fist on the table. "A vicious rumour! It's a slander!"

"When I first heard it," Long defended himself, feeling rather awkward, "I knew it was rubbish."

Yan was lost in thought.

Wu glanced at Qin and said, "I went to the Xus' that night, but I didn't..."

"You?" Long was shocked.

Wu went on, "Yes. That night, Qin was visiting my mother, so then I saw her home. When I left her at the gate, I heard Qin and Xiuyun talking. Isn't that right, Qin?"

Qin blushed.

Changsheng broke in suddenly, "Now I remember. That was

the night Aunt Xiuyun came here and gave Changxiu a lovely cotton-padded coat."

"Oh!" all except Jin chorused in astonishment.

The boy continued, still smarting from his father's scolding, "But dad wouldn't let me open the door. I was very upset. Then Aunt Xiuyun left the coat at the door. When I opened the door, I couldn't see her. I nearly cried. However, she was not far away and called me to go over to her. She said to me that..."

"What did she say?" All eyes riveted on Changsheng.

"She asked me to tell dad that a work team was coming."

The listeners were relieved.

"Did she say anything else?" Yan inquired.

"She also said to tell dad that it would soon be grandpa's birthday and we must all go and see him, because his health wasn't so good. She said she'd get some presents for us to give him. Then she'd send them to us when they were ready. She's so kind. She knows we're too poor to buy any..." Scowling at his father, he protested, "But dad was so mean! It was so dark, but he didn't want me to open the door. He wouldn't even see her. Instead he gave me a telling off!"

Qin looked at Jin in wonderment.

Jin said nothing, his head down, his eyes red. He would have made a scene if so many people had not been present.

Long grinned in relief and declared, "I knew it was just a rumour! Well, Yan, if you live here longer, you'll learn that this nasty place produces nothing but rumours!"

Wu, as if remembering something, broke in, "That's queer! Why is Jin of all people the target? There must be some reason behind it. That same night, shortly after I left Qin, I saw Zheng Bairu behind me. He ran so fast, if I hadn't leapt out of the way, he would have bumped into me. He didn't notice me until he was already a few steps ahead. He only looked round at me and ran off. What's he got to do with this? If you don't believe me, ask him. Qin, you must know something about it."

"Yes. It all adds up now. I met Xiuyun at the gate. But she didn't say why she was standing there. According to Changsheng, she must have just got back from here. We talked a little

and then went in. Before I reached the house, I heard her scream. I dashed back and found her lying on the ground. Then I saw a dark figure racing out of her room towards the gate. If that's the case, I...I..." She broke down.

"Now, now," Long soothed her. "What's there to cry about?"

Wiping her eyes, Qin said miserably, "I believed the rumour. I've wronged Xiuyun and Jin."

"But you know it now, don't you?" Long pointed out.

"We must get to the bottom of it," Wu insisted bitterly. "Gourd Plain's really like a bloody gourd. We must break it open and see what's inside! Look how they calculated the annual grain yield. Forty thousand catties of grain conjured up from nowhere! They boasted we'd over-fulfilled our quota. Why play such a trick?"

At this, Yan, who was listening quietly, began to understand what had been going on. She interrupted him, "As for that forty thousand catties of grain, the district Party committee discussed it and refused to accept the figure. There will be an official inquiry."

"Really?" Long smiled.

They discussed village affairs, meetings and other topics. When they came to Qi, the main figure at the meetings, Yan asked them what they thought of him.

Long kept silent, too timid to raise any opinion against a member of the work team. Though he did not like his ignorance, he would not criticize him.

But Wu could not hold back his dislike. He began tersely, "His theory has nothing to do with practice. All he knows is how to give stupid orders. He abuses his power and throws his weight about. He called my mother 'an old-fashioned democrat, who knows only small-scale production' and 'a woman with a narrow peasant outlook'. He criticized me for being too involved in my work and not enough in politics. He labelled me as a 'revisionist' and 'a man who puts love first'. Nonsense! He infringed upon my rights..."

"What? Infringed upon your rights?" Yan queried.

"Of course! He read my diary without my permission!"

"Oh? Ha! Ha! . . . Any secrets?"

"Secrets or not, he has no right to read it." Wu blushed.

Yan said with a grin, "No, he shouldn't!" She remembered then that Qi had once told her that Wu was secretly in love with Zhen. But that was nothing wrong.

It was getting late. To bring an end to it, she turned suddenly to Jin. "Well, Jin, I felt from the moment I got here that something was missing in your place."

"Something missing?" Jin had no idea what she meant.

"Yes. Without a hostess, we women don't feel at home." Turning to Long, she continued, "Long, you ought to help him. Find him a wife. Of course, you must find a really fine one or Jin won't regard her as his equal. Right? Ha! Ha! . . ."

Grinning from ear to ear, Long said, "To tell the truth, Yan, I've been thinking about it for a long time!"

"Really? Have you found someone?"

"Yes!"

"Who?"

"That's still a secret."

"What's she like?"

"To be frank, there's no one to compare with her in our village."

"Really?"

"Of course."

Yan turned to ask Jin, "Is that true?"

"He's kidding," Jin said with a smile. "I'll never marry again. I'm no longer young. My kids are getting bigger each year. No need to go to all that trouble."

Long retorted loudly, "Nonsense! If I announce her name you'd cheer!"

"Oh, tell us!" They urged him.

"All right," Long said at last. "On the other side of the river there's a woman team-leader in Liujia Village. She's thirty, a Party member, educated and capable. She never married because she comes from a big family, with few wage-earners. I hear she wants to find an honest Party member slightly older than herself. Well, how about it? Ha! Look at him. He's blushing!"

Long chuckled, while Jin shook his head. Yan laughed too. But outside Xiuyun was driven to despair.

She had already been there for some time, not expecting to find visitors there. She had hesitated at the door and then decided to wait until the others left.

On her way there, thoughts had flashed through her mind. There was no future for her except with Changxiu, Changsheng and Jin Dongshui. She had no alternative but to turn to them. She knew her actions would be the talk of the village the following day and that people would call her senseless and shameless. Besides, Jin might be too timid to accept her love. The odds were against her, she knew, but it was her only chance. She could be as stubborn as her father. When pressed too hard, she was an incredibly firm woman.

Long's words had blighted her hopes. When she heard him praise the other woman and Jin make no response and then Long tease, "He's blushing!" she felt faint. Her legs trembled, her bundle dropped to the muddy ground. She closed her eyes, feeling a catch in her throat. She wanted to cry out, but no sound came. She sobbed bitterly. Again she thought of suicide. She turned away from the shed abruptly and went back along the dark path she had come.

Before she had gone very far, she stumbled into someone. It was Zhen, who was terrified and screamed.

On hearing her, everyone rushed out, Wu at the head. He lifted the girl and saw she was Zhen. Leaning against his shoulder, Zhen cried out, "Oh! A ghost!"

Then Jin and Qin spotted a dark figure leaping up from the ground, dashing away along the path and tumbling down the sloping river bank covered with withered grass. They gave chase, yelling, "Stop! Stop!"

The figure ran faster. When Jin had almost caught up with it, it jumped into the river, splashing water on to his face. He dived into the river after it.

When Qin arrived, Jin, standing in the water, called to her, "Hurry up! Give me a hand! It's Xiuyun." Qin bent to grab

her while Jin pushed from behind. At last the unconscious woman was laid on the bank.

Changsheng found a bundle under the eaves and told Yan, "This is Aunt Xiuyun's bundle. She must have come to give us the presents. There are also clothes in it!"

Gazing at the dark plain, Yan remained silent.



A Summary of the Final Chapter

So Xu Mao finally realizes Jin Dongsbui's good character and Zheng Bairu's worthlessness. Ashamed of himself, he divides his savings into nine parts for his eight daughters and Jin Dongsbui.

Wu realizes Zhen is not serious about him and so gradually grows away from her.

On learning by chance that Wu is in love with her sister, Qin agrees to be sent to do further study.

Jin Dongsbui, urged and helped by Yan Shaochun, finally marries Xiuyun.

The political situation at that time just like the weather was changeable. The work team is suddenly summoned back. A new storm is brewing.

*Translated by Wang Mingjie
Illustrated by Wang Weizheng*

Li Guangtian

A Pitiful Plaything

I can't remember in which year this happened, but know it was in my childhood.

I'd never left our village — except to visit my mother's old home — and I was unfamiliar, even rather afraid of our own village. Though it was only a village, the main street was three or four *li* long. We lived at the west end. I never ventured to loiter in the middle, the liveliest part of the street, let alone go all the way to the east end to play. My world at that time was both so restricted and so vast.

Father busied himself in the fields, Mother in the house. That left only Granny to tell me stories and sing me folk songs. Sometimes I sat woodenly all by myself on one side, listening to the whirr of her spinning-wheel. That was the home I had.

I often went outside to play too, but always on my own. The children in the street wouldn't let me join in their games, unless by any chance they needed someone to make up the right number. Unfortunately I was always the cause of my side losing, so I soon lost interest in their games myself. To start with I was afraid they would bully me, but they never did, perhaps thinking it unsporting to bully a helpless child. They simply ostracized me, which was

already humiliating enough. Often I would sneak home alone, skirting the walls. "They won't play with me," I'd say, running into Granny's arms. Stroking my head she would answer, "Play by yourself, there's a good boy."

Though I was only a child, I knew what it was to be lonely. Now that I am a man, I still suffer from loneliness, but it isn't the same; and I look back nostalgically on the loneliness of my childhood.

Father was always grim and stern. I don't believe I ever saw him smile. Mother, though she loved me — or so I thought — never bought me any sweets behind his back. She told me, "When you see people buying sweets, scam." Small as I was, I knew quite well what she meant; so whenever I saw grown-ups or other children crowd round the sweet pedlar at the sound of his gong, which set my mouth watering, I slipped away. Later on, if I heard the sweet pedlar's gong outside I stayed indoors.

The fact is, the only one who loved me in those days was Granny. She did her best to comfort me, making me little kites of waste paper, little whistles of grass or carts and horses of millet stalks, all of which delighted me. One day, the moment she saw me coming home, she beckoned me, calling softly, "Come here."

I ran over. "What is it, Granny?" I asked eagerly.

"A plaything for you, child."

With that, from her sewing-basket she took out a wad of cotton-wool and opened it to disclose a fledgling sparrow. I jumped for joy.

"Where's this sparrow from, Granny?"

"Picked it up under the eaves. Most likely its mother carried it out from its nest."

"Why should she carry it down?"

"Little silly! Its mother'd been holding it in the nest. She must have flown off so fast to find food for it that she carried it with her. The fall could have killed it!"

I only half believed her, and felt rather upset. Poor little fledgling! But now I had a fine plaything. I promptly pulled out a small bamboo crate from under the bed, spread cotton-wool on the bottom and put rags on top to make a cage for it. When it

was hungry I fed it, kissing its yellow beak. I offered it food when it wasn't hungry too, but it wouldn't open its beak. I carried that bamboo crate back and forth in our yard, and Mother seeing this said, "Now you've a fine plaything!"

I was thinking to myself: Let those rough children keep away from me. I shan't go out any more. At home I've Granny and this pet. It'll be even better when it's big enough to fly.

At noon Father came back from the fields. As usual, the sight of him depressed me; but how could I know it was wrong to keep a sparrow?

"What's that?" he demanded sternly.

"A . . . sparrow." I hung my head.

"Bring it here!" He snatched the little bamboo crate, and before I looked up I heard a thud — the crate had been flung on the roof.

Naturally I cried, but I didn't dare sob loudly, not wanting to be beaten. At such times Mother always took Father's side, sometimes saying, "Give him a good beating!" as if both angry with me yet sorry for me. There were times when, because of me, Father slapped or kicked her too. As a child I couldn't understand her psychology. Finally I climbed on to Granny's lap to weep disconsolately. By now Father seemed less angry. He just growled, "Useless brat. Why don't you go out and pick some grass for me." Then he sighed.

Granny swore under her breath, "Your dad's heartless, with no feeling for old or young. All he can do is skimp and scrape to scratch a living from the soil. Don't cry, there's a good boy. Tomorrow Granny will climb a tree to catch a little magpie for you." She wiped away my tears.

After crying I forgot the whole incident, because things like this kept happening all the time. And I can no longer remember what became of that fledgling sparrow. It seems that only now, after twenty years, I feel any concern for that unfortunate fledgling. Poor thing, deprived of its parents' love, its brothers and sisters, its warm nest, then picked up by Granny and put in my little crate, only to be thrown on the cold, bare roof by my father. What a wretched fate for a lonely, unloved fledgling!

At the time I really hated Father; but now, instead, I pity him. My heart aches at the thought of that grizzled peasant working away by starlight, threatened by cold and hunger and exposed to the elements, without much hope of living many years longer. Besides, born and bred on the land, from boyhood he had watered it with his sweat, hoping the sandy soil would produce enough to support his family. No wonder he had such a temper. I hear his health is failing now and he often thinks of his son so long away from home.

1934

A Country Inn

The sun is setting. After another day on the road wayfarers are weary.

When you enter a small out-of-the-way village, it may be quite strange to you yet seem familiar, because you have passed so many little villages like this before. You will find a number of gates already closed, some others perhaps still ajar, a few men plodding home followed by a dog or cattle, some women standing in their doorways looking out, maybe softly calling their menfolk back to supper. You will hear doors slam shut. It will occur to you, "How I wish I could go into one of those houses to rest."

Before long, however, you reach a small inn by the highway or at a crossroad. Though you have to make an early start tomorrow, tonight you will be able to have sweet dreams. On the battered gates of some inns you may read such couplets as:

Rain in the lonely village, early to rest;
In wind and frost lying in is best.

These, whether intentionally or not, warm the hearts of travellers. Here you will be well looked after by the simple, warm-hearted inn-keeper and his wife, who will make you feel at home. Occasionally, though, you will meet a crafty young fellow who will tell you that the next village is much further away than it actually

is, and who will overcharge you for a ride on his donkey. But you may not feel this excessive — such people are simply rather crude. Everything there is crude. The iron wash basin resembling a cauldron has been in use for several generations; the black earthenware teapot holds enough to drink for half a day, and some people may consider it a fine antique. As for food, the size of the helpings is all that counts. "You must fill up for a long journey," the inn-keeper will tell his guests. "No matter what, we can't stint you."

You seldom feel lonely in such places. Because either you are so tired that you want to rest, or there are other lodgers to chat with you. "Within the Four Seas all men are brothers." They chortle, then ask, "Hey, aren't you from the foot of the north mountain? That makes us as good as neighbours." A greeting like this is common. Fruit sellers from the hills, fish pedlars from across the river, men pushing barrows or carrying loads on poles, pedlars of whips or clay figures, men exchanging old ropes for matches, maybe even former teachers who have become itinerant doctors, thrown together by chance, talk cordially and frankly. They make the most of these opportunities, considering them predestined, for who knows if they may not lead to some disaster or some splendid stroke of luck. If it is winter, a generous inn-keeper will make a gratis fire of pine branches or kindling — this is his treat. In that peaceful warmth, complete strangers toast themselves before the fire and tell yarns.

Even now, though communications have improved, in out-of-the-way parts like these there are still very few people who know the so-called news in the press. But such places are not completely cut off from the news, for which they rely on these pedlars, who in their wide travels meet people from all parts of the country. So on such occasions they compete to pass on everything they have seen and heard. They know what murders and robberies there have been in different villages, what rumoured conspiracies there now are in different county towns, and the state of the market in different localities. As soon as they leave the little inn the next morning, the news they have relayed spreads throughout the village, to be discussed and embroidered on by people in the street.

These items of news may not be entirely new; some of them may be old tales which have often been spread then forgotten, and are now resuscitated. Stories of ghosts, fox-fairies, women who hanged themselves, the romances of horse-dealers, the misdeeds of nuns . . . all are enacted again here. Some men also sing folk songs or discordant opera arias. They may discuss affairs of state and the ravages of the war, but only much as they would relate *The Canonization of the Gods*.^{*} By the time the fire dies down, the inn-keeper has long since gone to bed and some of the travellers have turned in as well; but one or two of them may still be deep in conversation. For instance, one young fellow may confide to another that he fled his home after committing a capital crime and for several years has been a fugitive. He has no idea how far he has come, how many hundreds or thousands of *li*. "Well, I took to peddling," the other may respond, "because I wanted to find my runaway wife." They may talk for hours, perhaps all through the night, and become firm friends.

A thatched inn in the moonlight, a cock crows;
The frosted wooden bridge men's footprints shows.

Now the window is growing white, distant footsteps can be heard in the street, as well as the clank of buckets and the creak of the pulley by the well. Time to take to the road again.

Calls, yawns, the sound of horses pawing the ground . . . the inn-keeper has to bestir himself once more. He bids each guest good day and asks if he has enough money for his journey. Has he lost anything? If he isn't pressed for time, why not have breakfast here before setting out? The travellers then choose their different ways, to different destinations. "When shall we meet again?" "Who knows? There's no telling!" Some chat a little longer, or say with a sigh, "We wayfaring folk spend one night together then part, never to meet again. We hit it off so well, I really enjoyed our talk!"

Yes, these itinerant pedlars cannot but look back wistfully on these encounters. And more intriguing are the short inscriptions

* A popular Ming-dynasty novel.

cut with a knife or scratched with a shard on the walls of these country inns. You may read that so-and-so of such-and-such a village spent a night here. There are even doggerel verses in which strangers finding each other so congenial, oblivious to everything, recall the past and pour out their true feelings. That gives you a strong sense of affinity. It is reminiscent of the old verse:

Thou ridest a carriage, I wear a bamboo hat;
If we meet again, wilt thou dismount to greet me?
Thou bearest a load, I ride a horse;
If we meet again I shall dismount to greet thee.

Perhaps verses of this kind were written after such encounters.

1934

Son of the Mountain

Staying in Taishan Hotel by Halfway Gate we were well placed to watch the pilgrims passing up and down Happy Three *Li*.

If you climb from Taishan Arch to Halfway Gate you are halfway to the summit. Below the Temple of the Goddess the terrain is nearly flat, and to mountaineers it seems like a highway on a plain. But from the temple to Halfway Gate, step by step the gradient increases, becoming steep, especially after the Spirals, when people climbing the mountain for the first time imagine it cannot possibly grow any steeper. What is most marvellous is that South Heavenly Gate on the summit is screened by the peak of Halfway Gate, so that people below this often mistake it for South Heavenly Gate. Fine, they think. Here we are, nearly at the top. By the time they have struggled up to Halfway Gate and look up, they realize they have still half way to go up an even more precipitous winding track, at which they cannot but exclaim in wonder. Next comes Happy Three *Li*, which they say was divinely conceived, where they have to sit down and rest, paying their heartfelt respects to the deities.

Turning north from Halfway Gate and going down the Three Twists, below you are two or three *li* of level road, not only flat but absolutely free of stones underfoot to make the going rough, so

that climbers feel inexpressibly light-hearted. Besides, all around are little bridges and brooks, tumbledown shanties and a profusion of flowers. Birds sing, dogs bark, strangers greet you. Many women who live up there sit under the pines and cypress trees to sew, while naked, sturdy children often sleep in the grass. This seems less like climbing a mountain than returning to your own village! Although a few shops here sell wine, their customers are only the well-to-do. The custom of rustic pilgrims is far more interesting. In groups of three or five they bring along a picnic in a willow hamper: strong liquor, tea leaves, pancakes and salted vegetables, as well as finely split kindling and a red copper kettle. Happy Three *Li* also provides a Happy Spring for them. It gushes from under a cliff in the middle of Happy Three *Li* and forms a little rock pool in the shade of a few pines and cypresses. The water is crystal clear and very sweet, while all around are smooth rocks which serve perfectly as tables. Setting out at dawn, they arrive here in time to breakfast and rest after their stiff climb. Then, gathering up their hampers, they look up again, exclaiming happily at the sight of South Heavenly Gate, and continue on their way up. We enjoyed watching the simple faces of these country-folk and listening to their rustic accents as they told tales about their homes and stories about the mountain. Our mouths watered at the fragrance of good liquor emanating from their hampers. Of course we enjoyed the mountain scenery too, for we were surrounded by mountains, as if set down on the bottom of a basin, and above our heads as a canopy was the blue sky. A gurgling spring cascaded down the cliff on the east side; there were figures on the north peak; and the white clouds drifting from behind the mountain made us suspect it might rain. From a gorge in the west silver mist was rising to wreath the peaks. We had come to see the mountain, but while viewing it we lost track of what we were doing.

By about two or three in the afternoon, it was time for the pilgrims to come down. They had told the deities all that weighed on their minds, had been absolved from all their sins in the past year. So, as if they had accomplished some great feat, their faces were smiling, their hearts were extremely light. They were travel-

ling light as well, as their hampers were empty, the wine bottles too; they had left all their offerings up on the mountain, and given the maimed beggars their left-over pancakes, the foreign needles, thread, coppers and some of the coins which they had taken with them. From the mountain they carried down a sense of peace and joy. They had also filled their hampers, head-scarves and wrappers of plaited grass with lovely wild lilies, so many of them that we marvelled.

We spent about a dozen days here in all, and made two little friends, one called Liu Xing, the other Gao Lishan.* Whenever I met Gao Lishan, I said teasingly, "Gao Lishan, your surname means tall, and standing on the mountain you're even taller." Then all of us would laugh.

All of a sudden I heard two shrill calls, the more intriguing as there was no one in sight. The calls came from the mist, out of which in ten minutes or so our two small friends emerged. I loved the name Gao Lishan. For me, it conjured up a picture of a solitary traveller from afar standing erect on the summit of the mountain, blown by the winds of heaven. It made a fine picture, but the man in the picture was sick at heart. Young Liu Xing reminded me of my younger brother, not only in his appearance but because of his character too. He was a simple, honest little lad. I had not seen my younger brother for a long time. I felt an urge to pick Liu Xing up and kiss him, but I couldn't do this as the child rather shrank from me.

Before I could accost them, they called out together:

"Hey, aren't you scared, all alone here?"

I could understand their surprise. They thought me a towner, come from far away, who didn't know the mountain. So it worried them to see me standing all alone in the mist. And mixed with their affectionate concern was an impishness which I found still more amusing. To them I often seemed stupid, forever asking the names of wild flowers, a skin what ginseng or the tuber of multiflower knotweed looked like and where they could be found.

* The characters 高 *gao*, 立 *li* and 山 *shan* mean tall, stand, mountain.

I asked about the rocks, the springs, the weather, about stories and traditions. I invariably found their answers interesting, which made them very proud. And they laughed at my ignorance, at my finding all these things so strange.

"Scared? What's there to be scared of?" I asked them.

"Plenty. Mountain ghosts, poisonous snakes.... The mist could blur your eyes or wet your hair."

They burst out laughing, then went on to explain that poisonous snakes lurked in the undergrowth. They weren't too big and didn't look too fierce, being the colour of rocks; but they were really frightful because they loved to track down passers-by and could move as quickly as flying — you could hear them swishing and slithering through the grass. If they coiled around you they'd never let go, unless you chopped them through at once with a sickle. Hardly anyone recovered from their bites. The wounds went on festering until they killed you. This often happened to grass cutters and shepherds.

"If there are so many poisonous snakes about, how come I've never seen one?"

"Of course you've never seen one, because they don't come out in the daylight," said Liu Xing. "When you get up in the morning, haven't you seen white froth on the grass?"

Yes, I found this evidence convincing, because I had seen white froth which I'd thought was the saliva of cattle chewing the cud. And it appeared most often on a kind of grass resembling bamboo leaves, which I had mistaken for a fern. That had naturally reminded me of the two men of old who starved to death on Shouyang Mountain.*

Gao Lishan found Liu Xing's explanation too dry. He added warningly:

"Snakes don't come out when it's sunny, but on a misty day like this you're very likely to bump into one."

With a show of fright Liu Xing put in, "Not only snakes. Even mountain ghosts often come out in a thick mist."

* Referring to the two princes who escaped and ate only ferns when the Shang Dynasty (17th century BC) was overthrown.

According to them, mountain ghosts were always vaporous creatures, but mostly looked like people. They lived in the deep caves at the foot of the cliffs, where of course few people ventured, especially after dark or in misty weather. Like the snakes, they often mistook heavy mist for night. Woodcutters and collectors of medicinal herbs occasionally met them, and very few escaped with their lives because mountain ghosts, like water ghosts, liked to find victims to die in their place; so they pushed anyone they met over a precipice or dragged him into a cave. The boys said they often heard these ghosts weeping and wailing. The sound was like a high wind in the mist.

"Don't you believe me?" Gao Lishan tried gravely to convince me. "I tell you, Dumbo's dad and elder brother met mountain ghosts and were hurled to their deaths in the gully of Back Mountain."

They had lowered their voices and were looking worried. They glanced towards the distant mist, as if there were ghosts lurking there out of sight.

Out of curiosity I asked who Dumbo was. They told me he lived in a small temple by Ascending Immortals Arch up above. Whenever he met anyone he gesticulated and gibbered. I said hastily, "I know, I know! I've met him." The recollection both pleased and saddened me. Early one morning we had decided to climb to the summit. When we reached Ascending Immortals Arch, a number of people had stopped there to rest. It was a good place to rest, because just in front were the Eighteen Turns, the hardest stretch to climb. After sitting down we discovered that the other climbers weren't simply having a rest but also listening to the mute. A tall, strapping fellow, a son of the mountain, he was standing on a boulder in front of the arch and booming out sounds no one could understand, although he was trying to explain himself with gestures of every kind. Still no one could understand, myself included. But that helped me to understand another story: The spirit of Taishan proclaims the mountains' greatness, just as, though rocks cannot speak, we think we understand the spirit of rocks. The thought of Ascending Immortals Arch conjures up a splendid picture: above is South Heavenly

Gate; above which naturally is the azure sky; on both sides are sheer precipices and pine and cypress forests, between which is a jade ladder up to heaven. Below:

Floating clouds link sea and Taishan Mountain;
The plain merges with Qingzhou and Xuzhou.

Looking down, the whole world is under your eyes, and here our son of the mountain stood. Only that day did I learn that he had always lived here.

I stopped the two children hastily and said, "Steady on, I've something to tell you."

But what was I going to tell them? That the mute kept talking gibberish? That he must be very lonely? That he looked impressive standing erect on the boulder? That on gusty mornings, stormy nights, the small temple by the arch must rock in the wind? How deep the silence on the mountain must be on nights when there were stars and a moon that one could reach up to pluck from the sky, and when there was no wind and dew congealed in the sky? But I couldn't help wondering what the mute had been saying. "Gao Lishan, tell me what he says," I couldn't help asking.

"The same thing over and over. How his dad fell into the gully while picking wild flowers and was killed, and how the same thing happened to his brother." As Gao Lishan said this he showed the whites of his eyes.

"There you see, the ghosts took them as substitutes, because they were picking flowers," Liu Xing pointed out.

Flowers? What flowers? The boys told me: wild lilies.

They went on to tell me more about the mute. At the back of Taishan was an old dried up gully, with cliffs on either side of a deep valley; and all over the cliffs grew wild lilies. Naturally very few people climbed up there, but those red lilies were really beautiful. They grew in great profusion, with such vivid colours, the place was called Wild Lily Gully. The mute's father, a burly, fearless mountaineer, was the first to discover this place, and he climbed up there to pick lilies to sell to the pilgrims. It was extremely dangerous scrambling up rugged boulders and clinging to thorn bushes. To dig up a lily while clinging to the precipice took

a long time, and so each plant fetched a good price. By degrees it became the custom for all the pilgrims to take lilies home with them; and so Dumbo's elder brother had followed in his father's steps. Then both of them had met with the same fate. The forty-year-old father had fallen to his death one misty day, and when the brother was thirty a blast of wind had blown him off the cliff. After that no one else ventured up. Only this mute, son of the mountain, now old enough to follow suit, was entitled by the loss of their two lives to take over Wild Lily Gully. And he was equally fearless. He had not forgotten how they died, but precisely because they had met with such an end he had to take up this occupation, risking his life. He lived in the little temple by Ascending Immortals Arch, and used to pick lilies when pilgrims flocked to the place. This was how he supported his mother and widowed sister-in-law.

I was very grateful to the two children for telling me this story. When they finished, small Liu Xing still looked rather upset. His wooden expression increased his resemblance to my younger brother. The mist was rising; a mountain wind had sprung up. Feeling rather chilly I said goodbye to them.

The weather was turning cold now. People down below were still wearing summer clothes, but up on the mountain padded ones were needed. There was more rain and mist too, which was most depressing. As we had no winter clothes with us, we seldom went even to Happy Three *Li*. We decided to choose a fine day to go down the mountain. We got up early, packed and breakfasted, and then our sedan-chairs arrived. My two chair-bearers, as it happened, were the fathers of Liu Xing and Gao Lishan, so I felt easier in my mind. The two children came to see us off, and I felt most reluctant to be leaving this place and the two small boys, especially Liu Xing — my younger brother. I understand why they were glum: they knew we were unlikely to meet again. And then, by one of life's many coincidences, just as our luggage had been loaded on and we were about to set off, the boys called out, "Dumbo! Dumbo's come!"

Yes, it was the mute we had seen at Ascending Immortals Arch. He had on a short padded jacket and was carrying a big willow crate. I looked to see what was in it — a shovel, a knife and a big pair of scissors. We all kept quiet, but he called out greetings. The two children mimicked him. A man from the hotel called out to ask if he was going down the mountain. For he was deaf as well as dumb, so you had to shout at him. He answered loudly too, gesticulating and pointing down to the valley, then at his jacket and crate, after which he pointed at South Heavenly Gate. We knew he had been down the mountain the day before and only just come back. Zhao and I hoped to detect something about him. What exactly we did not know. Calling out to each other, the bearers picked up the chairs. The children followed us for quite a distance. When I could no longer hear them, I went on waving to them, waving my hat, and I fancied I could still hear the gibberish the mute was shouting.

1938

A Sunless Morning

It was eight in the morning and there was a heavy mist.

Wang's wife, carrying the laundry, stepped uncertainly out of the yard. She raised her swarthy face to gaze at the sky where the sun should have appeared, unconsciously shading her eyes with her left hand. Then wrinkling her brows she thought: Still such foul weather!

Lowering her head she made for the well. A big rooster standing on the winch beside it had stretched its neck to crow. Still crowing, it flapped alertly to the ground, just in time to avoid the pestle she threw at it. Shaking its blood-red comb from side to side, it fled, half flying, half running, apparently still crowing.

"Drop dead! Crowing cheerfully, aren't you!"

While swearing, Wang's wife bent down to retrieve her pestle.

Worried and angry, she had a bellyful of resentment to work off. With the weather so bad, of course the clothes wouldn't dry. But that didn't matter; her mistress had an iron and charcoal, so

that clothes needed in a hurry could be ironed dry. That dratted rooster had left droppings on the winch; but although this annoyed her, it was nothing out of the way. Today something else was preying on her mind. The sight of the cock crowing so lustily made her think indignantly, "Damn you! I suppose you're so cock-a-hoop because the Huangs' hen was killed instead of you."

Besides, since she woke at dawn, she'd been unable to forget last night's dream.

She had dreamed that Gouer's dad, his face streaming with blood, was standing before her.

"Look, Old Master Mao has let me go after all. He says I wasn't the one who stole those green jade bracelets."

Tears started to her eyes and coursed down her cheeks. In weeping she found relief. Yet she felt sick at heart, knowing quite well that Gouer's dad was dead, so how could he come back? Had she only dreamed he was dead? Surely not. She felt thoroughly confused. Before she could question him she heard him say:

"I must first go to thank the master and mistress for letting me off."

He turned to go to the family's living quarters. She knew the master was smoking opium right now and shouldn't be disturbed, so she tried to stop him. But he shoved her so hard that she fell to the ground, and at that she woke up, tears still in her eyes. She lay in bed at a loss, listening to the breathing of Gouer fast asleep beside her, and watching the pale light filtering through the window. She couldn't go back to sleep.

Her heart was like tangled hemp, and the more she tried to sort things out the more confused they seemed. She wanted to have a good cry, but something stopped her. Wide-eyed, she just made wild guesses at what had happened.

She thought: The death of Gouer's dad really made no sense. By the time she got the news, it was all over. She saw nothing but a cheap coffin. She was told he'd offended the master, had wanted to fight him, and the master had ordered the servants to give him a beating. Then he had rushed off to hang himself in the back yard. She wasn't even allowed to watch by the coffin, which they made frantic haste to bury. Thinking back to that day, she

really blamed herself. Gouer's dad had said he wouldn't go to the Mao's house that day because he was feeling poorly, his heart kept beating wildly; but she'd kept on at him, saying that the landlord was giving his tenants a feast and would be settling accounts. He might be raising the rent. It really wasn't right to stay away. Then he'd gone, and never come back. She was left on her own now in her misery. And at this point she realized she should never have come to work here. Still less should she have accepted those five hundred dollars from the Maos, because they weren't much help to her mother-in-law and Gouer. Though the Maos seemed to be making amends to the dead man's family, they were actually trying to cover up their crime. Just think, if you beat a man to death, how can you keep it secret? So many nightmares she'd had! In each, Gouer's dad, his face streaming with blood, told her, "Those green jade bracelets of theirs *weren't* stolen by me. With all those tenants at the feast that day, why should he pick on me? They said I'd been in their rooms, but I hadn't!" But now there was no way out. To make a living she'd had to stay on here, though she knew this was really letting down her dead husband, especially when she saw those two green jade bracelets on Mrs Mao's plump white wrists. At the time she'd thought of taking the case to court, but people had dissuaded her. They told her, "Old Master Mao's in cahoots with the magistrate. They're for ever drinking, playing mahjong and smoking opium together. So what chance would you have?" Now of course it was too late, everything was finished. The grass was already high on her husband's grave. At the thought of this, her eyes filled with tears again.

It was gradually growing light. Time to get up. But overcome by lethargy she couldn't even feel anything, let alone worry about Mrs Mao cursing her for getting up late. Her mind was a blank. Not until Gouer suddenly turned over and went back to sleep did she come to her senses again. She wondered: Should I wake him and make him get up at once? I can't turn in early in the evening, and missing me he won't sleep; so of course in the morning he likes to lie in. After thinking it over she told herself: All right, let the poor kid stay snug at my side a bit longer; he may have to leave

this afternoon. He seldom comes to town. So when he does, he doesn't want to go back. He's been here two days already. If I keep him on, Mrs Mao will say something cutting. Remembering why Li's wife, the kitchen-maid, had got the sack, she couldn't help thinking Mrs Mao a tartar. Unlike Old Master Mao, she got up early and turned in late to keep an eye on everything, on each needle and thread in the house, each grain of rice. Nothing escaped her eyes. She had all the household affairs at her fingertips. She could talk sweetly to the underlings, could play the gracious lady or act the tyrant. Wang's wife was really rather scared of her. And each time she thought of her, she seemed to see that pair of triangular eyes in Mrs Mao's yellow face staring at her in the dark. The servants often said even the master was afraid of those triangular eyes of hers. Most likely. But she knew very well what a thin time of it Gouer had. He depended on his mum, hankered for food. Though he had his granny at home, a granny is never as good as a mother. And what did they eat? He was lucky if he could fill up on maize and sweet potatoes, not to say anything better. Here, though she had no time to cosset him, he felt safe if he could see her face, hear her voice; and how he loved eating Old Master Mao's white rice with her and the other servants. At home he was really too lonely, without even a chick, a pup or the like to play with, for they couldn't afford now to feed them. Most likely he just stared blankly at the paddy-fields in front of their two-roomed shack; but the green shoots in those fields had been p'anted by another family. Soon after Gouer's dad had been killed, Old Master Mao had rented that plot to another tenant. Suppose she kept the boy here with her? She had thought of that, even of asking the Maos to find him some job; but the child was still too small, the master and mistress would never agree to keep him. . . . These thoughts held her motionless as if benumbed. But it was no longer early, she had to get up very quietly for fear of disturbing the child sleeping so soundly. As she stood by the bed, the grey light showed his face distinctly. She thought, "You're the spitting image of your dad. You've got his nose and mouth." That upset her again.

Her dream was still preying on her mind. So she vented her

anger on the big cock-a-hoop rooster, remembering how the Huangs' hen had been killed in his place.

Old Master Mao wanted a chicken dish.

The cook told him he had only one old rooster.

The master said he wanted a tender hen.

The cook told him the Huangs had one, but weren't likely to want to sell it.

The mistress hearing this said sharply, "Never mind whether they want to or not. Catch it and kill it for me."

So the Huangs' hen had been killed.

Yesterday she had seen the cook chasing that hen, then blood spurting from its cut throat. Blood! That reminded her of her dream.

The Huangs had rented rooms in Old Master Mao's garden.

It was a very fine garden. Its house with two wings was elegantly furnished and had a large square courtyard shaded by trees, as well as flower-beds, tubs of goldfish, stone tables and stools — nothing lacking. The Maos had previously held feasts there, but then the place had been abandoned. The fish-pond had dried up, the flowers had withered, the ground was littered with fallen leaves and dead grass. Mr Huang was a teacher from another province, hardly ever at home in the daytime. His wife looked after the house and their little girl. As there were many trees and insects in the garden, she kept a small hen, hoping it would eat the insects and lay eggs. It would be a pet too for the child. At first they had felt quite secure here. But then Mrs Huang learned a secret, after which she kept blaming her husband. It was Wang's wife, the washerwoman, who had let the cat out of the bag. One day in secret she asked:

"You know about that plum tree, Mrs Huang?"

"That plum tree? What about it?" She sounded surprised.

"The Mao's second daughter hanged herself on that tree. Don't tell me you didn't know?"

Mrs Huang hadn't known. Her husband had kept it a secret, because he wanted a house with a low rent, and he liked this quiet courtyard. But now that the secret was out, his wife lived in daily dread and often said she heard strange noises at night. As to the

way Miss Mao had hanged herself, accounts differed; but the consensus of opinion was that it was over her marriage, because that young lady believed in the new fashion of "free marriage", while her father and mother wouldn't hear of this.

Wang's wife often went in her spare time to chat with Mrs Huang, and on the sly sometimes used left-over material from the Mao family to make little shoes or a cap for her daughter. With the money she earned this way, added to her wages, she could buy food and other necessities for her mother-in-law and son in the country. She often gossiped to Mrs Huang too about her master and mistress. Their family was the only place where she could let off steam.

She had just laid hands on the winch, meaning to draw water. The winch wobbled, then was still, because another thought had occurred to her. The mistress hadn't come out yet, and with the weather so bad she really was in no mood to start washing. Instead she wanted to go to find Mrs Huang and tell her: Old Master Mao ate your hen; but if you know what's best for you, don't make a fuss about it, otherwise there'll be trouble. A landlord's entitled to eat his tenants' hen. She also wanted to tell her: Old Master Mao told his wife to warn you on no account to let your little girl pick any flowers in the garden, because if she broke off the branch of a tree a grown-up in his family would die; if she broke off a twig one of their children would die. Another thing she wanted to tell her was: One day Mrs Mao told the servants: Living here, the Huangs should show a bit more tact. I don't mind them drinking water from our well, but they should provide their own rope. Other people mustn't use the Mao family rope. And she'd tell her: Last night I dreamed about Gouer's dad. . . .

But just as she arrived at the garden gate and was reaching up to knock, she discovered that it was locked. That puzzled her. Why should the whole family have gone out so early? As she hesitated, she suddenly heard a shrill cry from the main hall:

"Cheap trash! Get out of here!"

Wang's wife recognized Mrs Mao's voice, and wondered which

of the servants she was angry with this time. Limply resting her right hand, raised to knock the door, on its knocker, she pricked up her ears.

"Our home isn't an orphanage, we can't feed loafers, can't bring up trash. You've not only eaten our good rice and flour, but stolen a whole vat of my preserved duck-eggs!"

Wang's wife's heart missed a beat. "Can't feed loafers" — could she mean. . . .

Her heart misgave her. And then she heard Mrs Mao screech: "Wang's wife! Wang's wife! Wang's wife!"

As if waking from a dream, she went through the side gate into the inner courtyard. The path under the verandah was flat and smooth, but she tottered as if on a rugged mountain track, each step costing her an effort. She heard a child crying. It was Gouer all right. His jacket thrown over his shoulders, he was wiping his eyes still blurred from sleep and sobbing. He made as if to throw himself into her arms, but didn't dare, because Mrs Mao just behind him was in a towering rage. Her triangular eyes were dilated, her thin lips quivering.

"Wang's wife, Wang's wife, if you want to bring up your son, you can't stay here. If you want to stay here, send him home. What time is this to let your precious son lie abed? That's not the way in our house! You know how kind, how generous I am. I don't mind a child having a few meals here, but he should never, never have filched those forty eggs. Disgraceful! Just think, forty of them, all gone. He hasn't left so much as the shell of one!"

Gouer sobbed. Wang's wife hung her head, frowning. Her swarthy face turned deep purple. Standing in a corner well behind Mrs Mao were four or five servants and maids whispering together, some with tongues sticking out in dismay, others scowling. A young maidservant at the back shook her finger viciously at Mrs Mao, then slipped out. Mrs Mao went on fulminating:

"The world's going to the dogs. Respectable families like ours have no way out. People come as they please to eat our food, drink our wine. How much food can I spare for outsiders? Everything costs the earth. Which family isn't hard up? And luck's against us. The authorities demand grain, the troops demand

fodder. The new county magistrate has sent to demand fifty piculs of millet! Millet! I don't have that much!"

Wang's wife said nothing, biting her lips. Her silence infuriated Mrs Mao.

"Well? Are you made of wood or stone? Are you deaf and blind? Are you dumb?"

Mrs Mao turned to leave, but called back over her shoulder:

"Wang's wife, you've brought up a fine son, a real treasure. Forty of my eggs, and you don't say a word. I see you've no intention of laying a finger on that treasure of yours!"

While saying this she turned up her cuffs, and her green jade bracelets gleamed. Then she swept out of the hall like a gust of wind. The servants and maids who had been looking on hastily made themselves scarce.

Wang's wife felt ready to explode. Forty eggs! Let it be four hundred, four thousand, forty thousand. Unable to contain herself, she wanted to give vent to her feelings. But upon what? Gouer was standing beside her. She snatched hold of him and dragged him out below the verandah. As she grabbed a bamboo from the foot of the flower-bed fence, the big red rooster clucked with fright and fled. In bewilderment Gouer cried, "Ma!" The bamboo landing thwack! thwack! on his bottom made a sound like fire-crackers.

"A finger! A finger! See if I dare lay a finger on you!"

The bamboo rose and fell faster and faster, each stroke harder than the last. As she thrashed the child Wang's wife shouted, "I'll teach you to do that again!" The bamboo broke in two. As she threw it aside she heard that Gouer's intermittent cries had changed into continuous wailing.

She stood beside him, her hands on her hips, not saying a word, just panting.

The child's wails were growing fainter. Her heart softening, she thought, "Poor kid. . . ." But then Mrs Mao darted out again from the main hall.

"Wang's wife, Wang's wife, don't put on that act for me. I'm not afraid. If you kill him, I'll take the blame! Let me see you beat him properly!"

Before she had finished, Wang's wife had already tugged a big bamboo from the fence. Once more she pressed Gouer down, and thrashed his buttocks and thighs with all her might. He struggled feebly, wailing:

"Dear ma, dear ma, dear ma. . ."

"Who's your dear Ma?" she shouted, beating him hard. "I bore you but I can't raise you. Today I'll beat you to death!"

By now Gouer was too exhausted to wail or to struggle. And she was too tired to go on beating him, but still she went on raising her aching arms, shouting intermittently, "I'll teach you to do it again!" The big bamboo broke too, yet she went on beating him, because of the triangular eyes looking on malevolently from the side gate.

Footsteps were heard in the covered walk leading to the outer courtyard. The Huangs who lived in the garden had come back. Mr Huang in uniform led the way, followed by Mrs Huang holding her little girl's hand. Behind were two porters they had hired to carry their luggage. Today was Sunday, they were going to move house. Mr Huang had taken his wife to look at their new quarters. After Wang's wife had told Mrs Huang the secret of the ghost who had hanged herself, and after Old Master Mao had eaten their hen yesterday, Mrs Huang had complained so endlessly that Mr Huang had to comply with her wishes and move out at once.

When Mrs Huang saw Wang's wife beating her son so hard, she wanted to intervene, but seeing Mrs Mao there she thought better of it. Paying no attention, she hurriedly led her daughter off to open the garden gate. Mr Huang, to show his good manners, inclined his shaggy head towards Mrs Mao, and forced a wry smile on his pale face as he said:

"Good morning, Mrs Mao. Please tell Mr Mao that we're moving out today."

Mrs Mao, her triangular eyes slightly narrowed, answered:

"I see. Please drop in to see us later."

She spoke rather abruptly, feeling put out. Without waiting for Mr Huang to say any more, she turned and went back inside.

Meanwhile Wang's wife had long since stopped raising her arm. She tossed the broken bamboo away and flopped down to sit by

her son. Covering her face with both hands she burst out sobbing.

The mist was still very thick. The rooster gave a long crow by the well. By the time Old Master Mao, his back bent, shuffled out from his room in his bedroom slippers, the sun happened to show its face from behind the mist. It shone on Old Master Mao's livid white face, making him look like a corpse.

At lunchtime the servants and maids in the kitchen talked things over. They talked of Wang's wife, Gouer, the green jade bracelets, the forty eggs, the new county head, the official levy of millet, the Huang's hen, their moving house, the ghost of the girl who had hanged herself, the misty weather. "The sky's always overcast!" they swore. By this time Wang's wife, a bundle on her back, Gouer's hand in hers, was walking firmly, lips pursed and scowling, across the far-stretching wasteland.

1945

Translated by Gladys Yang

Li Xiu

A Persevering Writer: Li Guangtian

ALTHOUGH the noted writer Li Guangtian's life was full of hardship, his courage never failed him. Poverty, unemployment, exile, feudal warlords' prisons and assassination attempts by the Kuomintang secret police could not intimidate him. He continued writing and working diligently for the people and his untimely death was brought about by the "Cultural Revolution".

The Son of the Yellow River

Li Guangtian was born in 1906 into a peasant family named Wang in Zouping County, Shandong Province and was originally called Wang Xijue. Owing to his family's poverty, he was "lent" soon after his birth to his middle-aged sonless uncle and his name was changed to Li Guangtian. Thereafter he became heir apparent to one peasant Li owning 30 *mu* of land.

His childhood was spent on Yellow River plain with its endless landscape of trees and villages alternating with row upon row of bleak graves. His maternal grandfather's house was near the banks of the river and when he was a child he used to gaze at its muddy

Li Xiu, daughter of Li Guangtian, is now teaching at Beijing Normal University.

waters and listen to its roaring waves. In one essay he compares the Yellow River to a long lute. "I saw the string of the lute glistening in the silvery moonshine. I could see both its ends and yet felt it to be infinitely long." The playing of the long lute triggered his imagination and filled his solitary childhood with fantasies. In the essay "Landscape", he expresses his feelings of attachment to the land.



Li Guangtian

In later years, Li's childhood proved a rich repository of memories of the open countryside, the Yellow River, the peach woods and their summer fragrance. His first collection of essays was called *Gallery* and in it each piece is a portrait of local village life. For example, "A Country Inn" describes an evening meeting of local tradespeople — fish pedlars, porters, wild-fruit sellers and offers a vivid characterization of their warmth and honesty.

Li Guangtian's early life was harsh. He began his studies under his grandfather's tutelage and then continued at a local school where corporal punishment and truancy were common. Although only a brief part of his schooling, this experience left a bitter impression. When later Li went on to study in the village primary school, his parents were not in favour of prolonging his education and considered it far more practical for him to work in the fields. They refused to pay for his textbooks and the young Li was forced to extract whatever he could find from the school rubbish dump. His grandmother, seemingly the only person who cared for him, used to make him little kites of waste paper and small grass whistles. On one occasion she found a young sparrow that had fallen from its nest and made a gift of it to her grandson. To the child,

the sparrow was a new-found friend, but when his father saw the child fondling it, he became irritated and threw it on to the roof in its small bamboo cage. The story of this unloved and rather ill-fated fledgling was the basis for "A Pitiful Plaything". It was not until several decades later, by which time he was a father himself, that he was able to understand and forgive his own peasant father. He realized that such a life, threatened always by cold and hunger, offered little hope. Though "A Pitiful Plaything" is a portrayal of the writer's boyhood, it also shows a deep understanding of the social conditions of the Chinese peasantry in the 1930s.

Li went on from primary to teacher-training school and within one and a half years was invited to teach at a county-run primary school. Having saved enough from teaching to cover travelling expenses, he secretly left for the provincial capital to sit the normal college entrance exam for further education. Henceforth his world assumed wider and wider horizons.

The Three Poets of the Han Garden

In the mid-1920s, Li studied at the Shandong No. 1 Provincial Normal College where the New Vernacular Literature Movement was developing vigorously and literary organizations and periodicals were springing up like mushrooms. In this environment he absorbed many new ideas, joined the Communist Youth League and, together with some friends, founded a newspaper and periodical society introducing works by Lu Xun and other writers from new vernacular literature organizations. With the extremely unsettled political situation and a recent riot in Jinan, post and telegrams had been placed under strict censorship. As a result, progressive books they bought were confiscated by secret agents of the Shandong warlord Zhang Zongchang before they were received. Li Guangtian was arrested and sentenced to death whereupon his father sold the ancestral woods but was still unable to bail him out. He was only released when the Northern Expeditionary Army had captured Jinan and forced Zhang Zongchang to flee the city. In his first essay "Before Imprisonment", he gives an account of his arrest, revealing a singularly mature grasp of literature and revolution.

After his release, he returned home to teach at a primary school and some six months later entered the foreign languages department of Beijing University. In 1929 Li first went to Beijing, the political and cultural centre of the north. The Arts College of Beijing University was at Shatan in the eastern part of the city. The top floor of the Red Building of Beida* offered an impressive view — there was the Wanchun Pavilion in Jingshan Park and, in the west, the White Dagoba of Beihai Park. To the southwest could be seen the massive rear gate of the Imperial Palace and beyond Beihai the Beijing Library. In the Jingshan Eastern Street were the publishing offices and bookstall of the *Nameless Press* — a literary organization established under Lu Xun's influence. To a young man straight from rural Shandong, Beijing's breadth of culture was fascinating.

Li immersed himself in the study of English, Japanese and French, and seldom socialized with others. During this period he began to have his poems published in a magazine edited by the poet Dai Wangshu, *Modern Times*. Among his contemporaries, Bian Zhilin of the foreign languages department and He Qifang of the philosophy department, who became editor of the periodical *Red Desert*, were particularly close. Li himself edited the periodical *Pastureland*. Bian Zhilin brought the two editors together and arranged to collect the poems of the three into a single volume. They called the book *Poems of the Han Garden* and it was published in 1936 as a contribution to the Creative Work Series of the Literature Research Association. The three poets often got together to exchange ideas and remained firm friends. Consequently, contemporary literary historians refer to them as "the three poets of the Han Garden". Of the three, the poetry of Li Guangtian has an especially bucolic flavour.

The Soul of Mount Tai

After graduating from university, Li returned to Jinan and taught in a middle school while his wife Wang Lanxin taught in a school

* Abbreviation for Beijing University in Chinese.

near Mount Tai. There was a convenient train service between Jinan and Taian and Li would visit Taian every weekend.

From 1935 up to the eve of the war against Japan in 1937 Li was a prolific essay writer. The compilations *The Silver Fox* and *The Straw Cape*, as well as *Gallery* date from this period. Unlike *Gallery*, the two former collections contain essays that "have gradually changed from subjective narration to objective description" (explanatory notes to *The Silver Fox*). No longer given to writing about the daily life of individuals or childhood recollections, more space is devoted to "writing about people who suffered in the old society and had no way to earn a living" (preface to *Thirty Essays*). The essays express sympathy for the fate of these people and indicate contempt for the old society.

The Lis lived just over a kilometre from the foot of the famous Mount Tai. Life offered many pleasures. After supper they often went to the Dai Temple to buy stone rubbings or such local delicacies as walnuts, haws and chestnuts. Sometimes they visited the Taishan Arch to have tea brewed with mountain spring water. As soon as the summer holidays began, they would move to the mountain, often staying at the Taishan Hotel in Happy Three Li on the East Hill.

The celebrated mountain's ambience had a profound effect on Li, seen for example in the stories "The Fan Cliff" and "Son of the Mountain", both of which were written there. Behind Mount Tai lay a dried-up gully, with cliffs covered with wild lilies. In "Son of the Mountain" this place is discovered by a mute's father. Scrambling up rugged boulders and clinging to thorn bushes at the risk of his life, the old man picks lilies to sell to the pilgrims. One day he falls to the bottom of the Lily Ravine and is killed. The mute's elder brother follows in his father's footsteps but he, too, dies when blown off the cliff by a gust of wind. Then, the mute, the mountain's son, takes up this occupation, risking his life in order to support his aged mother, his widowed sister-in-law and his own wife and children. His own silence reflecting the mountain's silence, this speechless son of the mountain expresses the majesty of Mount Tai.

"Son of the Earth" in *Poems of the Han Garden* and "Son of

the Mountain" in *The Straw Cape* have been regarded as representative of Li's early work. Coming to Mount Tai after the lonely plain of his childhood and after his stay in Beijing meant a broadening of his emotional and intellectual experience, a process which gradually developed his realistic style. After his death, he was called "the son of the mountain" in many memorial articles and in a sense there is some similarity between the firmness of Li's conviction and the solid presence of Mount Tai.

The Anti-Japanese War

After the anti-Japanese war broke out, Li Guangtian and his students withdrew from Jinan to Taian just before the fall of the city and amidst heavy bombing from enemy planes. Li said goodbye to his pregnant wife and led the students southwards. Moving from Taian through Henan and Hubei, they settled down for six months in Yunyang County on the northern bank of the Han River and then travelled on foot for two months to Sichuan.

The majority of these refugees were progressive young people who had left their families to join the anti-Japanese campaign. They studied and advocated resistance against the Japanese as they travelled. Li Guangtian was their favourite teacher and an energetic supporter of these activities.

During their two years as refugees and their long trip from Jinan to Sichuan, they witnessed the reality of war and political corruption. Living conditions in the interior were abysmal, with the peasantry starving and destitute. In *Western Journey*, a collection of essays recording these experiences, Li wrote: "Poverty, poverty! Maybe the word 'poverty' sums up the whole situation — mind-poisoning, the evils of banditry and the irrational events in politics, education and cultural activities make one feel that every step is one into 'another world'." *Western Journey* was first called *Another World* and only later adopted its present name.

When they reached the banks of the Han River, an accident occurred. The school had hired four boats for its use. A heavy rain fell, swelling the river by over three metres and going against

the treacherous current was especially dangerous. For the purpose of earning money, however, the school authorities made the boats take an extra load of several hundred sacks of flour, totalling more than 20,000 catties. When the boats reached White Sand Slope, they were rushed along the flooded river for several *li* until they crashed on a reef. The men in charge gave instructions to rescue the flour sacks instead of saving the drowning students, and as a result the lives of twenty-two girls were lost.

Facing the savage waves of the Han River, Li Guangtian wrote:

Would rather the world be entirely dry,
Without even a single drop of water,
But of what use is a waterless world now?
Twenty-two lives have become fish fodder. . . ;
We'd rather die in action against the enemy!

This disaster aroused the indignation of the teachers and students. The twenty-two young girls did not die on the battlefield of the anti-Japanese war but were killed by the greed and callousness of the educational authorities. The incident taught these intellectuals in exile, including Li, that in resisting Japan one must also struggle against the rule of the Kuomintang.

They settled down for a short time on reaching Laojiang. The arrival of a number of progressive cultural workers infused life into the small town. In this provisional school Li popularized progressive ideas among the students and taught them Soviet literature and works by Lu Xun, which ultimately caused the Kuomintang authorities to dismiss him. Having been sacked by secret police, the school was closed down. Li was forced to go and teach in the Southwest Associated University.

The Martyrs' Path

In 1941 he arrived in Kunming where the three North China universities Beida, Chinghua and Nankai had moved and merged into one Southwest Associated University. A large number of revolutionary intellectuals, democratic professors and progressive scholars

had gathered in the city. The contradictions that existed between the Kuomintang Party central and the local authorities, produced a greater degree of freedom in the political and academic worlds. This atmosphere invigorated the activities of various organizations to an unprecedented extent — in the Associated University alone there were groups such as The Ilex Society, The Literature and Art Society, The New Vernacular Poetry Society, The Dramatic Art Society, The Sunshine Fine Arts Society and The Singing Aloud Chorus. Li Guangtian was adviser to The Literature and Art Society and, together with Zhu Ziqing and Wen Yiduo, a member of The Ilex Society. The three of them edited monthly magazines and weekly reviews, and organized various activities advocating resistance against Japan and vigorously demanding the establishment of a peaceful, democratic and free New China.

From his early days in Shandong, Li had travelled farther and farther and gradually developed a strong and active political commitment. This brought about a prolific output in his literary work. *The Shrubbery*, *Jottings in Jinri Pavilion* (collections of essays), *The Gold Jar* (a collection of short stories) and *On Poetic Art* (a collection of articles) were all written in this period. "A Sunless Morning" is one of the short stories in *The Gold Jar*. Abandoning the earlier style of nostalgic reminiscence, the themes now emphasize class antagonisms. "A Sunless Morning" symbolizes the bleak years when the heroine, Wang's wife, and countless thousands like her were at the bottom of the social order. Her husband had been falsely accused by a landowner of stealing some jade bracelets and beaten to death. Her son Gouer was framed for pilfering forty preserved eggs and roughly treated. In those years such people were unable to appeal against their suffering. Wang's wife, filled with hatred and anger, takes her son by the hand and walks out both literally and symbolically into a new life.

In this period he also wrote *Gravitation*, a novel essentially based on his own experiences. The central character is a man named Meng Jian. His wife flees with her children from the enemy-occupied area and after innumerable hardships manages to get to where her husband has been working. Before their arrival, however, her husband, motivated by a much greater force, has already

left for Yan'an, the centre of the Chinese Communist Base Areas. Completing the novel in August 1945 amidst the noise of firecrackers celebrating the unconditional surrender of Japan, Li thought with great joy that eight years' suffering had at last come to an end and that the peace and democracy people had long expected would soon be realized.

However, the victory that had been won in the anti-Japanese war was forfeited in a flash by the gunfire of the civil war started by Chiang Kai-shek. The students of Kunming's schools and colleges went on strikes, battling against civil war. On December 1, 1945, a large body of armed soldiers and secret police broke into both Yunnan University and the Teachers College. Students were beaten up and buildings looted and destroyed. Four people were killed and this subsequently became known as the "December 1st Massacre".

Li Guangtian saw this atrocity with his own eyes and, moved by the students' tragic and heroic acts, he wrote: "To think that eight years' arduous struggle has just ended and we should have come to such a pretty pass! We have neither troops, nor political power, nor arms, nor bombs. Except speaking up, except saying what we must say, what else can we do? The victims of the 'December 1st Massacre' were killed only because they wanted to speak up. We're still alive. It only behoves us to go on saying what they have said until we die." ("Not for the Sake of Remembrance")

In a speech delivered at the cemetery of the four martyrs, the poet Wen Yiduo said: "We must avenge the dead! We must hunt down the murderers. We'll pursue them to the ends of the earth. If our generation fails, the next will succeed!" He also wrote epitaphs for the martyrs, but before they were printed, on an overcast and rainy day in July 1946, he was assassinated by the Kuomintang soon after another patriot, Li Gongpu had met a similar fate.

Motivated by the increasing sharpness of this grim struggle, Li Guangtian wrote several essays (collected into *Jottings in Jinri Pavilion* later on) denouncing the atrocities committed by the Kuomintang. He said: "After the 'December 1st Massacre', even the

old 'Sunny Building'* was turned into a battlefield. To this state of affairs is applicable our popular saying: 'With some there is serious work, with others unashamed dissipation' — on the one hand some thugs are spreading conscienceless slanderous rumours, on the other youths are speaking up for the people at the risk of their lives. Right now the struggle is still persisting and gaining new momentum. It has become a time when the fate of the Chinese people hangs in the balance." At the same time he responded to the appeal set forth in "A Letter from the All China Cultural Federation to Scholars and Literary and Art Workers the World Over" and collected Wen Yiduo's writings and speeches to be published worldwide. Writing about Wen's death he said: "His blood has dyed red not only a nameless wild flower or the withered grass under his feet, but also the hearts of countless people; it has inspired millions of people to stand up to fight for peace and for a new China." (Preface to *Selected Works of Wen Yiduo*)

His determination to devote himself to the democratic movement for which these martyrs had fought led to the inclusion of his name in the Kuomintang's assassination blacklist.

Beijing's Liberation

Shortly after the murder of Li Gongpu and Wen Yiduo, Li Guangtian went to teach at Nankai University in Tianjin. The university grounds presented a bleak landscape of broken walls with only two or three old buildings left intact. The Lis lived in a small secluded house in Xibaishu Village. Although they lived humbly, their home became a kind of retreat where large numbers of progressive students visited to discuss politics and criticize the Kuomintang's policy of civil war and dictatorship.

Civil war, food shortages, inflation and strikes were spreading throughout the country. At first the students from Beida and Chinghua only took to the street to clash with the troops and police. Then the "Northern China Students Strike Committee" was set up, with the slogans: "Against Hunger, Against Civil

* In central Kunming.

War!" "For Democracy, for Peace!" In what become known as the May 20th Movement the students of Beijing, Tianjin and Tangshan went into action with eight arrests and many wounded. Walking shoulder to shoulder with the marchers of Nankai University on May 20th was Professor Li Guangtian. The following day the *Ta Kung Pao** published Li's speech and commented: "Both his talk and his pen are pointed at the dark, backward and corrupt forces."

Again Li was placed on the Kuomintang wanted list. In the latter half of 1947, at the invitation of the poet Zhu Ziqing, Li went to teach at Chinghua.

During this period, Li wrote a number of articles on literature and art, among which are comments on Lu Xun, Gorky and Tolstoy, on experiences in creative work, on literary and artistic creation, criticism and style. These articles appear in the collections: *Leaves and Branches of Literature*, *On Literary Creation*, *Letters on Literature and Art* and *On Literary Education*. The book *On Literature* remained unfinished. After Zhu Ziqing's death in 1948, Li collated *Selected Works of Zhu Ziqing* and *Selected Works of Wen Yiduo* and wrote a preface for each.

In the wintry sunshine of January 1949 Beijing was peacefully liberated. When the Communist Party branch at Chinghua University published a list of underground Party members, Li Guangtian's name was included.

Return to the City of Spring

In 1952 Li became chancellor of Yunnan University. He left Beijing and returned to Kunming where he was to spend the last 16 years of his life. During this period his administrative work consumed almost all of his time. Yunnan University trained thousands of cadres, scientists and technicians and Li, as an educationist, contributed much painstaking labour. It was said that Li ran the university with the air of a poet and that he instilled into his poetry the fervour of an educationist.

The works of his later life include a collection of poems

* A popular daily published in Tianjin.

and *Thirty Essays*. Other essays from this period are "The Flowery Tide", "Mountain Scenery and Other Things" and "Diary of a Certain Person". Among them "The Flowery Tide", a moving description of people going to Yuantong Hill in Kunming in spring to look at the flowers has been praised most. Li was also engaged in the collation and study of national minority literature from Yunnan. He collated the narrative poem *Xianxiu* and the legend *A Drop of Honey*, both belonging to the Dai people of Dehong. The long poem *Ashma* of the Shani people which he collated and revised is a significant work in national minority literature. It was made into a film on which Li acted as literary adviser. His preface for the revised edition of the poem is regarded as an article of great academic value on national minority literature.

All of Li's work, however, became evidence against him during the "Cultural Revolution", when he was mentally and physically tortured and died on November 2, 1968. Li's daughter walked 30 kilometres to the Paoma Hill in the suburbs of Kunming to claim her father's ashes. The day was the Mid-autumn Festival of the lunar calendar, a day, in Chinese tradition, of family reunion. That mid-autumn night the daughter brought home her father's remains and the next day, with the help of a couple of kind-hearted peasants, she buried him at Jinjia Hill.

Ten years of the "Cultural Revolution" have elapsed, the "gang of four" has been smashed and the unjust verdict against Li Guangtian has been reversed. In 1978 a grand ceremony was held in Kunming to honour his ashes. This writer and educationist who contributed so much during his lifetime has not been forgotten.

Translated by Hu Zhibui

Hu Feng

What the Grass Said to the Sun

YOU give me warmth,
 give me strength;
 my blades have turned green,
 my tiny flowers red,
 and I have formed a capsule of fine seeds.

You are the wet-nurse suckling me,
 you are the lover loving me,
 you are my second self, aware of my heartbeat;
 I have loved you,
 love you,
 sha'll for ever love you.

Hu Feng, born in 1902 in Qichun, Hubei, is a literary critic, poet and translator. In 1955, he was wrongly accused of being the chief of an anti-Party clique and was not cleared until 1980. The case against the so-called "Hu Feng Anti-Party Clique" was wrong.

Winter has come
 with ice
 and snow,
 how splendid!
 An expanse of brightness, an expanse of white,
 but I am locked in the ice,
 covered with snow,
 and cannot see you
 or hear you.

No matter,
 there is warmth in my heart,
 I am happy,
 protected by the ice,
 enfolded in snow,
 I must sleep,
 sleep gently,
 sweetly;
 then all the warmth you have given me
 will flow into my roots,
 and I shall sleep snugly
 dreaming peaceful dreams.

Next year
 you will bring in the spring;
 when that time comes
 I shall open my little eyes,
 raise my little head,
 stretch my little waist
 and smile just as innocently
 as ever I can;

with blades greener than ever,
tiny flowers redder than ever,
I shall look at you and love you.

Next year
the seeds formed this year will germinate;
they are my children,
even more your children;
they will smile,

 and no one, not even I,
 has such an innocent smile;
their blades will be green,
 and no one, not even I,
 has had such a vivid green;
their tiny flowers will turn red,
 and no one, not even I,
 has had such a red.

When you see them
their smiles will intoxicate you,
 knowing how I watch you, listen to you and love you,
wet-nurse who suckles me,
lover who loves me,
my second self, aware of my heartbeat.

Give me your blessing,
 too great a blessing by far,
 but gratefully I shall accept it;
and accept my blessing,
 too small a blessing by far,
 but still kindly you will accept it.

Such bliss,
such happiness,
I must sleep,
I am falling asleep,
already I am dreaming,
all is peace . . . all is sweetness

Written in the evening, December 4, 1949, in
Beijing while watching the first fall of snow

Translated by Gladys Yang

Tao Yongbai

A New Generation of Artists

EIGHTEEN years ago, a young girl, Wang Gongyi, saw a portrait of Qiu Jin (1879-1907) in a historical museum. The story of Qiu Jin's life inspired her so much that she began to collect materials about her. Qiu Jin broke the feudal traditions of her family by going to study in Japan at the turn of the century, where she joined the Chinese Revolutionary League led by Dr Sun Yat Sen. Its aim was to overthrow the Qing Dynasty and create a democratic republic. After her return to China, she organized an armed insurrection, which was later crushed by the Qing troops. Qiu Jin was executed at her home-town of Shaoxing, Zhejiang Province. Wang Gongyi was studying art in Hangzhou, when she went on a sketching trip to Qiu Jin's home. She started to engrave a set of seven woodcuts depicting Qiu Jin's life and completed them within a few months. *Seeking, Ardour, Joining the League, Insurrection, Sacrifice (I), Sacrifice (II) and Autumn Wind and Rain* won a first prize at the Second National Youth Art

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Ardour by Wang Gongyi

Exhibition held last winter at the National Art Gallery, Beijing. Thirty-five-year old Wang is now a postgraduate student at Zhejiang Academy of Art. The woodcuts freely engraved with artistic exaggeration present Qiu Jin as a woman of action, unusual in a time when women were confined to the home. One feels Qiu Jin's restless search for a sense of purpose and how her brief life gathered momentum until her final sacrifice.

The exhibition, sponsored jointly by the Ministry of Culture, the Youth League and the Chinese Artists' Association, displayed works by over 500 young artists, whose ages ranged from 16 to 35. It reflected the ideas and experiences of the artists, most of whom

had grown up during the chaotic years of the “Cultural Revolution”. This compelled them to think deeply about life and its problems. While many works praised socialism and expressed the eagerness of the youth to modernize China, some were critical of certain shortcomings in our society.

A first prize was also awarded to Luo Zhongli, thirty-two years old, who is a student at the Sichuan Academy of Art, Sichuan Province. His oil painting *Father* has a photographic quality. In 1969, after graduating from the middle school attached to the art academy, Luo was sent to work in a factory in a small county town in the Daba Mountains. He remained there for several years, living among the peasants and learning about their lives. One snowy New Year’s Eve, all the families were celebrating, except for one old peasant, who sat apart by a container of fertilizer, near his house. It was as if he were guarding a priceless treasure. He seemed to be thinking about the good harvest it would bring. Luo said, “Do you know how much effort it costs the peasants so that we can eat bread or rice? I painted the old man like this because he is one of our unsung heroes. He is creating history. I wanted him to be so alive that you could almost hear him breathe!” Every detail on the old peasant’s face is meticulously painted: the lined, weather-beaten, tanned skin; the beads of sweat on his brow; his rough, gnarled hands. All are witness to his years of toil, while his cracked bowl bespeaks his poverty. What are his eyes seeking? What is he trying to say? Luo, who worked on illustrating picture books previously, only started painting in oils a year ago. In the woodcut, *A Milkmaid*, a healthy, energetic young girl, dressed in a red robe, stands among the cows and golden sunflowers. This is the work of Wei Junchuan, who after graduation at sixteen from middle school, was sent to work for five years on a state farm in Inner Mongolia. Though he left the farm several years ago, life on the grasslands left a deep impression on him. Last year he visited there again and came to realize the influence it has had on his themes and work. The artist used several colour plates to achieve his effect.

Zhu Xunde’s *Selecting Embroidery Patterns* is done in the traditional meticulous style, yet the theme is new. Some women are



Selecting Embroidery Patterns (traditional Chinese painting)

Zhu Xunde

Works by Young Artists



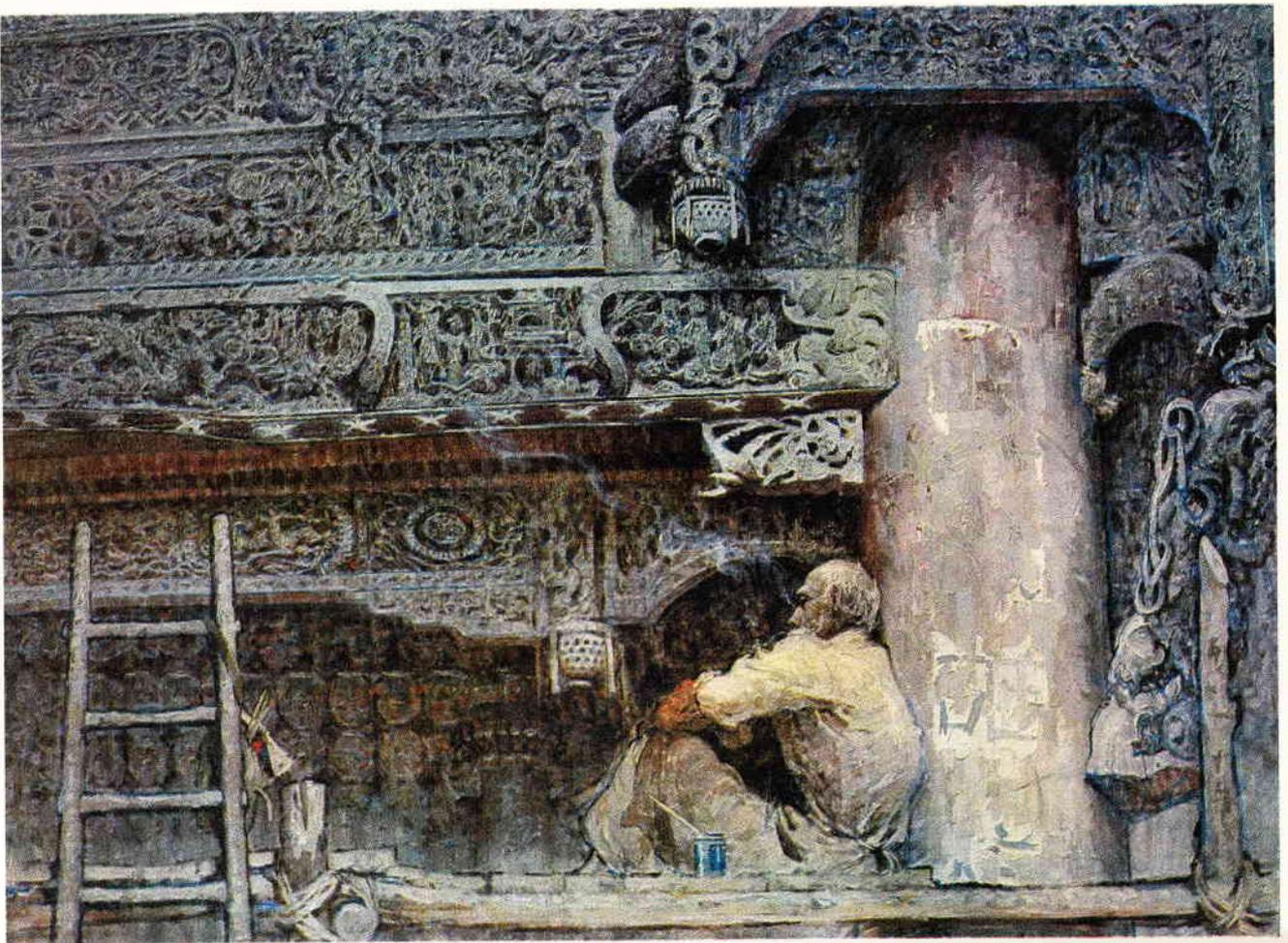
Young Tibetans (oil)

Zhou Chunfang



A Milkmaid (woodcut)

Wei Junquan



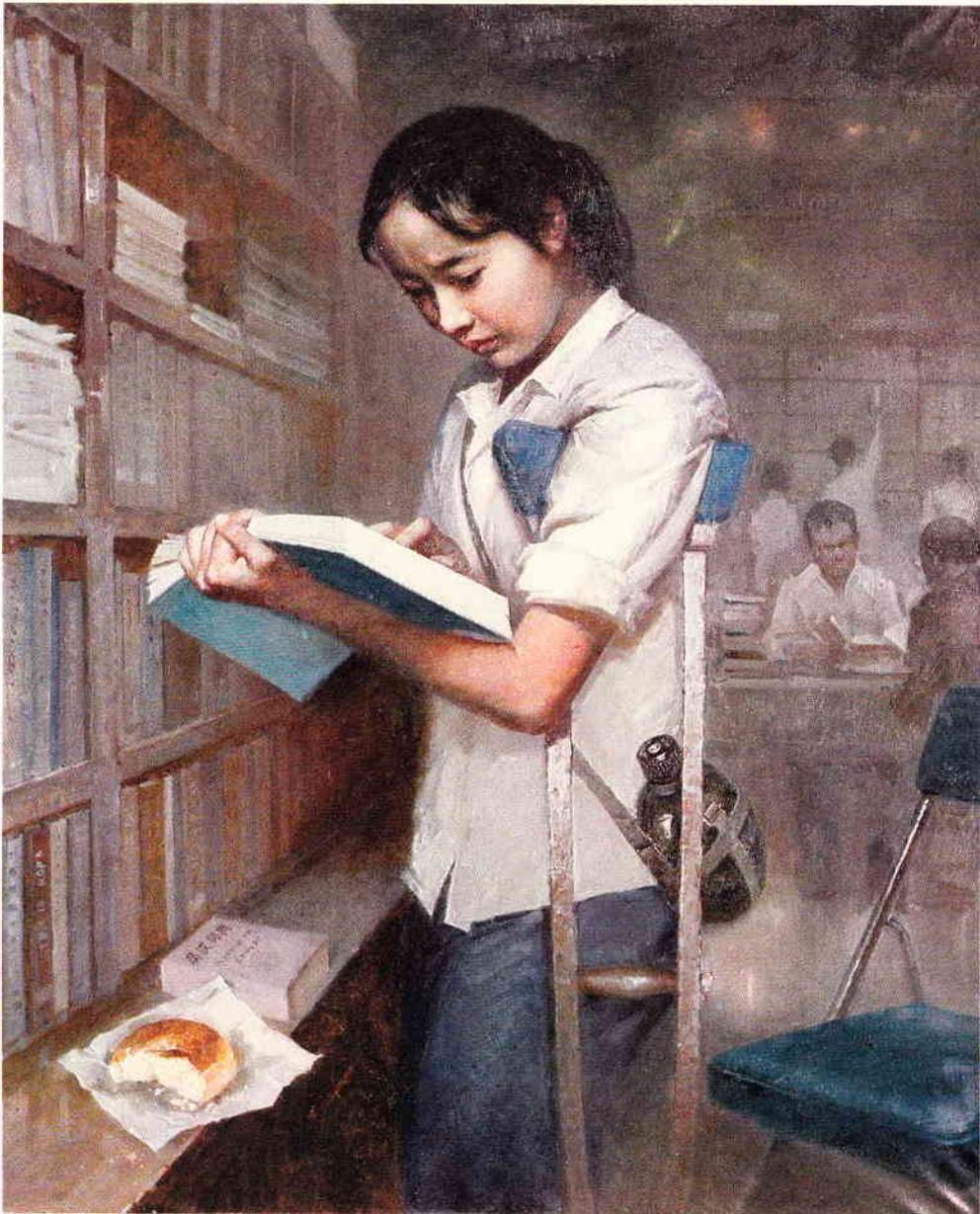
An Old Painter (oil)

Li Jusheng



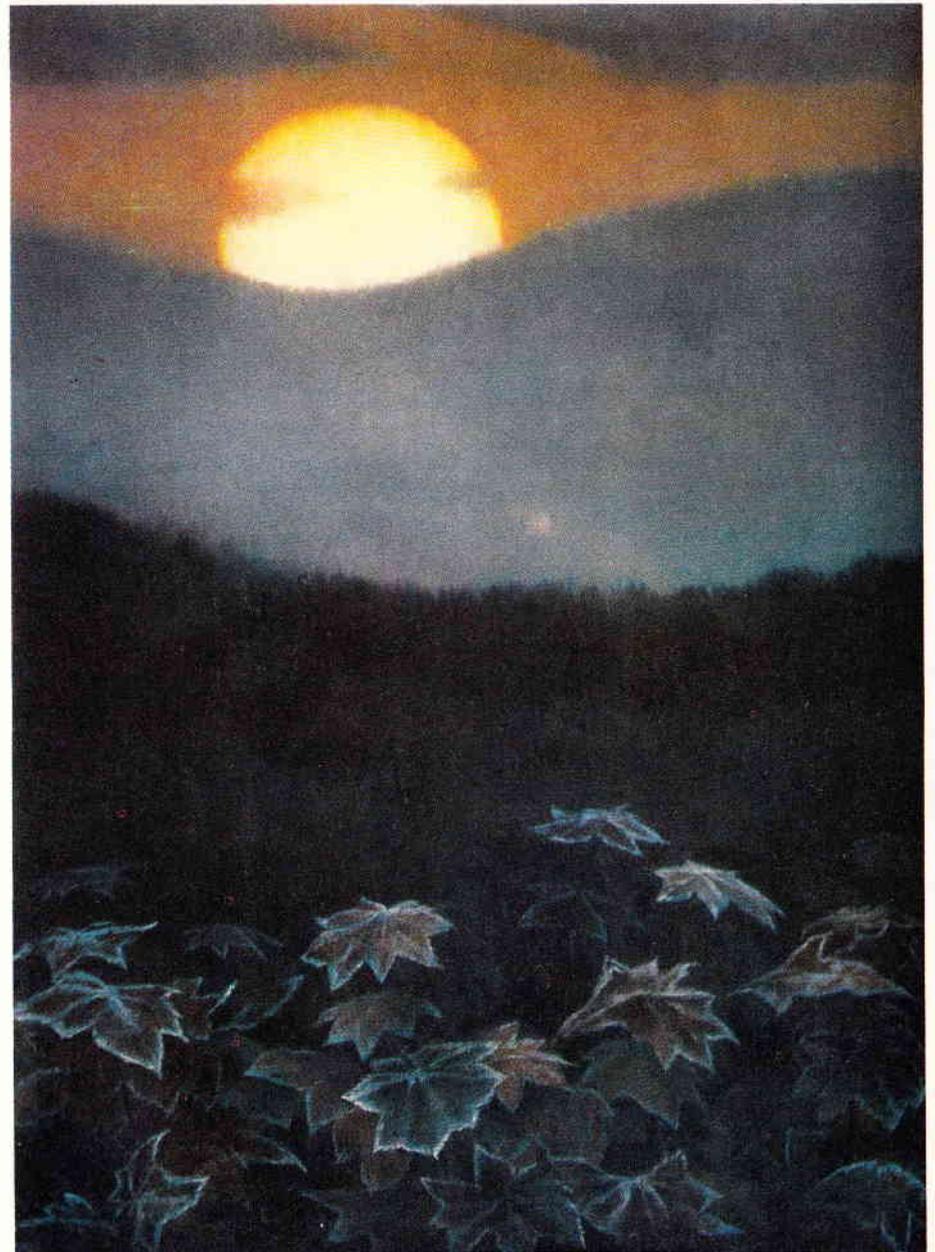
Playing Together (traditional Chinese painting)

Liu Shuzhi



Aspiring Girl (oil)

Ai Xuan



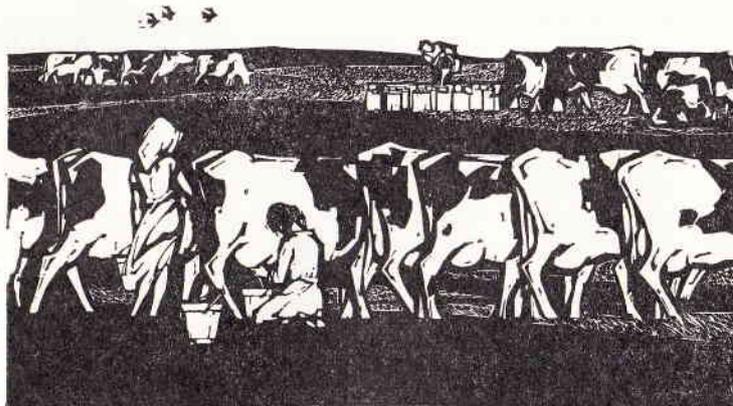
Autumn (oil)

Mo Dolin



Father (oil)

Luo Zhongli



Milking Cows by Lü Xiaoman

selecting flower embroidery patterns from a carpet on which they are displayed. *Young Tibetans* by Zhou Chunfang is a simple composition of five children, symbolizing the new generation. Pointillism is used to apply the colours, adding liveliness to the work. In *An Old Painter*, Li Jusheng uses oils to portray an old decorator, who is meditating on the step of a magnificent temple. All his life has been devoted to decorating it. Now he must start all over again. Flowers are the linking theme of *Gezhou Dam Worksite*, the flowery sparks from the welders at work, the flowers in the hair of the girls. This is a painting done in the traditional style by He Jiaying. Lü Xiaoman's woodblock print *Milking Cows* is a charming pastoral scene in black, grey and white tones. Liu Shuzhi's *Playing Together* incorporates the simple, rustic, colourful characteristics of the peasant New Year paintings, while adding a touch of modern life. *Aspiring Girl* shows the tenacity of a crippled girl, who is so absorbed in her studies that she forgets her meals. This is true of the younger generation, who had their education interrupted for ten years and who now have to make up for lost time. This oil painting by Ai Xuan speaks for them. *Autumn* by Mo Daling is another oil. Its cool tones give an impression of the season's chilly winds and approaching winter.

Translated by Kuang Wendong

Zhuo Ru

An Interview with the Poetess Bingxin

It isn't often that one has the chance to congratulate a noted poetess on her eightieth birthday, but on 5th October last year, I went to wish Bingxin many happy returns of the day. There was a crispness to the bright autumn sunshine. "I haven't written poetry for many years," she said smiling. "But I still love to read good verses." I explained that I hoped she would tell me something about how she became a poet.

Bingxin came from a high-ranking naval officer's family. She was fortunate enough to have parents who encouraged her to study. She attended a preparatory course at the Women's Union College in Beijing. In 1919 an event occurred which changed the whole course of her life, turning her into a writer. At the Conference of Paris, the imperialist nations infringed upon the rights

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Bingxin

of China, one of the victorious nations. This enraged the Chinese people, and students in Beijing launched a nationwide patriotic democratic movement, the May 4th Movement, heralding the start of a new democratic revolution. The mass demonstrations made a deep impression on Bingxin. In excitement, she rushed to her college and threw herself into the movement. She was elected as an officer of the Students' Union and executive secretary in charge of the propaganda department of the Women Students' Federation. By day she was busy popularizing the movement, soliciting articles and attending meetings. By night she wrote articles herself attacking imperialism and feudalism in its various forms. Her first story, *Two Families*, was published under the pen-name Bingxin. After that she published more stories, prose and poems in newspapers and magazines. Within a few years, a collection of her stories, *The Recluse*, and two collections of her poems, *Stars* and *Spring Water*, were available.

In 1923, she went to the United States to study literature. En

route and during her stay there, she wrote down her impressions, which were published as a collection of reports and essays, *To Little Readers*. This brought her fame overnight, especially since she was a writer, a rare career for a woman in those days.

I asked her when she first began to write poetry. After a pause, she replied, "It was as long ago as 1919. I had never thought of writing poetry. I just scribbled down a few lines that came to my mind one day in class. Then I was inspired by Zheng Zhenduo's translation of *Stray Birds* by the Indian poet Tagore. The style of these poems was very free. I studied it, jotting down my thoughts or recollections, a few lines at a time, sometimes with a reason, sometimes without, and occasionally criticizing something. When I had enough of these I arranged them into a collection, choosing the first word of the first line 'Stars' as the title. Then the editor of the *Morning News Supplement* asked me to be a contributor. Since I had nothing else at hand to offer him, I sent him *Stars*, which he accepted. Still the night before it went to press, the editors rang me up and asked what it was I had written. I told them they were like recollections."

I produced from my bag a copy of *The Collected Poems of Bingxin* and turned to *Stars* and *Spring Water*, reading some of the following poems:

People only admire the bright colour
Of the flower of success.
They never see its bud,
Soaked with the tears of struggle,
Sprinkled with the blood of sacrifice.
.....
The fuller the flower of words blossoms,
The smaller the fruit of action becomes.
.....
When you indulge quietly in your own fragrance,
The flower at the corner of the wall,
The universe will become very small.
.....
Work carefully, young men.

Time is turning the pages
Which you will inscribe with your pen.

.....

"There is a philosophical mood to these poems," I commented. Bingxin countered modestly, "To be frank, I never considered *Stars* or *Spring Water* strictly as poems. Rather they were my random thoughts. These two collections lack form and rhythm, which a poem should have. Even at the time I felt they were too brief and lacking in fullness. In the end I stopped writing like that."

In fact some of the poems in these collections express courage, urging young people to value their youth and look to the future. The language is fresh and natural. Bingxin's delicate style was widely admired and copied by the youth. Its influence was considerable in poetry circles then and even today remains of some importance.

"I actually longed to write good poetry in June 1921, when I had transferred to Yenching University. I started with *Thoughts in Hills*, which I wrote while I was at a summer camp in the Western Hills. It was also published in the *Morning News Supplement* with a note by a literary critic, Sun Fuyuan. He was a noted editor and a student of Lu Xun. He wrote: 'This short article is very poetic, written in separate lines. Thus it can be printed in the poetry column. (That it is written in separate lines is not the most important factor. A poem depends on its content)...' This made me bolder. I wrote free verse, sometimes rhymed, sometimes not. But none satisfied me. Only *Preface to the Collection of the Past* and *A Word*, which I wrote several years later, have some musical quality."

A Word was written in 1936, ten years after Bingxin had returned to China from the United States. It was published only recently in the magazine *Poetry*.

That day a thin mist rose over the lake,
Enshrouding the fish splashing on its surface.
The east wind gently caressed my shoulders,
"Don't say that word yet. Wait, wait!"

That night the stars dotted the skies,
Resting in the tree a pair of birds.
The south wind teasingly tapped my cheeks,
"It's done! You've finally said that word!"

That night a pale moon over the lake,
Across the water fireflies glimmered.
The west wind gently pressing my lips,
"Brooding over that word still? Why?"

A dusty wind whistling through the air,
Carrying the alarmed caw of the lonely crow.
The north wind scratching at my eyes,
"Take back that word? It's too late!"

This poem aroused the interest and curiosity of its readers, some of whom believed it to be a love poem connected with Bingxin herself. I took the opportunity to refer to this. She clarified the mystery, saying, "I wrote it to mourn for a dear friend. She had fallen in love with a school-mate, but her family strongly opposed the marriage because of the boy's humble origins. Later a famous man proposed marriage to her. I was then in the United States. 'How shall I decide?' she wrote to me. 'I'm waiting for a word from you.' I wanted her to settle down, so I told her to go ahead and marry him. In fact I didn't feel it was right. When she died in 1936, I felt very sad and wrote this poem in her memory."

"Have you ever written any love poems?" I probed eagerly, but immediately regretted my impulsiveness and impertinence. However, Bingxin smiled and answered, "Yes. I wrote one, *Come Back, My Darling!* It was written for Wu Wenzao in 1938." After Bingxin's return to China in 1926, she taught at Yenching University and Chinghua University in Beijing. She met her future husband at Yenching, where he was a professor of law.

After the Japanese attacked the Marco Polo Bridge outside Beijing in 1937, Bingxin and her husband left for Chongqing, the wartime capital. After the defeat of the Japanese in 1945, her husband was the leader of an official delegation to Japan, so Bingxin accompanied him to Tokyo, where they lived for some

years. In 1951, after much effort, Bingxin and her husband returned to New China. Her writings of this period can be found in her books, *Taoqi's Diary in the Summer Vacation*, *My Native Land*, *After My Return, We Have Disturbed the Spring*, *Ode to the Flowering Cherry*, *Notes on Gleaning Wheat*, *A Little Orange Lantern*. She also published some translations such as Tagore's *Gitanjali*. She did not write much later, on account of the ultra-Left tendencies prevalent in those years. Then came the "Cultural Revolution".

After the downfall of the "gang of four", Bingxin regained some of her vitality, writing recollections of her home and childhood. She produced a third volume of *To Little Readers* for the young people striving to modernize China. At the Fourth Congress of Writers and Artists in 1979, she was elected vice-chairman of the All China Federation of Literary and Art Circles. Last year, in April, she visited Japan as deputy head of a Chinese Writers' Delegation. After her return, she continued work on some translations and engaged in other cultural activities.

Overtired, she suddenly had a stroke one night. When the news of her illness spread, everyone was very concerned about her. The noted writer, Ba Jin, himself almost eighty, who happened to be passing through Beijing, went to her hospital room and advised her, "Don't fight old age!" Foreign writers and friends also sent letters wishing her a speedy recovery.

Though she is still convalescing, Bingxin shows a lively interest in recent literary developments. When I asked her what she thought about the new poems, she said from her experience poetry was not simply a matter of form, the content should have a poetical flavour. "A good poem, apart from the emotions it expresses, should have beautiful, sonorous rhymes. I like to recite poems and realize the great importance of cadence. A good poem has tremendous influence on its readers." She said she was delighted at the emergence of young poets in the past two years. She continued, "I hope they read more classical and foreign poems and folk songs." During our conversation, many times she recited in her clear voice some children's songs and ancient poems.

There are some differences of opinion about the poems of young

poets. In reply to my question on obscure and ambiguous poems Bingxin said, "I've read very few poems recently. Sometimes I just read them casually, without paying much attention to them. It's difficult to understand some of them. To comment in detail I'd have to read them carefully again. I prefer poems that are clear and optimistic. The Tang poet Bai Juyi (AD 772-846) used to read his poems to old women to make sure that even they could understand them. I also like Li Bai (AD 701-762) and Du Fu (AD 712-770). But my favourite is Bai Juyi. I don't like poems that are difficult to understand. In the past, some poems were written ambiguously, because the poets dared not be open. Or they used poems without titles to express love between men and women when it was inconvenient to do so frankly. Poetry reflects one's thoughts and feelings. If it is too obscure so as not to be intelligible to others, it loses its significance."

She paused before going on, "Let a hundred flowers blossom in the field of poetry. Readers are just critics. They can discriminate. Sentimental poems and poems full of grief and indignation over the chaotic years were in vogue for a time. However, as life improves, people will feel more hopeful and such poems will naturally become fewer. Many people learned from foreign poetry during the May 4th Movement until they finally evolved their own style. I believe we can continue to develop poetry in this country by learning from our ancient poetic tradition."

Nursed with the best of care, Bingxin is much better. When her 80th birthday was celebrated, she said with emotion, "I never think about being eighty. People say that there are some who never realize that old age is approaching, but I didn't even notice my old age had already come!" Hearing this, I could not help quoting the lines from a Tang-dynasty poet:

Don't say mulberries and elms are in the evening of their lives;
Their splendour still fills the sky!

Translated by Kuang Wendong

Xu Xiake

A Visit to Yandang Mountain

TEN days after leaving Tiantai Mountain I reached Yellow Crag. As sun was setting, I stayed overnight at Ba'ao, thirty *li* from the south gate.

The following day I walked 20 *li* and climbed Spiral Mountain to find the soaring peaks of Yanshan Mountain beckoning in the distance like a cluster of lotus flowers. After a further 20 *li* I took lunch at Dajing Post. Turning southward I crossed a small stream and caught sight of a round boulder on the western peak. My servant thought that it was Double Head Hillock while I myself imagined it to be the Old Monk Crag. In fact it was neither. Some five *li* on and across the Zhang Building the real Old Monk Crag came into view. About a hundred feet in height, it resembles a bald aging monk in his Buddhist robes. Next to it is a smaller peak in the shape of a young boy leaning over although this is usually obscured by the Old Monk Crag. Halfway up the mountain and a distance of two *li* from the Zhang Building is the Stone Bridge Cave. The bridge slants downward in a rainbow-like arc and has steps carved into a recess in the middle. I climbed these

and, arriving at the top, found an open space. I sat a while and then descended. Journeying from the Mount of Master Xie and over the right foot of the mountain I crossed a ravine, to the west of which lay the path to Miracle Mountain. Halfway up, two steep cliffs rise above the clouds and clustered peaks overshadow one another, some as vertical as bamboo shoots, others upright as fungus, straight as a writing brush or tilting like a man's head-dress. The mouths of the caves are like furled curtains and the pools an indigo blue. The Double Phoenix and Five Elders Mountains extend about one *li* along to the Miracle Temple, from where I climbed to Miracle Cave behind the temple. Beside it is a crevice through which I edged on to a flight of stairs leading to a sheltered area at the top. In the centre of the clearing sit statues of arhats. Here I sat happily until dusk fell and then returned to the temple.

On the 12th day of my journey, I set out after mealtime from Miracle Mountain to find Azure Sky Cave, returning later by the old road to the base of the Mount of Master Xie. Some five *li* on from Echo Crag, I arrived at the entrance to the Monastery of Pure Name. On entering I found the Water Curtain Gorge, its cascading waterfall flanked by two cliffs.

Five *li* from the gorge, the Miraculous Crag Monastery is set deep into the mountains. Along the winding path leading to it, another world comes into view. The south-facing monastery is in the middle and behind it the spare, purple Sunshine Screen Peak, towering thousands of metres in the air. The south face of the peak has Heaven Pillar Mountain on the right side and Unfurling Flag Mountain on the left. Dragon Snout Stream runs between the peak and the Heaven Pillar. Through an opening in the cave I laboured directly on up to another cave similar in form to the Miracle Cave but somewhat smaller and containing yellow and purple boulders. Along the rim a lustrous reddish-black vein in the shape of a snout stretches from the ceiling to the bottom of the cave. If you put a finger into this snout water then trickles into a stone bowl. This is considered to be one of the wonders of Sunshine Screen Peak. To the southwest is Solitary Beauty Mountain, smaller in volume than the Heaven Pillar, but equally high and sharp. Beneath the Solitary Beauty is Brush Stem Moun-

tain, half the former's height, but extremely steep. The roaring sound between the two mountains originates from the Small Dragon Cataract. Across and opposite the Solitary Beauty is the Jade Lady Mountain, at the top of which grow spring flowers as though decorating a woman's hair. On from here and past the Double Phoenix, Heaven Pillar Mountain is the highest. Beyond the Double Phoenix Mountain there are only two peaks, on the edge of which is the Crag of the Praying Monk which has the appearance of a monk in his robes. Between the left lower face of Sunshine Screen Peak and the Unfurling Flag Mountain is Dhyana Gorge and southwest is Stone Screen Peak, resembling Sunshine Screen in appearance, but half as high and wide as the latter. On top, by the peak, Toad Crag stands opposite Jade Tortoise Crag.

From the Stone Peak southwards, a flight of steps rises on ridges in the Unfurling Flag Mountain stopping at a stone threshold. If you look down from the steps, you cannot see any ground at all. Above is a high mountain with two round caves. Another cave, called Bright Cave, is deep but open to light from outside and is a feature of Sunshine Screen Peak. Soaring peaks, each higher than the next, offer some of the most fantastic scenery on earth. Spanned by a bridge with a temple before it, Small Dragon Cataract flows across Heaven Pillar and Unfurling Flag Mountains. Near the bridge at the foot of Heaven Pillar is Pearly Crag. Crown Pearl Mountain overlooks Unfurling Flag Mountain. All this can be seen from Miracle Cave.

On the 13th day, walking along the foot of the mountain and right I saw jagged cliffs and luminescent rays streaming through the clouds. Slab Crag is very high and wide and under it are the Small Scissor Cliffs, their sharp edges close to each other. There is a peak which almost seems to touch the sky called Bodhisattva Guanyin Crag, with Saddle Mountain standing next to it. Turning right along a circuitous footpath flows a murmuring brook. There is a cave with a bottom as flat as a grindstone. About a dozen *li* away from Miracle Crag and past Floating Clouds Peak, the Large Scissor Cliffs along the ravine come into view. The layered crags on the north side of the cliffs are known as Serried Clouds Mountain. Having made a tour of Slab Crag, I came across the

Dragon Cataract tumbling down into a pool. With the steepness of the ravine, the water spray leapt dazzlingly into the air. There is a hall set in the middle of the pool and legend has it that the arhat Rakula once stayed there in order to contemplate the waterfall. Behind the hall a flight of stone steps leads to a pavilion directly in front of the waterfall. I stayed a while to enjoy the view and then went down to the convent to have a meal.

Although it was drizzling, my soul flew to the peak of Wild Goose Mountain. So, I braved the rain and walked to Floating Cloud Peak. Passing the Pine Cave halfway up the peak, I climbed three *li* higher and arrived at the White Cloud Convent. In this deserted and dilapidated place, I saw a priest amidst weeds and shrubs. Catching sight of me, he looked up and left. I continued on one more *li* to Tranquil Cloud Convent, where I stayed overnight. The priest Qing Yin, though bedridden for many years, still held a lively conversation. The weather was raining and dismal, and I was greatly worried about the following day.

Unexpectedly it turned fine on the fourteenth day. I asked Qing Yin to permit his disciple to be my guide. He told me that the lake had become overgrown with weeds and neglected. And the disciple had to go somewhere else, but he promised that he would have him accompany me as far as the summit of the Floating Cloud Peak. I thought when I got to the top the lake was within easy reach. With staffs in our hands, we laboured through bushes for several *li*, panting at every step, before we arrived at the top. Beneath the peak was a white expanse of clouds through which only one peak was visible. Illuminated by the sun, the clouds resemble a glittering, snow-white jade world and it is difficult to say whether they are land or sea. In the sea there seemed to be a jade ring, so close I was tempted to pick it up. This landscape of jagged and perilous stalagmites within emerald cliffs is more wonderful than that of Miracle Crag. In the tranquil gorge a murmur of flowing water is audible, although no lake is to be seen. Looking down, the surrounding mountains seem like small hills.

East Peak towers above the rest and only Floating Cloud Mountain can match it. Before my guide turned back, he pointed

out the lake on the west slope of a mountain and told me I had to cross three mountains before reaching it. I followed his directions. After I left the first of them behind, the route was no longer clear. By the second I seemed to be virtually in mid-air. The *Topography of the Ming Empire* says: "Wild Goose Lake is on top of the mountain and is the source of Dragon Cataract." Further down, the lower reaches of Dragon Cataract are fed from East Peak. Crossing another two gorges, I then turned to head for East Peak. My fellow traveller, Monk Lian Zhou, felt too tired to accompany me and returned. I journeyed on with both my servants over another two ridges and did not see a soul.

The higher the mountain, the narrower the path, and it was like walking on the backs of swords with rugged menacing cliffs on either side. No sooner had we crossed a ridge than we encountered a steep peak. In this way we traversed three peaks as though walking through a forest of swords. If the route is too narrow even by foot, how can it accommodate a lake? At the very top of the last peak is a razor-sharp cliff. I was afraid in case I should be injured as there was no room even to walk. I decided I had better not take the old road and, looking southwards, found a ridge under the cliff. Using four-foot puttees as a rope, one of my servants lowered himself on to the precipice. I then followed suit with a view to finding a way out. Our ridge was only large enough to stand on and beneath us lay a ravine some hundreds of feet deep. We thought to climb up again, but the cliff above us rose more than thirty feet and of course we could not fly up. We had to climb it grasping the foot bandages for support. Once our puttee-rope broke and we had to suspend it again from a rock. With much difficulty we eventually succeeded.

When we returned to Tranquil Cloud Convent it was sunset. Our clothes were ragged and we felt so dishevelled that we gave up going to visit the lake. Having said our goodbyes, we proceeded from the convent to Dragon Cataract which, after the heavy rain, was tumbling down even more violently than before and sent white foam flying. I sat there till it grew dark. Afterwards we walked about four *li* southwards and lodged at the Neng Ren Monastery.

On the fifteenth day, we searched behind the temple for some bamboo branches. We could only find ones too slender to be used as staffs as the stronger old branches had already been cut. On our way back along the sea towards the south we took the tortuous road and crossed Yao'ao Peak to go to the county of Leqing.

On Taihua Mountain

At the end of the second month, I journeyed some thirty-five *li* into the Tongguan Pass and stopped at Huashan Monastery. The Yellow River flows from the northern desert to the south, then bends at Tongguan to the east. The pass is a strategic point overlooking the Yellow River on the north and adjoining the Huashan Mountains on the south and is bounded by giant fortified walls. The highway runs east to west. To head north necessitates crossing the Yellow River. Moving south means making one's way through the Wuguan Pass. With steep cliffs and overlapping crags at the south end of the Huashan there are no alternative routes. Before entering the Tongguan Pass, Taihua Mountain is visible towering above the clouds from a distance of a hundred *li*. When one arrives at the pass, however, it is hidden from view by foothills. Some twenty *li* ahead, magnificent mountains like clusters of lotus flowers appear. Three striking peaks with crags on either side and the bare hills to the north make incomparably beautiful scenery.

On the first day of the third month I went to pay homage to the deity in the Huashan Monastery. Climbing the Longevity Pavilion and walking fifteen *li*, I entered Cloud Terrace Temple and then asked for a guide to All Directions Convent. At the entrance to a gorge a rivulet flows through two cliffs with Jade Fountain Villa on the left. Another ten *li* ahead of this gorge and rivulet there is the Trailing Grass Palace. From here the path becomes dangerous. A further ten *li* on and one arrives at Green Shrubs Clearing where the route levels out somewhat. Beyond Scant Sunlight Bridge five *li* off, hardly any path exists at all. Holding on to a chain, I

climbed up to the Thousand Foot Crag and the Hundred Foot Gorge. Turning left, I arrived at the Laozi Plough Ditch and passed the Mountain of Monkeys. Five *li* north of the Green Shrubs Clearing is the White Cloud Peak surrounded on three sides by sharp cliffs and seemingly hanging in the air. South of this peak is Grey Dragon Mountain. Crossing Sun-and-Moon Crag and Plough Ditch five *li* away, I ascended Tripod Mountain. From the east slope I went to pay homage at the Jade Lady Temple, and entered the Cave of Greeting the Sun. The priest Li promised that I might lodge there so I made use of my spare time to visit the eastern hill till dusk.

On the second day I climbed up to the peak from the northern foot of the south mountain and then descended on the south side to rest at a secluded spot. A little later I climbed up again. On the top there is a small depression, which the priest told me was the Facing Heaven Pool, with Black Dragon Pool right next to it. Coming down from the west side, I ascended the west peak once more and then found a crag capped by a stone slab like a lotus leaf. Beside it is the very deep Jade Well and I wondered why a pavilion should have been built over it. At mealtime I returned to the Cave of Greeting the Sun. Mounting the east peak this time and descending from the south cliff, I found a flat rock named Chessboard Stone above a gorge. Bidding farewell there to the priest, I took the same route down as before in order to see White Cloud Peak and Mother Goddess Hall. While I was at Trailing Grass Clearing, dusk fell, and I hastened away from the gorge, then, carefully feeling my way for three *li*, stayed overnight at the All Directions Convent. Outside of the Green Shrubs Clearing on the left upper slope are Sailing-in-a-Cup Convent and Mao Nü Cave. On the upper right slope outside Trailing Grass Clearing is the Imperial Peak. All of them are subsidiary peaks of the Huashan Mountains. Since the paths leading to them are very steep and shrouded in darkness, I decided not to go on any further.

On the third day, after travelling 15 *li* I arrived at Huashan Monastery. Walking another five *li* westwards I passed the west gate of Huayin County. Twenty *li* southwest of a narrow path

one enters the Hong Ravine. It is the third ravine on the west of Huashan Mountains, and between its two towering cliffs runs a rapid stream. Following along the ravine towards the south, the path abruptly turns east, then west. The rocks are jagged and sharp and one travels as though through gaps between teeth or as a boat navigating along a tortuous river. Covering twenty *li* more, I lodged at Wooden Cup. So far, from Huashan Monastery onwards, I have travelled forty-five *li*.

Translated by Song Shouquan

Wu Yingshou

The Travel Notes of Xu Xiake

CHINESE science and technology made significant advances in the hundred year period from the mid 16th century onwards. Many important works appeared, such as the *Compendium of Materia Medica* by Li Shizhen (1518-1593), *Complete Treatise on Agriculture* by Xu Guangqi (1562-1633), *The Exploitation of the Works of Nature* by Song Yingxing (1587-?) and *Observations on Physics* by Fang Yizhi (1611-1671). Also from this period, *The Travel Notes of Xu Xiake* was a first attempt to research and systematically record the karst topography of south-west China, and as such is a major scientific work. Apart from its place in the history of Chinese science, *The Travel Notes* is also distinguished as a work of considerable literary merit.

Xu Xiake, also called Zhenzhi, was born in Jiangyin, Jiangsu Province in 1586. He assumed the name Xiake, meaning "lover of scenery" out of his fondness for mountains and rivers. The son of a landlord-official, Xu lived during the final years of the Ming Dynasty. From childhood he loved to read and developed a particular interest in history and geography through works such as the

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Shan Hai Jing.* As a young man he sat the imperial exams but after many failures gave up the idea of becoming an official and devoted himself to reading. At that time exploring nature was a fashionable intellectual pursuit and, influenced by this, he spent the rest of his life travelling, recording in diary form the places he visited and their special points of interest. From the age of twenty-two until his death at fifty-five, Xu travelled through half of China, covering some 19 provinces including Jiangsu, Shandong, Hebei, Shanxi, Shaanxi, Henan, Hubei, Guangxi, Guizhou, Zhejiang, Anhui, Jiangxi, Fujian, Guangdong, Hunan, Yunnan Provinces and the cities of Beijing, Tianjin and Shanghai.

His journeys can be divided into two periods. In the twenty-eight or so years before 1636, he made short trips to well-known mountains and rivers and various places of interest noting their special features and impressive scenery. After 1636 he spent four years travelling through eight provinces and cities in southwest China, in terms of time and distance the longest of all his trips. His records of the karst topography of this region are invaluable. This, however, was to be his last trip. At the age of fifty-five he fell seriously ill in the town of Lijiang, Yunnan and, returning to his native province, died shortly thereafter.

Xu was strongly motivated and well able to cope with the hardships of travel. After being robbed at the Xiangjiang River, attempts were made to persuade him to return home, to which he replied, "Nothing can alter my determination. I have a spade. It can bury my bones anywhere." In order to gather information on China's topography he made numerous trips over dangerous terrain and was really China's first modern geographer, travelling on his own initiative rather than as a government official or religious pilgrim.

Ten volumes of Xu's travel notes, totalling over six hundred thousand characters are extant. They cover geological topography, the distribution of flora and fauna, mineral resources, local customs and resources and some observations on the relationships between

*The Book of Mountains and Seas, an early Chinese geographical record dating from the Warring States Period (403-221 BC).

different nationalities. Xu's major contribution, however, is specifically in the field of geography.

Before Xu's time, traditional Chinese geography recorded such things as border alterations, changes in water courses and local customs and resources, while paying little attention to natural geographical phenomena. Most of these works reiterated old theories, rather than offering new ideas. Xu dared to break the fetters of tradition and introduce a more scientific approach with his original observations on water erosion and on fountains and their underground sources.

His most significant contribution to geography lies in his work on karst, the unusual limestone formations found in southwest China and rarely seen elsewhere. During his long journey through the southwest, Xu made detailed scientific records and analyses of the distribution of karst, its formation and the regional differences. Xu's work is the earliest known scientific thesis on Chinese karst.

Xu also made an invaluable contribution to the investigation of the sources of China's mountains and rivers. After considerable research, he asserted that the main source of China's largest river, the Changjiang,* was the Jinsha River, thus overturning the thousand-year-old belief that the Minjiang River was the Changjiang's main source.

The Travel Notes of Xu Xiake has always been accorded great literary merit. Qian Qianyi (1582-1664), his contemporary and a noted scholar, praised the work as "the finest travel notes ever written". Travel literature has a long history in China and includes many outstanding works. However, Xu's contribution is unique in its detail, comprehensiveness and for the special subjects he covers. They present an interesting integration of scientific research with perceptive observations on nature, enriching and expanding the genre.

Xu's writing, a faithful record of the mountains and rivers he explored, is as unaffected and charming as the nature it describes. In *Travelling in Hengshan*, written in 1633, Xu described the scenery at Jiancao Ridge: "Peaks stretch from east to west. Cliffs drop

* Yangtse River.

suddenly. Stretches of green and red cascade down the slopes. Rocks rise beside trees. All the same colour, the rocks are majestic, with differences in shape and grain. The trees, varying in colour, have the appearance of a fine brocade. Beside the trees, the rocks rise high, reclining and inlaid one within the other, presenting an even more beautiful sight, draped in moss. Beside the rocks the trees spread, gnarled with age." In this enchanting essay on mountains and rocks, Xu's considerable literary talent is demonstrated.

Xu's descriptions of nature show his deep love of China. He described the "stone forest" in Yunnan, "High peaks rise singly and stand in line, each more exotic than the next." The rocks at the Jiuyi Mountain in Hunan Province resemble "lions, elephants, dragons and snakes rising on both sides of the mountain paths, trying to capture the paths of men".

A Visit to Yandang Mountain, published in this issue, was written in 1613. It is a record of the first of Xu's three visits there. Situated in Zhejiang Province, the mountain is known for the beauty of its peaks, temples, caves and cataracts. On this trip he refuted the idea that the source of the famous Dragon Cataract was at the top of Wild Goose Lake Mountain. He risked his life climbing dangerous cliffs and precipices to locate the actual source. Although unsuccessful on this particular trip, his notes vividly demonstrate his dedication to the spirit of scientific research. Twenty years later, in 1632, he made a third visit and finally found the top of the Wild Goose Lake Mountain, proving that it had "nothing whatever to do with the Dragon Cataract". *On Taibua Mountain*, written in 1632, describes his twelve day trip. Published in this issue is an excerpt from his trip to Huashan Mountain in Shaanxi Province, one of the five famous mountains in China. It rises two thousand metres above sea level and is known for its dangerous peaks. The *Shan Hai Jing* describes it as a mountain some 5,000 *ren** high, the top of which is beyond the reach of birds and animals.

The Travel Notes of Xu Xiake is a voluminous work presenting the landscape and scenery of China almost like a long traditional

* An ancient unit of measurement equal to 2.5 metres.

scenery scroll, comprehensively covering thousands of *li* from the Tiantai and Yandang Mountains near the East China Sea to the border provinces of Yunnan and Guizhou in the southwest.

Xu was unable to make a systematic compilation of his notes during his lifetime. When his teacher Ji Mengliang and friend Wang Zhongren undertook this task a year after his death, some of the notes were already lost. In 1645, three years after the compilation was completed, Xu's home was looted by Manchu soldiers moving south. Though a compilation was made again later, errors occurred. Some 135 years after Xu's death, in 1776, an edition of *The Travel Notes* was published. This has always been the authorized version although many revised editions appeared later. Xu Xiake's work has been difficult to study owing to the number of distortions in many of these texts. In 1976, the Shanghai Ancient Books Publishing House began checking and revising his work using two early hand-written compilations as well as later versions. This new edition was published in 1980.

Translated by Yu Fanqin

Rui Xue

Huang Quan, a Flower-and-Bird Painter

LEGEND has it that centuries ago, a local official presented the emperor with six cranes. Since he prized these birds above all others, he ordered his court artist to draw them on a wall of a hall in the palace. The painter quickly sketched six positions typical of the birds so vividly that the real cranes went to stand in front of the wall, confusing them for real birds. This extraordinary scene so astonished the emperor that he renamed the hall "The Six Cranes Hall". Later the emperor ordered a new hall to be built. After its completion, he again ordered his artist to paint a mural of all the flowers in every season, with bamboos, rabbits and various birds like pheasants and sparrows. When the mural was finished, a white eagle swooped down to catch its prey. The artist was Huang Quan (c. AD 903-965), a native of Chengdu, Sichuan Province. Though these stories may be apocryphal, they nevertheless point to the fact that Huang Quan seemed to imbue his subjects with life and raised flower-and-bird painting to an unprecedented level.

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He had revealed his prodigious talents while still a boy. By the age of seventeen he was already a celebrated painter with the title of "Imperial Attendant" in the imperial academy. Though he was versatile, he was renowned for his paintings of flowers and birds, plants and insects. Diao Guangyin, a famous Tang-dynasty flower-and-bird painter, had been his teacher. His other student, Kong Song, never progressed beyond faithful reproductions of what his master had taught him. Huang Quan, however, learned the techniques of all the great masters and assimilated these in developing his own superior style. Another important factor was his careful observations and sketching of natural objects and living things.

Since he had received the patronage and won the favour of the emperor, Huang Quan led a comfortable life. As a member of the imperial academy, he could enter the palace and examine all the rare birds and animals, exquisite flowers and strange rocks. Most of his paintings, done at the emperor's bidding, reflect the aristocratic love of luxury and extravagance. There is a splendour in his style, the so-called "richness and nobility of the Huang family". This exerted a great influence especially in the Song Dynasty (960-1279), when it was used as the criterion for evaluating a painting or selecting an artist for enrolment into the imperial academy.

The method Huang Quan used was to first sketch the position and outline of his subject with slender ink-lines; then he would fill these in with colour. This is called the "outline method". His three sons, Jubao, Jucai and Jushi, were all taught by their father and became accomplished artists in their turn. In continuing their father's techniques, they formed the Huang style and school of flower-and-bird painting.

Huang Quan was a prolific painter. *The Collection of Paintings of the Xuan Huo Period** alone included 349 of his works — though, unfortunately, few are now extant. *Sketches from Nature***

* Xuan Huo (1119-1125) refers to a period in the Song Dynasty.

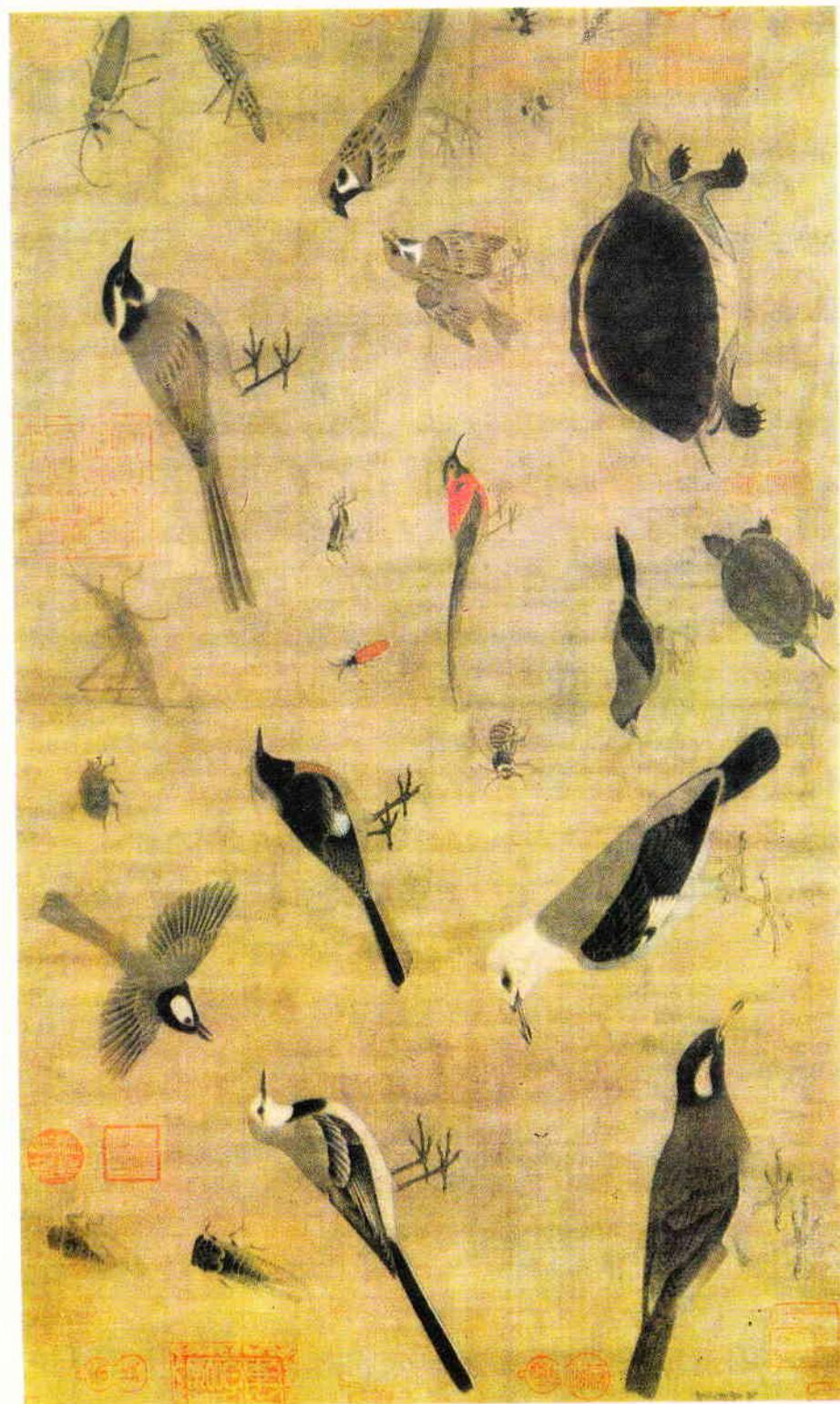
** The original, drawn on silk, 41.5 cm wide × 70 cm long, is now kept in the Beijing Palace Museum.

is the most important of these. There are birds, such as a wagtail, sparrow, turtledove and hawfinch, some insects like a grasshopper, and tortoises, bee and longicorn drawn freely. At the left-hand corner of the scroll is the inscription — “To my son Jubao”, implying that it was to be used as a model by his eldest son. It is accurate, full of vitality and with exquisite detail of feathers, scales, antennae, etc. One can almost hear the chirping of a fledgling sparrow, with its beak open and fluttering wings.

Huang Quan remains an outstanding painter, whose works are still deeply appreciated today.

Translated by Hu Zhibui

Sketches from Nature by Huang Quan



New Edition of Complete Works of Lu Xun

A 16-volume edition of the *Complete Works of Lu Xun* will be published this year to mark the 100th anniversary of the author's birth. The comprehensive new edition, under the imprimatur of the People's Literature Publishing House, will feature essays discovered since 1957 plus the writer's correspondence and diary. In hardcover and paperback, the edition will also feature revised and enlarged footnotes on previously published works.

Mao Dun's Novel Ordeal

Mao Dun's *Ordeal* is to be published this year by the Culture and Art Publishing House. Written in Hong Kong in the 1940s, the novel was serialized in local newspapers but has never appeared in book form. Recent revisions and a preface by the author will be included in the new publication. The novel is set at the time of the anti-Japanese war.

A New Historical Novel *The Broken Golden Bowl*

Volumes 1 and 2 of a four-volume novel set in the 12th-century Song Dynasty by historian Xu Xingye have recently been published by the Fujian People's Publishing House. The novel reflects the author's detailed research into 12th-century social life during the

time when the Song-dynasty rulers lost control over north China and retained sovereignty only over the southern part of the country.

Li Zicheng Volume 3 to Be Published Shortly

The China Youth Publishing House will soon be publishing the third volume of Yao Xueyin's popular historical novel *Li Zicheng*, centred around the peasant uprising at the end of the Ming Dynasty. The first two volumes cover the early period of the fighting between the peasant insurrectionary army and the crumbling Ming regime. Volume 3 describes how the insurgents fought with government troops for possession of central China. Yao Xueyin is currently working on the final two volumes of *Li Zicheng* and plans to start another historical novel about the 19th-century Taiping Rebellion.

Lu Xun Studies Commences Publication

Lu Xun Studies, a quarterly academic journal sponsored by the Society for the Study of Lu Xun recently began publication in Beijing. The magazine contains research on Lu Xun's life and works. The first issue featured 11 newly discovered Lu Xun essays as well as articles by Zhou Yang, Wang Yao, Tang Tao and Ge Baoquan.

Nationalities Literature Appears

The first issue of a journal of national minority literature *Nationalities Literature* has appeared. Sponsored by the Chinese Writers' Association and published by the National Publishing House, the magazine will focus on literary works by writers from China's minority nationalities. It will also introduce traditional and folk literature and publish commentaries and reviews. The first issue contained writings by nearly 40 writers, poets and critics from 33 minority nationalities, songs from the national minority theatrical

festival as well as a report on writer Ding Ling's talk to Tibetan writers.

Selected Poems of Hu Yepin

Sichuan People's Publishing House recently published a selection of 99 newly discovered poems written by Hu Yepin from 1926 to 1927. Hu Yepin (1905-1931) was a member of the China League of Left-wing Writers and was shot by the Kuomintang in Shanghai in 1931. The People's Literature Publishing House has edited and printed *Selected Works of Hu Yepin* and *Selected Stories by Hu Yepin*.

Collected Poems of Yu Dafu

A new edition of poems by the celebrated modern poet Yu Dafu (1896-1945) has been published by the Zhejiang People's Publishing House. Edited by Yu Ting and Zhou Ai'ai, this is the most comprehensive collection of Yu's work yet published and includes more than 500 poems.

Ancient Arts and Crafts Exhibited in the Palace Museum

The Yuan (1279-1368), Ming (1368-1644) and Qing (1644-1911) Dynasties sections in the Palace Museum have recently been reopened to visitors. These sections were closed during the "Cultural Revolution" and have just undergone a year's restoration work. The 618 exhibits, chronologically arranged, include paintings, porcelain and sculpture as well as a wide variety of arts and crafts from each of the three dynasties.

Guizhou Folk Arts and Crafts

An exhibition of folk arts and crafts sponsored by the Guizhou provincial branch of the Chinese Artists' Association was held in

Beijing in February this year. The more than 450 items displayed included examples of the well-known Guizhou batik printing plus embroidery work, pottery and silver jewellery. The exhibition concentrated heavily on the highly individualistic textile arts of the province and showed a wide variety of handicrafts traditional among Guizhou's six million national minority people.

Increased Circulation of *Popular Cinema*

The circulation of *Popular Cinema* is now over the eight million mark, making it China's best selling magazine. It commenced publication in Shanghai in 1950 but was forced to close down during the "Cultural Revolution". Publication in Beijing was resumed in the winter of 1978.

British Chamber Music Group Tours China

The seven musicians of the Chamber Music Group of London recently toured China, giving concerts in Beijing and Shanghai. The group played works by Mozart, Schubert, Brahms, Dvorak, Mendelssohn and Elgar and lectured at Beijing's Central Conservatory of Music and at the Shanghai Conservatory.

Symposium on Foreign Literature Held in Chengdu

The first annual meeting of the Society for the Study of Foreign Literature was recently held in Chengdu, Sichuan Province. More than 200 people attended, including teachers, editors, translators and publishers. Forums on English, American and Russian literature were held and a Society for the Study of Comparative Literature was set up. Plans were made to create two other new organizations, the Society for the Study of Eastern European Literature and a Shakespeare Society.

Panda Books



CHINESE LITERATURE has decided to launch a paperback series, **PANDA BOOKS**. The first two books to be released will be Shen Congwen's "The Border Town and Other Stories" and Ba Jin's "Autumn in Spring and Other Stories".

THE BORDER TOWN AND OTHER STORIES

Short stories by the noted writer Shen Congwen. Life in the minority areas in the twenties and thirties.



AUTUMN IN SPRING AND OTHER STORIES

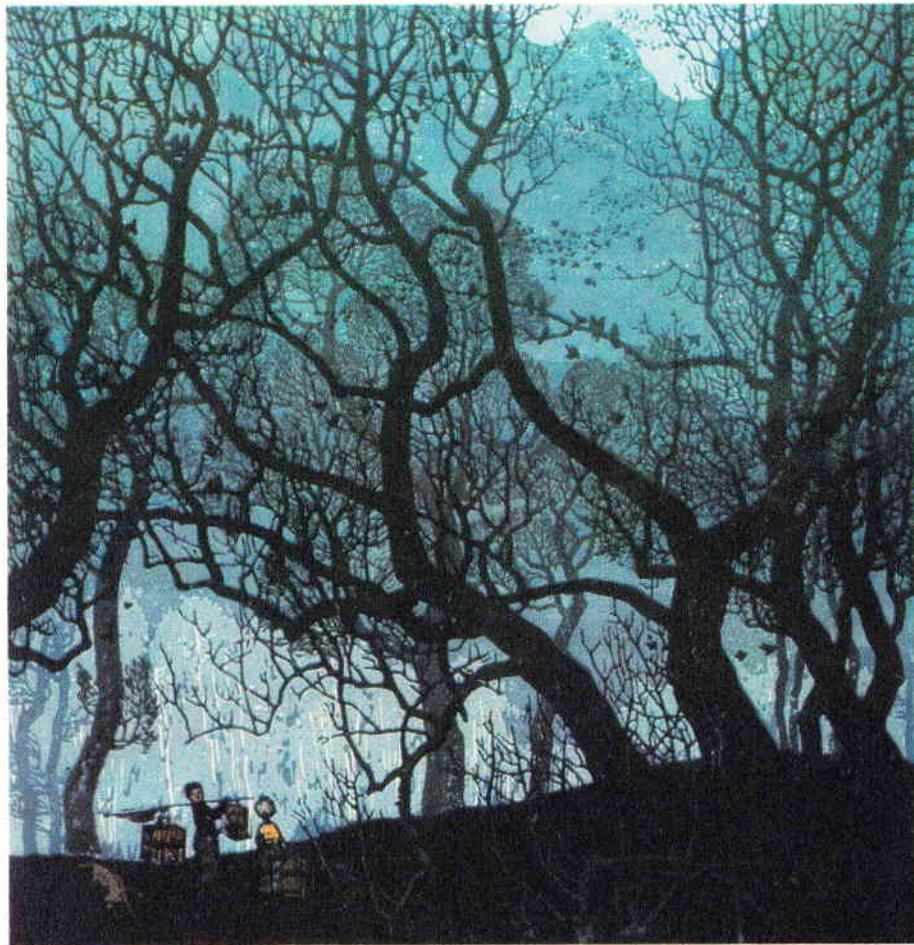
A collection of stories by the celebrated author of "The Family" Ba Jin. The problems of youth in China's turbulent thirties.



Order directly from Guoji Shudian (China Publications Centre), P.O. Box 399, Beijing, China, or inquire at bookshops abroad.

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Birds in a Wood (woodcut)

Guan Housheng



中国文学

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