

CHINESE LITERATURE



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The Bright Road

In our last issue we presented eight chapters from the second volume of Hao Jan's novel *The Bright Road*. Six more chapters appear in this issue.

The first eight chapters describe the deepening struggle unfolding in the village of Sweet Meadow during the agricultural co-operative movement. The first mutual-aid team in the village set up by Party Secretary Kao Ta-chuan and several other poor peasants succeeds in combating drought by relying on their collective strength to dig wells, thus demonstrating the advantages of co-operation.

Chang Chin-fa, village head of Sweet Meadow, is compelled to change his tactics after the Party Central Committee issues instructions on the agricultural co-operative movement. In collusion with well-to-do middle peasant Feng Shao-huai, he induces Liu Wan and Kao Ta-chuan's younger brother Erh-lin to join his bogus mutual-aid team, whose members actually work on their own. When faced with serious natural disasters, they are defeated.

The six chapters published in this issue tell how Liu Wan's wife leaves her bed too soon after childbirth to help her husband who is farming alone to save their seedlings and dies of illness; how Kao Erh-lin is fooled by Feng Shao-huai into leaving the village to cart goods and narrowly escapes dying of a fever; and how Kao Ta-chuan's mutual-aid team helps Liu Wan and Erh-lin overcome their difficulties. Taught by facts, the two peasants finally realize that they have taken the wrong path and that the only way out for them is to take the socialist road.

— The Editors

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The Sweet Meadow villagers worked with a will sowing and watering their parched fields, so that within a few days large tracts of land were covered with green shoots. Still, the later sown seedlings did not grow as fast as those sown earlier. The latter had already been thinned out by the time the later sown seedlings broke through the soil, and after manuring and hoeing they quickly grew tall and sturdy.

Thus the mutual-aid teams overcame the drought.

Then the rainy season arrived.

Downpours and showers came one after another. The crops grew fast, but the later sown seedlings were in trouble. Incessant rain made the fields too muddy to enter, and weeds sprang up, choking the seedlings. The lower lying land was hardest hit. The later sown seedlings there were still so small that they were inundated, only the tips of their yellow shoots showing above the water as they struggled to survive.

Liu Wan's fields were not too low and not badly water-logged. Still he had sown too late. Because the members of his bogus mutual-aid team were farming alone and the token wells they had dug were actually useless, they did not get round to sowing till the first rain. No sooner had the seedlings sprouted than the rainy season started. It was impossible to thin out the seedlings and they were choked by weeds, the fields looking like green velvet carpets. Liu Wan was frantic.

And just at this time his wife gave birth to a baby girl. This made him busier than ever. He had to cook the meals, look after his wife, see to the children as well, and feed the cow. These chores finished, he would stand by the door watching the dark sky and endless rain and sighing. If only he could sweep the clouds away and blow off with one breath all the water in the fields! His whole family's livelihood depended on these seedlings. If the crop failed, not only would he be unable to buy a cart, he might even lose these few *mu* of land. What a fearful prospect!

This evening, however, a strong wind sprang up and the sky cleared. Liu Wan was longing for the next morning, meaning to go

to the fields and start thinning out his seedlings. He reckoned it would take at least five clear days to do this and get rid of all the weeds. His only fear was that Old Man Heaven would not listen to his prayers for fine weather.

As he strolled round his courtyard where the water had just subsided, he heard people talking next door.

"Let's turn in now, brother, and get up early tomorrow. Five members of our team will manure your fields first. Just get everything ready."

"Didn't we agree to hoe your fields first, team leader?"

"Mine can wait another day."

Hearing this conversation Liu Wan thought: "Though we're only a mutual-aid team in name, we're still one team. Now that I'm in difficulties, suppose I ask the others to help? If each of our six families sends one person to work half a day for me, I'll be saved. I'll manage all right this year." With this in mind he left home and went straight to Chang Chin-fa's house.

Chang Chin-fa was whetting his hoe with a brick in the courtyard, his face as gloomy as the overcast sky. A few days ago the district had called a meeting to sum up the situation regarding spring sowing, and the district head Tien Yu had commended Sweet Meadow but criticized Chang, saying that his team was simply one in name and had done worst in the sinking of wells to combat drought. Fuming inwardly, Chang had decided to get these six families to hoe the fields more thoroughly and manure them, so that their seedlings could catch up. But as ill luck would have it, the incessant rain dashed his hopes.

Liu Wan told Chang of his difficulties, then asked: "What shall I do, village head?"

Chang answered without looking up: "Yes, it's hard. My fields are carpeted with weeds too. There's no keeping pace with them. Tomorrow I'm taking my donkey out to try to plough them up."

"Your only problem is weeds. I still have two plots where I haven't thinned out the seedlings."

"We never thought Old Man Heaven would play such a dirty trick."

"Could our team help me out a bit, village head?"

"Our team? Don't bring that up. It was you folk who wanted to hang up a mutual-aid signboard but not have a real team. As a result, I've been blasted by the higher-ups and badgered in the village; yet now you come asking me for help. Can't be done! It's all very well to talk about mutual aid. We're all in a fix now. Who should we help first?"

Chang's reproachful self-justification made Liu Wan fume, but he didn't see how he could argue his case. Yes, he had never thought it would come to this. Who was to blame? Having smoked two pipes with Chang he left. Looking up at the dark night sky, he felt too limp to move a step. Mopping his hot forehead, he asked himself: "What's to be done? Who'll lend me a helping hand?" Then he thought of Chin Fu who was on good terms with him. Chin Fu would surely not refuse to help him.

However, Chin Fu the Pinchfist could make wrong calculations too. He had sent his elder son Wen-chi out with his cart and horse to cart goods, so that now that he wanted to plough up the weeds he had no draught-animal at home. He was pacing frantically round and round his courtyard, cudgelling his brains, when Liu Wan stepped through his gate. Chin Fu felt as if a god had descended from heaven to help him. Seizing Liu Wan by the wrist he cried eagerly:

"Ah, my good friend Liu Wan! Just the man I want. Is your big brindled cow available?"

"She's with calf. Can't work now."

"How is it the gods always turn their backs on me when I ask them for a favour? We're such good friends, won't you help me out this once?"

"To tell you the truth, Brother Chin Fu, I came to ask for your help. My fields are overgrown with weeds. You've more hands in your family what with you and your sons. Do me a good turn!"

"But can't you see the fix I'm in? My eldest son may be dead outside for all I know. Neither he nor the horse has come back. Tomorrow we'll have to pull the plough ourselves if we don't want our seedlings to be smothered by weeds."

Listening to Chin Fu's complaints, Liu Wan thought: "Yes, we have to see things through other people's eyes. Each family

has its own problems. Who can afford to think about anyone else?" He smoked another two pipes with Chin Fu then left, wondering whom to approach next. He had barely the strength to walk. Head lowered, skirting the puddles and mud, he trudged wearily away.

Feng Shao-huai now emerged from the black gate of his house, belching after a hearty meal. Craning his neck he peered at Liu Wan through narrowed eyes and greeted him with a smile.

"Ah, Liu Wan, out calling on friends for a chat?"

Liu Wan sighed. "What time have I to chat? I'm looking for someone to help me."

Feng knew without asking just what Liu Wan wanted and what his troubles were. To him, this poor peasant's difficulties were a chance for him to make more money himself. Liu Wan's worries helped him to appreciate his own advantageous position. So he tried deliberately to needle him.

"Why, Liu Wan, how can you expect help from others at a time like this? With a wallet full of bank-notes, I went to town to hire labourers. Seven I wanted, but I only got four."

"So even short-term hired hands are hard to get."

"Yes. It's only struck me today how things have changed since Liberation. Now everyone has a few *mu* of land which he treasures. Last year everyone had some crops; and what with side occupations too, no one has to worry where his next meal's to come from. So who's willing to leave his own fields to work for others?"

"I never thought it would come to this..."

Liu Wan sighed and darted a few glances at Feng, looking so smug and cheerful. He did not ask Feng for help, knowing that it would be quite useless even if he could bring himself to broach the subject. Feeling utterly dejected he started home. The path ahead was muddy and winding, and he felt that he had no way out of his problems.

Liu Wan's wife had given birth just three days ago. Lying on the *kang* she was torn between anger with and pity for her husband. And because her anxiety affected her milk, the baby was crying with hunger. When Liu Wan returned looking so cast down and simply smoked his pipe with lowered head, without so much as glancing at

her or the baby, she felt indescribably resentful. Recalling Party Secretary Kao's eagerness to help others and his repeated advice to them to join a mutual-aid team, she wanted to give her husband a good dressing-down. But she kept her temper. She must make him see sense, point out to him the right path.

"Can't you get someone to help?" she demanded.

"I've tried everywhere. They're all busy."

"Did you ask Kao Ta-chuan?"

"The way things are, what face have I to ask him?"

"The way things are, who else can you turn to if not them? Remember how he helped Brother Liu Hsiang out last year."

This reminder sent a cold shiver down Liu Wan's back. Knocking out the ashes from his pipe, he lay down fully dressed. Thoughts of the past and of recent events thronged his mind, all tangled together like a ball of flax. He had a whole series of nightmares.

Before dawn Liu Wan got up. He boiled some gruel and cut a few slices of salted vegetable; then, squatting by the stove, he swallowed a few mouthfuls of gruel without tasting it, picked up his hoe and his trowel and went out. Just outside the door he turned back to look at his small son and baby girl, both asleep. He told his wife he was off to the fields to thin out the seedlings. He would do as much as he could and see how things worked out. With that he hurried off.

Humidity from the soil had formed a dense white pall, shrouding the green crops in mist. The mutual-aid teams' crops which had been sown early were sturdy and strong; their spreading leaves looked from a distance like green pavilions. But Liu Wan's seedlings, sown late, were being choked by weeds. Rain water filled the furrows. Frogs croaked as they leapt to and fro and vanished in the rank grass.

Liu Wan looked at the field in dismay, not knowing where to start. Then, clenching his teeth, he used his trowel to dig up one patch of weeds; next, parting the grass with his fingers, he singled out a sorghum seedling and pulled out the grass around it. He kept this up for some time before laying down his trowel and picking up the hoe which he wielded with all his might. When he turned to look, the patch hoed was certainly neater. Only the seedlings were

so small and frail that now that the grass had been cleared away they seemed even more spindly, as if they might fall down at any moment.

After thinning out a few seedlings and doing a spell of hoeing, he would turn to inspect the result before going on. The sun was out now, growing more and more scorching, sucking up hot vapour from the humid ground. Squatting there to work was like standing by a furnace or being steamed in a steamer. Sweat poured down Liu Wan's head, chest and back. When he straightened himself again to look back at the patch he had finished, he gave a start of surprise.

At the other end of the field, someone else was thinning out the seedlings and weeding. It was a woman in a check tunic and blue headcloth. She was working laboriously with lowered head, digging up weeds with a trowel.

Liu Wan saw it was his wife. He ran over shouting: "What are you doing here?"

Not raising her head his wife went on with her work.

"There are weeds all over the place. . . . I'll help you for a bit."

"Only four days after having your baby, how can you?"

"Doesn't matter."

"What about the children?"

"Liu Hsiang's daughter Chun-hsi called. She has no lessons on Sunday, so she's going to mind them for me."

"You must go back, quick."

"Can you do all this by yourself?"

Liu Wan looked at the tangle of weeds and said no more. After standing there for a minute he sighed, then went back to resume his work feeling grateful to his wife and apologetic, his heart filled with mixed warmth and bitterness.

The sun blazed ever more fiercely, making the day more stifling. Clouds gathered overhead and a wind rose, rustling the leaves of the taller crops. In the distance, all of a sudden, thunder rumbled.

Liu Wan looked up in alarm. "Hell, it's going to rain again. Hurry up and go back!"

His wife got up. But her legs felt numb after squatting. She could only walk slowly and with difficulty.

Liu Wan yelled anxiously: "Hurry!"

His wife made her way along the winding path. But before she could reach the shelter of their home it started to pour with rain. The rain came down like water poured from a bucket. Drenched from head to foot, she staggered in the raging wind.

Liu Wan ran towards her to help her. But before he could reach her she had slipped and fallen.

The rain sluiced down, the wind roared. All around was blotted from sight.

Liu Wan raised his wife in his arms and felt for her heart.

"How do you feel? Are you all right?" he cried.

His wife opened her eyes and tried to get up.

"It's all right," she gasped. "Just help me up."

The path was a mass of mud. As Liu Wan tried to help her up he slipped himself and both of them fell to the ground. When he clambered to his feet this time he found her unconscious. He felt like weeping but had no tears, felt like groaning but could not utter a cry. His heart contracted in pain as if stabbed by a knife.

A tall figure appeared on the path, over his shoulders a strip of oilskin and in one hand a stick. He strode swiftly towards them. Though his features were blurred by the rain, Liu Wan could see it was hefty Liu Hsiang. He took fresh heart at the sight.

Liu Hsiang ran up to him crying: "What nonsense is this? She's lying in; how could you let her work in the fields? Do you want to kill her?"

"She would come..." Liu Wan mumbled.

"Couldn't you make her go back?"

Liu Wan blinked back tears and said nothing.

Taking the oilskin from his shoulders, Liu Hsiang wrapped it round Liu Wan's wife.

"I didn't think you'd be going to the fields till the soil had dried a bit," he said. "So I sent Chun-hsi to your house to give you a message, meaning to go round myself later. The two mutual-aid teams headed by Kao Ta-chuan and Chou Chung are sending two men each to help you with your weeding. I wanted to tell you in advance to stop you worrying. I never thought your wife would keep Chun-hsi

to mind the baby." With that he crouched down. "Come on, put her on my back."

"No, I'll carry her," said Liu Wan hastily.

"Come off it. I can see you're fagged out. Get a move on, man. She's wet through; delay is dangerous."

Liu Wan made no further objection but picked up his wife and put her on Liu Hsiang's back.

Together they trudged back through the rain towards the village.

Liu Hsiang, being powerfully built, strode firmly ahead in spite of the weight on his back and continued with his explanation to Liu Wan.

"Last night the Party secretary came to a meeting of our mutual-aid team and told us that the fields of several families, yours among them, were overgrown with weeds. Yours were the worst, he said, and he reckoned you had nobody to help. He got each team to agree to send people to lend a hand to you and the others like you. His team and Chou Chung's will be helping you. I'd no idea I'd left telling you too late, so that now you're in such big trouble."

Liu Wan could find nothing to say, having no words to express his feelings just then. Close beside them the thunder crashed, shaking the earth and people's hearts as well.

10

Many peasants working in the fields were caught in the rain. Some ran home as fast as they could; others took shelter under big trees or in the look-out sheds in the melon fields.

A chill wind gusted. The rain pelting down was cold.

Those sheltering under the trees and in the sheds joked as they watched the rain.

"How cool it is."

"A cold shower first, then a sun-bath. Not bad."

"Hey, it's hailing!"

"Heavens, a hailstorm!"

They stared in consternation at the fields. The first hailstones, no bigger than white peas, plopped into the puddles and bounced

off the ridges; then bigger hailstones came clattering down thick and fast, turning the whole place white.

When the storm subsided they looked at the fields again. What a scene of devastation! The taller crops had been knocked crooked or felled to the ground, their leaves torn to shreds. The seedlings had fallen and been covered with mud, or been crushed into pulp by the hailstones. Everywhere was brown mud with not a green patch to be seen.

Seeing the havoc done, the peasants sighed and tears welled up in their eyes.

By the time the downpour ceased it was nearly dark. Kao Ta-chuan took Chu Tieh-han, Chou Chung and Chang Chin-fa to inspect all the fields in the village, going from west to south, then turning east and north. Ta-chuan's expression was grave as he gazed around from under knitted brows. He had a spade over one shoulder. As he made his rounds he cleared the mud from some of the ditches by the fields. His naked feet left a row of deep imprints on the muddy path and these were immediately filled with muddy water.

Chu observed: "The earlier sown crops are sturdier and stood up better to the storm. They've not come off as badly as those sown later."

"Shows our idea of sowing early on dry soil was right," responded Chou Chung. "Those who didn't do that have had it."

"They've no one to blame but themselves," said Chu angrily. "We told them but they wouldn't listen. Not even after we had set the example. They chose to tag after those bad eggs instead, so they didn't sink wells or sow their seeds in time. It's all their own fault."

Chang was walking behind them, keeping a certain distance. When Chu talked of blame he was on tenterhooks, wondering whom Chu meant. When Chu spoke of bad eggs he fumed. He thought: "Who are you calling bad eggs? Party Secretary Wang himself says that mutual-aid and co-operation are just an experiment. If it works, we'll do it; otherwise, we can quit. So in what way am I wrong? It was Party Secretary Wang too who told us to sink wells to combat drought; that's why we dug wells before sowing. What's wrong

with that? If we didn't manage to finish the wells, that's because we were short-handed. How can they blame me?"

Though Chang tried to justify himself in this way, he felt extremely downcast. Ever since last spring he had wanted to shine in this mutual-aid movement, but instead of succeeding he had lost face time and again. It looked as if all those who had followed him would lose out this year. Luckily, most of them did not attribute this to the fact that they had followed the wrong lead. Indeed, even Chang himself was not sure that this was the reason, and he did not want others to think along these lines.

On the way back from north of the village to the village office, Kao Ta-chuan said: "Let's call a Party meeting straight away and rope in all the heads of mutual-aid teams. We must rally the villagers to sow more seedlings in the gaps and re-sow the fields that have been completely ruined. It's not yet too late."

Chou Chung suggested: "Those big plants which have been knocked over must be propped up one by one before they take root. Each team must see to it quickly."

Chu promptly offered: "I'll run ahead to announce this by loud-speaker. Then we can go and round up the different people." He made off at once like the wind.

Chang was on tenterhooks again. Some of his seedlings had been killed by hailstones, and he did not know whether to fill in the gaps or whether to sow his whole fields all over again.

After turning a corner they saw Chu, who had already reached the steps to the office, talking in a loud voice to a man with a bicycle. Kao recognized the newcomer at once. He was Li Pei-lin the district cadre in charge of agriculture.

Li came over to greet them, saying: "Party secretary and village head, you two must go right away to the front headquarters at Yen-chuang for a meeting."

Kao did not understand. He asked what was meant by "front headquarters".

Li explained: "It's the headquarters we've just set up at Yen-chuang to cope with the calamity in the three districts which have been hit by the hailstorm, and to organize the masses to drain the

fields. County Party Secretary Liang and County Head Ku are in charge there."

Cheered by this news Kao asked: "Have you seen Party Secretary Liang? How is he?"

"Yes, I've seen him," said Li. "He's lost some weight since the spring, but he's in fine spirits."

Chang took no interest in such news and also felt left out. He stamped his foot impatiently and coughed before cutting in: "Didn't you come to notify us, Comrade Li? Let's get ready and go together."

Li broke off his conversation with Kao then and told them he must first notify the cadres of some other villages. He cycled off.

Kao next consulted Chu, Chou Chung and Chang as to whether they should call the meeting at once or wait until after their briefing at Yenchuang.

Chang said: "Of course we should wait until we've heard the higher-ups' instructions. If we do whatever the higher-ups say we can't go wrong."

Chu countered: "I'm for calling the meeting at once. This hailstorm has upset people, giving the enemy a chance to stir up trouble. If we Party members first unify our thinking, we can get to work on the masses and calm them down. That can't go against the leadership's instructions."

Chou Chung nodded approvingly. "I think Chu's right. The most urgent thing now is to reassure everyone. If you two have to go to Yenchuang, Chu and I can call a meeting here. We can also ask for suggestions on how to save the crops."

Kao asked Chang: "What do you say? I'm in favour of calling the meeting here at once. Old Chou and young Chu can see to it. And when we come back, we can tell them the new instructions."

"All right," was Chang's offhand answer.

The emergency meeting called by the district was short and to the point. All the peasants should be rallied to rescue the crops by organizing mutual aid between villages, mutual-aid teams and individual families to drain the water-logged fields.

Kao and Chang hurried back to the village before midnight and immediately called a meeting of the Party committee. Early the next morning another Party branch meeting attended by heads of the mutual-aid teams too was held. That evening the Party members called on different households to encourage the villagers, learn more about the situation and collect proposals on combating the calamity. Then another short mass meeting was held. At the same time propaganda work was done by means of broadcasts and wall-newspapers.

So another tense battle started.

After the mass meeting, Kao kept back Chu, Chou Chung and Chang to plan their next step. They agreed to visit different families who might be in difficulties or taking no interest in this emergency task, to talk with them.

When they emerged from the office, they saw a man staggering towards them from the street on the east side.

"Party secretary!" he cried. "Party secretary!"

They stopped short, seeing that it was Liu Wan, and wondered what had happened.

His eyes on Liu Wan, Chu whispered: "His seedlings were so small they'll all have been swamped. So he must have lost his head."

But Chou Chung objected: "Look at his clothes and shoes. They wouldn't be so clean if he'd come from the fields. Something else may have happened."

Only Chang guessed the truth. For on his return from the meeting the previous night, his wife had told him that Liu Wan had come looking for him. However, he kept his mouth shut about what had happened.

By now Liu Wan had reached them. His hair was tousled, his face ashen; his eyes were red and swollen, his hands trembling. Halting abruptly two yards from Kao he fixed dazed eyes on Kao's face. His lips trembled repeatedly before he managed to get out:

"Quick, Party secretary... save us... save us!"

Kao stepped forward, taking in his distraught expression, and asked with concern: "What is it, Uncle Liu Wan? Just tell us what the trouble is, and we'll do all we can to help you."

"The day before yesterday," quavered Liu Wan, "our fields were so overgrown with weeds, my wife didn't think I could cope on my own, so she came out to help me. She got drenched in the rain and was feverish by the time we got her home. . . . I was too ashamed to tell anyone, thinking it a loss of face. But just now she said . . . I must come and beg you. . . ."

Without waiting for him to finish, Kao grabbed his arm and hurried off with him, saying: "With big trouble like that, you ought to have told me at once. I heard from Uncle Liu Hsiang that your wife was caught in the rain and suggested to T'ieh-han sending Liu Hsiang's wife over to help out. I'd no idea your wife was so ill."

Chu T'ieh-han and Chou Chung hastily caught up with them.

Chang wanted to stay behind and slip away but felt this might look suspicious. He tried to justify himself by reflecting: "Each man has his own living to make. So if he gets into trouble, it isn't my responsibility." Then he thought: "When the higher-ups told us to try mutual aid, I did. If someone in his family falls ill, what's that to do with me? Still, I'd better follow them to hear what they say. Otherwise they may take this chance to get Liu Wan to join them and say bad things about me behind my back."

So he trailed after Kao and the others, although his heart was thumping uncomfortably. When they reached Liu Wan's gate, he faltered. When he followed them through it to the house, he hesitated again. When he crossed the threshold of the inner room and saw Kao and the others crowded round the *kang* with Liu Hsiang and his wife and some women who lived near by, he shivered with apprehension. They were gazing anxiously, with bated breath, at the woman on the *kang*. Chang felt he too should go forward to show concern, but lacking the courage he hung back.

Kao had crouched by the *kang*, his hands resting on its edge, his eyes on the pallid face of the dying woman. Her own eyes were closed and her breathing was faint.

"Wake up!" Liu Wan cried. "See who's here. The Party secretary's come to see you."

As the woman was in a coma, Kao signed to Liu Wan to keep quiet, then asked him in a whisper how she was.



Liu Wan replied hoarsely: "Mrs. Teng's had a look. She says it's fever after childbirth. I think she's right. Ever since she was carried back from the fields she's been half unconscious, never once opened her eyes. . . ." He choked here and broke off.

Liu Hsiang's wife said: "She came to just now and kept asking for the Party secretary. Said there was something she must say to the Party secretary."

Kao felt that the illness was very critical. "We must get a doctor at once," he said. "Tieh-han, you go and borrow the school teacher's bicycle, then ride to town and fetch a doctor from the clinic. Ring up the county hospital too. Uncle Chou Chung, you get hold of four strong young fellows. If the doctor thinks she must go to hospital, use a door as a stretcher to carry her there. Uncle Liu Hsiang, you and your wife look after the children and other chores for Uncle Liu Wan." He turned then to Liu Wan. "You mustn't get too worked up. All of us here are ready to share whatever worries and troubles you have."

Liu Wan had no way to express all his gratitude. "With you helping and everyone rallying round," he said, "I feel there's still hope for us."

Just then Liu Hsiang's wife cried: "Look, she's come to."

Once again everyone crowded round the *kang*, quietly watching the pallid face of the woman.

Her head moved slightly and her parched lips quivered. With an effort she whispered: "Get the Party secretary . . . I've something to tell him."

"Open your eyes," said Liu Wan. "He's here. The Party secretary's come."

His wife slowly opened her eyes. Her gaze moved from this one to that until finally it came to rest on Kao's face. She wanted to raise her hand but lacked the strength, wanted to cry but had no tears left.

"Just rest quietly, auntie," urged Kao. "We're all here to help you. The seedlings in your fields will be all right. We'll drain off the water in no time."

The woman finally managed to say faintly: "Too late, too late. . . . If only we'd followed you earlier, joined your team. . . . It's too late now."

"It's not too late," said Kao. "After the autumn harvest we're going to start an agricultural co-operative. We welcome you and Uncle Liu Wan as our first members."

The woman shook her head slightly. "I shan't live to see that day. . . ." Her eyes gleamed beseechingly. "Party secretary, you must take in our two children, take Liu Wan into your team. . . ."

Kao promised her: "Don't worry. We're bitter fruit from the same vine. We must take the socialist road together, sure."

The woman's face lit up with a smile. Slowly she closed her eyes.

Liu Wan rushed over to clutch at his wife and shake her. "Don't leave us, don't leave us. . . ." he sobbed, stamping his foot. Then he suddenly turned to rush out.

Some of the neighbours tried to revive the dead woman, others chased after Liu Wan who seemed to have gone berserk.

Chu Tieh-han who was quick and strong caught Liu Wan by one arm. Liu Hsiang grabbed hold of the other.

Unable to break away from their powerful grasp, Liu Wan tried to knock his head against the door.

"I've killed her! I've killed her. . . ." he sobbed.

Kao made an effort to control his own grief but could not help shedding tears too. He slipped through the crowd to Liu Wan's side and patted him on the back reassuringly.

"Calm down, uncle," he said. "This wasn't entirely your fault. *You* didn't kill her. It was the path you took that cost her her life."

"I was wrong, wrong!" wailed Liu Wan. "I shall never forgive myself."

Chang Chin-fa had been skulking in a corner, his face pale, and shivering uncontrollably. He could see how angrily Chu kept glaring at him. He tried to justify himself with the thought: "Sudden storms spring up in nature and men's fortunes may change overnight. This has nothing to do with me. If you use this as a pretext to attack me, it won't work. No, nothing doing. Party Secretary Wang will stick up for me."

Liu Wan's lamentations had aroused many people who crowded into the small courtyard, blocking the door. The soft-hearted among them shed tears over Liu Wan's misfortune.

Suppressing his own distress, Kao thought: "I must use this lesson in blood to educate our folk, deal a blow at the wrong trend and further our socialist cause. We can use our broadcasts and wall-newspapers, besides holding a few mass meetings and a few evenings' discussions. All the members of our mutual-aid teams must discuss this too. It's a chance to convince them of the need to turn mutual-aid teams into co-operatives."

Chu wanted to help Liu Hsiang take Liu Wan to the east wing, but they were unable to squeeze their way through the crowd.

"What are you all doing here?" he bellowed. "Watching the excitement? Just use your brains. If we don't listen to the Communist Party, don't join mutual-aid teams, where shall we end up? The capitalist road is the road to death."

This simple pronouncement moved everyone in the courtyard. Actually they had heard such talk many times from Party members as well as from the cadres and propagandists, but it seemed that now for the first time they understood it and were convinced of its truth. They all hoped to hear more such honest statements based on bitter experience.

Chin Kai and Su Tsun-yi, both standing by the wall, twice exchanged glances and nods. Chin Kai remembered what Kao had told him that day when he went round the fields to see where wells should be sunk. He said softly to Su: "He's quite right. No matter what we do, we mustn't get separated from the collective, mustn't leave the path of mutual aid and co-operation."

Erh-lin's wife Tsai-feng was soft-hearted. Unable to bear any more of this harrowing scene, she hastily slipped out and started home, hoping to dispel this tragedy from her mind. As she walked she looked this way and that and soon saw her young nephew Dragon, Kao Ta-chuan's son, galloping on a sorghum-stalk "horse" into the southern lane. When her sister-in-law Jui-fen gave birth to Dragon's baby sister, she recalled, all the members of their mutual-aid team had rallied round, some fetching water, others cooking their

meals, and some women even helping to suckle the baby and look after it at night. It was just like one big happy family. How different in the case of Liu Wan's family! Members of mutual-aid teams were truly much better off than those who fended for themselves.

Now Pinchfist Chin Fu approached looking thoroughly flustered. He stopped Tsai-feng to ask her: "Is it true that Liu Wan's wife has died?"

Tsai-feng came out of her reverie. She nodded.

Chin Fu was shocked. "You don't say! Just a few days ago she was alive and kicking. How could she die so suddenly? What did she die of?"

"I heard she caught a chill after childbirth."

Chin Fu blinked his bewildered eyes. "What sort of chill? How can anyone die of a chill?"

Tsai-feng could not answer that, and not wanting to pursue the subject she asked: "Is your son Wen-chi still not back?"

"No sign of him, confound it!" Chin Fu snorted. "We're rushed off our feet at home, all worried stiff. Maybe he's dead somewhere too."

"Yes, it's very worrying," agreed Tsai-feng. "The fields are all messed up. If we want to sow them again, we've neither men nor animals to do it. What crops can we expect?"

"What have you to worry about?" retorted Chin Fu. "Even if the fields yield no grain at all for three years, Feng Shao-huai will still live in comfort."

"He has money, but how about us? If the crops fail, Erh-lin and I will be living on air next spring."

"Erh-lin works full-time for Feng, and you work part-time. So if Feng has money how can you go short? As the proverb says: When the pork is fat, even the broth is oily."

Just at that moment they heard Liu Wan start wailing again in his courtyard:

"I was wrong, wrong. I've gone the wrong way. It's truly the road to death, the road to death!"

The eyes of Tsai-feng and Chin Fu met. They both shivered.

When Erh-lin started back with the cart from Spring Water River, Feng Shao-huai caught up with him.

Because the incessant rain had disrupted communications, the transportation of many state-owned and privately-owned commodities had been held up. Consequently, as soon as the weather cleared, the cost of carting went up. Feng had followed Erh-lin to help get him some easy and profitable jobs which would make Feng more money.

Getting on for noon, they reached Persimmon Town in their county. Having unloaded salt there, they headed straight towards the granary, gulped down some food and fed the mule. By this time Erh-lin was exhausted. He took an empty sack from the cart and walked off looking around for a shady spot where he could lie down and rest.

But Feng slipped down from the cart saying: "Erh-lin, we must hurry. Let's load the cart quickly."

Erh-lin had to stop and come back. He threw the sack on to the cart, and drove towards the granary.

"You start loading, Erh-lin," called Feng from behind him. "I'm going in to have a word with the accountant."

Erh-lin knew that Feng wanted to avoid the heat and hard work by having a drink of tea and a rest inside. Though disgruntled, he said nothing.

The large courtyard of the granary was filled with carts of every kind. All the waggoners and their assistants waiting there seemed in a hurry to weigh their sacks and load them.

The manager of the granary appeared on the steps.

"Attention, please!" he called. "Carts belonging to co-ops and mutual-aid teams come forward. Those will be loaded first."

Hearing this, Erh-lin reined in and stopped his cart.

As some waggoners shouted to their teams and their cart-wheels creaked, people exchanged quiet comments. These carts moved forward each in turn, while the men driving the carts from mutual-aid teams and co-ops could not hide the pride on their faces. When

the manager saw Erh-lin at a standstill, moving neither forward nor back, he came over and asked:

"Hey, comrade, are you from a mutual-aid team or a co-op?"

Erh-lin did not know how to answer. Had Feng been beside him, Feng would have answered confidently that they were from a mutual-aid team. Erh-lin was not prepared to tell a lie but, inadvertently, he nodded.

"Well, come forward," said the manager cordially and started pulling Erh-lin's mule to the front.

As Erh-lin loaded his cart, he felt feverish and his heart began beating so fast that he barely managed to finish. Then, without stopping to thank the manager who had helped him carry the sacks, he hastily drove the cart to the gate and, panting hard, mopped his face which was streaming with sweat.

It was just after noon and the sun was scorching. There were not many shady places in the big courtyard apart from under the few trees where some carts were already drawn up. By them sat several young men chatting and eating melons. Their carts, all of which sported small red flags, looked brand-new and were drawn by sturdy mules and horses with brightly coloured saddles. They obviously belonged to the transport teams of some agricultural co-operatives.

Erh-lin did not like to join them for fear of being asked where he came from and, especially, what co-op or mutual-aid team he belonged to. He circled round, then squatted down in the shadow of his cart. He wanted to smoke, but his pouch when he felt it was empty. He wanted to buy some tobacco, but not having a cent in his pocket he decided to go and ask Feng for some money.

Feng Shao-huai was in the office sipping tea and smoking as he chatted with the accountant.

Erh-lin had no intention of eavesdropping, but he could not help overhearing what they were saying. It so shocked him that he halted outside the door.

In the office Feng was asking: "How much did Kao Erh-lin carry on the twenty-third of last month? Just check up again for me, will you?"

After a while the accountant replied: "Two thousand one hundred."

"Hmm," said Feng. "And was the next time he came on the twenty-fifth?"

After another pause the accountant answered: "That's right."

"I suggest you keep records in triplicate, one for yourself, one for your customer, and one for the waggoner to take back to the cart's owner. Then I wouldn't just have to rely on his word. It would be more convenient all round."

The accountant laughed. "Don't worry. That carter of yours is a very honest fellow; he'd never trick you."

"One can never tell. Who wouldn't be tempted by money?"

Erh-lin hearing this was furious. He was tempted to go in and have it out with Feng. But fearing it might cause unpleasantness and spoil their relationship, he controlled himself and suppressed his indignation. Turning round he trudged back, his hands in his empty pockets, anger smouldering in his heart.

Feng came out of the office then and shouted after him: "Where are you going?"

Erh-lin saw that he had reached the courtyard gate. He halted and turned to look at Feng. The latter was smiling at him through half-closed eyes, a cigarette between his lips. And the small pocket of his white tunic was bulging with bank-notes earned by Erh-lin's hard labour, by carting goods to and fro in wind and rain. With these thoughts in mind, Erh-lin unconsciously put his hands in his own pockets. The fingers of his left hand touched something smooth and hard. It was the mouthpiece of the pipe which his brother Ta-chuan had bought for him in Yenshan. His heart missed a beat.

Feng asked cheerfully: "Finished loading, Erh-lin? Fine. Time's getting on. Let's go."

Erh-lin made no answer, simply harnessed the mule and cracked his whip. They started off again.

Sitting on the cart, Feng carefully went through the money he had just received. Having checked one packet of bank-notes, he said: "Let's hurry. If we catch up Wen-chi, we shall have company."

Having counted another packet of notes, he said: "Speed up. There's a lot of stuff waiting at Spring Water River. We must take as many loads as we can, so as to make more money."

Erh-lin said never a word. Whip in hand, he trudged wearily beside the cart.

It was a fine clear day. The sun beating down on the road after the rain sucked up moisture, making the atmosphere sultry and stifling. There were people working in the fields on both sides but few passers-by or carts on the road.

Feng could sense that Erh-lin was disgruntled, but he neither knew nor cared to know the reason. Feng was generally considered "smart", and he prided himself on this. He judged others by himself, putting his own interpretation on things. His failure to buy Liu Hsiang's land had been a blow to him, and Li Kuo-chu's defection had taught him another lesson, so that he now treated Erh-lin with a little more consideration. However, he still firmly believed that since Erh-lin and his wife had left Kao Ta-chuan, had dunned Liu Hsiang for debt and joined Chang Chin-fa's "mutual-aid team", the people on the other side would never forgive them; Erh-lin's sole hope of support was Feng, he had no one else to fall back on. Feng's only fear was that Erh-lin might secretly cheat him. This was why he would follow him from time to time and check up on the accounts.

Now, having verified the accounts and counted his bank-notes, Feng felt very pleased with life. During the last year or so, by carting goods here and there he had already earned more than the initial cost of the mule and the cart. If he went on in this way for a few years he would amass so much grain and money that if a famine came he could lend it out, and so in one season double his capital. What a splendid prospect that was — oodles of money! His corpulent body stretched out on the sacks of grain, he shaded his face from the sun with his straw hat, and crooked one knee. Very soon he fell asleep and started snoring as he dreamed sweet dreams. Flies buzzed up and down over his bare fat belly.

At the sound of snoring Erh-lin looked round. Seeing Feng sound asleep he frowned in disgust and turned his head quickly away.

Watching the village in front and listening to sounds in the distance, he tried to shake off his dejection but found it impossible.

Ever since last year, when Feng Shao-huai had tried to make Liu Hsiang sell his land, Erh-lin had had doubts about Feng and begun to feel a fixed aversion to him. This aversion might have been latent long before that, but this ugly incident brought it into the open. He couldn't understand why Feng was for ever trying to do others in. Wouldn't it be better if everyone lived in comfort? Why was Feng so eager for the ruin of others? Although Liu Hsiang was poor, he's never done Feng any harm; why should Feng try to trap him into selling his land? In bed at night, Erh-lin often voiced his fear to his wife that Feng might play some dirty tricks on them too. His wife kept reassuring him with the saying: A hare never eats the grass by its own burrow. In other words, grasping as Feng might be, he would surely not injure his own friends and relatives. But today the discovery that Feng had been secretly checking up on him increased Erh-lin's aversion to Feng and his fear of him.

Flicking his whip, Erh-lin gazed round the countryside and all of a sudden felt inexpressibly lonely. He suspected he was homesick. For more than a fortnight now he had been away from Sweet Meadow, and apart from Wen-chi whom he often met on the road he had not seen anyone else from his village. He wondered how his wife was getting on and how the crops were doing. Had his house leaked in all that rain? Since leaving his brother last year to live on their own, they had only just managed to make ends meet. But if this year's crop proved as good as last's, they should have a little left over. With the five bushels of maize promised them by Feng, it would be enough to get a big draught-animal. He thought: "Whatever happens, I must get myself some livestock before I leave him. Otherwise I'll have worked for nothing for two years. That would not only be a big financial loss but a loss of face as well."

The black mule jogged listlessly, the cart moved slowly. It took them quite a time to reach a village by which there was a shed where tea was sold. Outside the shed were carts loaded with goods, pedlars' wares and the bicycles of passers-by. In the shed, at two rickety

tables, sat a mixed bunch of customers drinking tea and smoking, or eating the food they had brought.

Erh-lin was parched with thirst. As he glanced at the shed it seemed to him that his throat was on fire. Having tried in vain to suppress his thirst, he made so bold as to awaken Feng.

"Let's have a rest and something to drink," he proposed.

Feng removed the straw hat from his face. Raising his head he first squinted at the sky, then glanced at the shed.

"Better stick it out a bit," he said grumpily. "It's not early. We must hurry on our way. We can stop for some tea when we get to Bridge-side Village by Spring Water River."

After this snub, Erh-lin did not ask again. Inwardly he was fuming: "It's not that you're in such a hurry. You just want to save a few cents. How stingy!" He let go of the reins to run over to a well and said to a woman there who was drawing water:

"May I?"

Crouching over the bucket he gulped water for a while. Then he straightened up, wiped his mouth and ran after the cart.

Not far from the tea-shed was a big willow tree under which were parked two bicycles with two men squatting beside them drinking tea. One, a swarthy young fellow, had his big bowl in one hand and with the other was fanning himself with his straw hat. When his eyes fell on Erh-lin he said something to his companion, an older man.

"Hey!" he called to Erh-lin. "Aren't you from Sweet Meadow?"

Erh-lin stopped, seeing that both men had stood up, and nodded.

"I'm from Tienmen," said the youngster. "My name's Tung Pai. Liu Hsiang is my maternal uncle."

The older man asked with respect: "Aren't you the brother of Party Secretary Kao?" He glanced then at the cart on which Feng was sitting. "Is this one of your mutual-aid team's carts?"

Erh-lin felt his face burning, his heart pounding wildly. He turned to go.

The men asked him to stop and have some tea with them.

Erh-lin did not turn his head. However, he heard what they next said, although they did not speak loudly.

Young Tung Pai remarked: "That cart he's driving doesn't belong to any mutual-aid team; it belongs to Feng Shao-huai."

"But why does Party Secretary Kao let his brother work as a hired hand?" asked the other.

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Erh-lin quickened his pace and, looking up, saw that the cart was some distance ahead now. As he broke into a run, his belly began to ache.

Feng, lolling on the cart, raised his head to demand: "Why talk with paupers like those?"

Erh-lin did not answer. The pain in his belly was almost unbearable, as if a hand were clutching at his vitals.

Feng continued: "Did you hear? That brother of yours is up to a new trick now. He wants to start some agricultural co-operative. For generations we farming folk have longed desperately for land of our own; yet now that we've just got it, they insist on giving it up. What sort of logic is that? It's lucky you left him, otherwise you'd have had to follow suit."

Beads of sweat the size of peas sprang out on Erh-lin's forehead, then plopped to the ground.

Feng lay down in comfort again and continued with dramatic emphasis: "I saw through him long ago. Who knows just what he's up to? Anyone who follows his lead will sooner or later find his family ruined."

Pressing his hands to his belly, Erh-lin squatted down by the roadside.

Feng went on muttering under his breath for a while till, raising his head, he noticed that Erh-lin was behind.

"Hey, what's the idea?" he yelled. "A young fellow like you shouldn't tire so easily. If you don't hurry up, we shan't get to Spring Water River before dark."

Erh-lin clenched his teeth and lurched to his feet. By putting on a spurt he caught up with the cart then proceeded to drive it on.

Feng beamed. "Yes, drive the mule faster. If we get there early enough we can get some more profitable goods to cart."

Erh-lin still said not a word.

As if aware of Erh-lin's displeasure, Feng started preaching again in his usual way. "Well, Erh-lin, we must be able to bear hardships. As the saying goes: It's by tasting bitterness that we win sweetness. Just keep on carting for me for a few years and you'll make enough money to buy a big cart yourself. Wouldn't that be fine!"

Such talk had already lost its power to attract or encourage Erh-lin, who now thought to himself: "Yes, I'll just put up with him till after the autumn harvest. Then we'll part as friends."

By the time they reached the riverside the sun was already setting.

Erh-lin's belly-ache had gone now, but he felt cold and shivery. Gritting his teeth he unloaded the grain and drove the cart and mule to the waggoners' inn, after which, completely played out, he threw himself down on the *kang*. Feeling fearfully cold, he pulled a tattered quilt over himself; but it was no use. Under the quilt he shivered convulsively.

Feng followed him in to say: "Erh-lin, I've already chosen the goods. Get up quickly and have a bite to eat, then we can load the cart."

Erh-lin shook his head.

"What's this?" exclaimed Feng. "Tired, are you? Well, a young fellow has plenty of strength in reserve. In a minute you'll feel right as rain. You mustn't pamper yourself. Get moving, man. I'll get you a tot of liquor to buck you up."

Erh-lin kept his eyes closed tight.

"What's the idea?" asked Feng impatiently. "There are two of us with the cart. Why should we spend money hiring someone to load it?"

Erh-lin's pain was so bad now that he let out a groan.

The short fat attendant in the inn came over.

"Mr. Feng, your carter's in a bad way," he said. "Look how pale he is, his lips are livid too." He felt Erh-lin's forehead with one hand then exclaimed: "Gracious, it's hot as fire."

Feng did not look carefully at Erh-lin, much less feel his head with his hand. He hurried out, his whole mind on the goods he was going to cart away and the fee he would get for this.

Erh-lin lay there with his eyes closed, burning with fever. He kicked off the quilt and unbuttoned his shirt but still felt stifled, hardly able to breathe, so that he kept clawing at his chest. After a while he fell into a doze and started dreaming. He dreamed that he was a boy again, lying ill while his brother and sister-in-law watched beside him. His brother went out into the pouring rain to borrow a pot to boil medicine, and he shouted after him: "Brother, brother, put on the oilskin. It's cold, icy cold!" With this cry he awoke, his own back as cold as if it were covered with ice. Shivering, his teeth chattering, he curled up and gradually went back to sleep, and again he started dreaming. He dreamed that his sister-in-law spread a dog-skin over him and burned armfuls of sorghum stalks to heat the *kang*. The fire in the stove blazed so fiercely that in no time the *kang* was as hot as a frying-pan. He cried frantically: "Sister-in-law, put out the fire! It's hot, burning hot!" Once again he woke himself with his cry. And this time he heard people talking near by.

"Did you come yesterday from Tienmen?"

"Yes, left there yesterday evening."

"Was there really a hailstorm?"

"I'll say! It ruined the crops in quite a few villages."

"How about Sweet Meadow?"

"I haven't heard. They may be all right."

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Erh-lin started dreaming again. He dreamed that he and his wife were getting maize cobs from Feng's granary. He was scooping them out while Tsai-feng held the sack. When it was full she helped him hoist the heavy sack on to his back—it wasn't easy. They were just about to leave the granary when Feng sprang on them from behind and seized the sack, forbidding them to take it. Erh-lin started struggling with him. Tsai-feng intervened to stop the fight, and for fear she get hurt he yelled: "Get out of the way! He's a vicious brute; he's trying to do us in. I must have it out with him!" Once again he woke himself by crying out. He opened his eyes and found it was broad daylight. Dazzled by the sunlight, he closed his eyes again.

The fat attendant came over and said in a low voice: "Hey, carter, what's all the row about? You've had us scared and given us no peace all night."

Erh-lin's throat was parched. He said: "Give me some water."

The attendant brought him a bowl.

Try as he might, Erh-lin could not sit up. He craned his neck and took two painful gulps, then pushed away the bowl and looked around. He saw that the *kang* was empty. Everyone else had gone, taking their things.

The fat attendant told him: "Your master's driven the cart away. He said you won't be well for a few days, so it would waste time waiting for you here and would cost more in food for him and the mule. He told me to tell you to rest here quietly. When he comes back this way he'll take you home."

Erh-lin's head fell back on the pillow and he lost consciousness again. Growing delirious, he could no longer distinguish between his dreams and the reality.

12

The heavy rain was followed by several clear days without a speck of cloud in the blue sky.

The Party branch of Sweet Meadow mobilized the villagers to save seedlings, and they worked away at top speed. The mutual-aid teams took the lead, all their members, old and young, going to the fields and even taking food there to eat at midday. Apart from tilling their own fields, they chose some hefty fellows to form two temporary teams led by Chu Tieh-han and Chou Yung-chen, head of another mutual-aid team, to help those families who had not joined teams and were unable to save their crops. Some of the loosely organized mutual-aid teams which had been slow in sowing had now learned a lesson. They envied the fine crops in the old mutual-aid teams, and regretted not having been prepared themselves for the rainy season, so they joined in the present movement in good earnest.

Draining the water-logged fields was organized among the villages, each being responsible for one section, and the work went ahead suc-

cessfully. Large tracts of land were gradually freed of excess water.

The green crops, freed from water-logging and weeds, grew more sturdy every day. The fields struck by the hailstorm were re-sown, and now the new seedlings were peeping out of the soil. Once again it seemed that a good harvest could be expected on the whole plain.

But these last few days Tsai-feng had been feeling uneasy.

Each time she heard footsteps outside her room, she would dash out thinking it was her husband come back.

Things were very lively on the road as mutual-aid teams marched past, a red banner at their head. Among them were men and women, old and young, some carrying ploughshares, others crates, yet others leading draught-animals. All were talking and laughing, in the highest of spirits.

A group of girls came along chattering like magpies. The one in front was Chou Chung's daughter Li-ping. She called out to Tsai-feng: "Hey, what are you doing over there?"

Forcing a smile Tsai-feng said: "Nothing, just keeping cool."

"This is no time to keep cool," replied Li-ping earnestly. "Hurry up and see to your fields if you want any crops."

Tsai-feng tossed her head. "That's all right. Our bit of land is so small it's easy to cope with."

"Don't take it so lightly," warned Li-ping. "Go and have a look, quick. Yesterday Chun-fang and I walked past that south field of yours. You'll almost certainly have to sow it all over again. Better start at once. If you can't manage on your own, come and tell me and I'll report it, so that they'll send helpers over."

Tsai-feng smiled. "Thanks for your concern."

Li-ping frowned. "I mean it, don't take it as a joke. I'll expect to hear from you after lunch." She then overtook her group and they sped off towards the fields outside the village.

Staring after their receding figures, Tsai-feng heaved a deep sigh. Though in public she put on a show of calmness as if she were being well looked after by others, in fact this far from stupid young woman was already very worried. Ever since she married Erh-lin and he started working whole-heartedly for Feng, she had an inkling that now

that Feng had achieved his purpose and could make use of Erh-lin he was no longer interested in their welfare. She had to do both families' housework, and if ever she was the least bit remiss she could tell from Feng's dissatisfied expression and complaints that he considered her simply as a servant. At first, what had worried her most was that Erh-lin's brother Kao Ta-chuan might try to pay them back for their bad behaviour. She felt she and her husband needed some powerful backing. Besides, as they had little property of their own, they must have the help of someone well-to-do if they were ever to improve their fortunes. For these reasons, she put up with Feng's overbearing manner and at the same time did everything she could to keep Erh-lin from flaring up and breaking with him. Their idea was to make shift like this for a couple of years until with the yield from their own land and what they got in addition from Feng they would have a reserve of grain and cash, for on that sound basis they could take the next step forward. Unfortunately they hadn't had time last year to till their fields well and the harvest had been poor; while this year their crops had been spoilt by the hailstorm and water-logging. If they got no harvest at all, there would be a big hole in their pocket. An initial setback like this would handicap them so badly, how could they ever hope to become well-to-do?

As everyone left for the fields and the street emptied, Tsai-feng felt there was something in Li-ping's advice. It was foolish to stay at home waiting; she ought to go to the fields to have a look and do what little she could. So she went back into the house, changed into old shoes, found a spade and, having put on her straw hat, locked the door and put the key on the lintel above it, in case Erh-lin should come back while she was out.

The fields struck by the hailstorm were undergoing another transformation. The taller plants which had been knocked down were being propped up one by one; and where the seedlings grew sparsely there were many new holes in which seeds had been sown. Among the green appeared strips and plots of brown where the soil had been ploughed up and sown again. Scattered throughout all these fields were people cheerfully working.

But when Tsai-feng reached their own plot, her face fell in dismay. Of the small seedlings in the furrows most had been blasted by hail and lay withered on the ground; while those not quite dead were a wretched sight—so straggling and spindly. She wondered whether they should fill in the gaps or plough and sow all over again. Her husband was away and so was her cousin's husband Feng Shao-huai, while her cousin "Eggplant" didn't know much about farming, so there was no one to advise or help her. What should she do? A delay of just a few days in sowing and a whole year's hard work might come to nothing.

Pacing up and down by their field in mounting anxiety, she began to panic. If Erh-lin didn't come back in the next day or so, it would really be too late; and if they had no harvest this year, next year they'd have to go begging. They'd truly be sunk!

Behind her, sorghum leaves rustled and "Chatterbox" Shu-hua appeared.

"So it's Tsai-feng," she said. "Come to enjoy the view?"

Tsai-feng did not turn her head.

"Our land was just like yours," continued Shu-hua. "The seedlings were too small; so when the hailstones crushed them into the mud that finished the lot."

Tsai-feng turned to glance at her but still said nothing.

"It's all our own fault for not listening to the Party secretary," Shu-hua rattled on. "Their crops, being sown early, were tall enough to stand up to the storm. Those that flopped could still be propped up, they hadn't been choked by the mud. A few leaves were torn but that doesn't really matter."

Tsai-feng sighed.

Shu-hua said: "Luckily, with the Party secretary's help, our mutual-aid team hasn't had to fold up. After the disaster everyone pitched in, propping up plants, filling in gaps and ploughing. In two days we'd made good the damage."

Tsai-feng's eyes strayed to the sturdy crops around her.

Shu-hua said: "Now the Party secretary's organized us all to drain the fields, according to instructions from above. No team working

on its own can do such a big job, so now lots of teams have joined forces. It's really something worth watching!"

Such talk grated on Tsai-feng's ears. She decided to leave.

But Shu-hua continued: "This field of yours looks to me as if it should be ploughed and sown again. You'd better look sharp, though, or it'll be too late."

"How can I do it on my own?" snapped Tsai-feng.

"Get your cousin to help," urged Shu-hua sincerely. "The two of you have done so much for him. Now that you're in trouble, isn't he bound to help you?"

"But don't you know they're away carting?"

"Nonsense. I saw him this morning as soon as I came out."

"Saw whom?"

"Your cousin Feng Shao-huai."

"Just him?"

"With two short-term hired hands he'd brought back. They were hitching the mule to the plough to plough Feng's fields."

"Are you making this up?"

"Why should I try to fool you?"

"No, it can't be..."

"To my mind, you two had better watch out. Don't let that foxy Feng cheat you."

"How could he..."

"He'd do the dirty on anyone, that fellow. I don't mind telling you, a few months ago I wouldn't have barged in, just watched the fun. But now I feel you're not a bad sort, you want to be a good wife to Erh-lin. The only trouble is you're far too trusting."

Tsai-feng didn't altogether believe Shu-hua. She had been to Feng's house only the night before and her cousin had urged her repeatedly not to worry, promising that as soon as Feng came back they'd help her clear up her land. Now she thought: At a time like this when I'm frantic, because it's a matter of life and death for us, how can Feng come back and not even let me know?

Thinking in this way, she hurried back to the village.

The big black gate of Feng's house was ajar. His big brown dog lay sleeping on the stone steps.

Tsai-feng pushed open the gate. The first thing that met her eyes was the cart in the courtyard, which proved that Feng was indeed back. Then she saw that the house door was locked, as if everyone had gone to work in the fields. Looking at the dog which had woken up and was circling round her, wagging its tail, Tsai-feng felt still more perturbed. She simply could not understand what had happened.

So she ran back to the fields.

Beside an old elm tree there was a sharp turn in the path. This was where Feng's fields began. From the distance she could see nobody there. As she drew near, however, she noticed that all the furrows had been newly ploughed and one grain of maize, not covered by the soil, gleamed like gold on the wet earth. Apparently they had just finished sowing this field. Her heart thumping fast, Tsai-feng turned to look around. The next field, which belonged to the Chins, was just being ploughed and Wen-chi was coming her way, guiding the plough. Not bothering to hail him, and regardless of the mud and seedlings at her feet, she cut hastily across the field to stop him.

Wen-chi's eyes were intent on the soil being turned up by his ploughshare. When someone suddenly stopped his animal, he was startled.

"Wen-chi, Wen-chi, is my Cousin Feng back?"

"Sure."

"And Erh-lin?"

"When we were unloading at Persimmon Town, someone told us there'd been a hailstorm here, so I hurried back without going on to Spring Water River."

"What are you talking about? I want to know if Erh-lin's back."

"Erh-lin, eh? I don't know. I haven't run into him the last few days."

Tsai-feng ran off then to another of Feng's fields, arriving there completely out of breath. The first sight to meet her eyes was the black mule which her husband tended at night and drove by day. But the face of the man now driving it was unfamiliar. She saw Feng, too, strewing seeds behind the plough. But the middle-aged man

scattering manure was another stranger. Behind them came Feng's daughter-in-law driving the animal pulling the roller. Feng's wife Eggplant was standing watching at one side, a pot of tea in her hands. Among all these busy people there was no sign, however, of Erh-lin. Tsai-feng stood rooted to the spot, half dazed.

Feng's sharp eyes had spotted her as soon as she reached the fields. When he had heard in Persimmon Town that his village had been hit by a hailstorm, he was so worried that he hurried home without troubling to go back for Erh-lin as the latter was no use to him for the time being. His idea was to hire some men for a few days to get the work done, then cart some more goods to Spring Water River and fetch Erh-lin from the inn. By then the young fellow should be well enough to start working for him again. This seemed the best solution in every way. Besides, ever since his nephew Li Kuo-chu left him, Feng had been afraid that some day Erh-lin and his wife might do the same; and he thought the best way to prevent this was not to let their wings grow strong enough. In other words, they must not be allowed to grow well-off and independent. When he reached home the night before and heard from his wife that Erh-lin's land had been laid waste by the storm, he was secretly pleased. He reckoned now that Tsai-feng had hurried over to ask him to sow her land. He had better show some willingness to help, otherwise they might break away from him like a kite with a broken string, and he would never get them back again. So stopping his work he greeted Tsai-feng warmly.

"Cousin, where's Erh-lin?"

"I didn't finish carting one lot of goods and decided to turn it over to someone else, so I left him there to keep an eye on things while I found somebody."

"When will he be back?"

"In a few days."

"It gave me quite a fright. I thought something had happened. Why didn't you let me know when you came home?"

"How can you blame me, with all I have to do? I've hired workers and there's no end of business to see to at home and in the fields, but you never showed up."

"How was I to know you were back?"

"Do you only help our family when I'm home? Is it just an act to impress me? You should bestir yourself and look after both houses."

"How about my own fields? All my seedlings are done for."

"That's easily fixed."

"If you don't hurry, it'll be too late."

"All right."

"Be more definite. When will you do it for me?"

"Well . . . let's say tomorrow."

"Good, good. Bring those hired hands of yours to our place for a meal tomorrow. I'll go and grind some flour."

Feng agreed to this, then went on with his sowing.

His wife went over to him and whispered: "You didn't tell her that Erh-lin fell ill on the road. Is that all right?"

"If I told her, could I go on sowing? I'd have to take her to see him, wouldn't I?"

"Later Erh-lin's bound to tell her. What then?"

"I'll say I did it out of consideration. I was afraid that if she knew, she couldn't help him and would just worry for nothing."

His wife chuckled.

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As soon as Tsai-feng got home, she emptied all the wheat from their small bin into a basket, wiped the bin clean with a wet cloth, then hurried straight to the mill.

Su Tsun-yi's sister-in-law, wife of Tsun-hsiao, was just sweeping cornmeal off the millstone.

Tsai-feng went up to her and asked: "Have you finished, sister-in-law?"

"No, I've been waiting my turn. I've only just ground two lots."

"Can I use it first?"

"I'm in a hurry too."

"Erh-lin's not at home. Tomorrow my cousin's bringing some men to plough and sow for me."

"Same with us! Going it alone is no good, we nearly lost our harvest. Thank goodness the mutual-aid teams came to our rescue. They helped us all yesterday afternoon, and today they're sowing

what's left. I feel bad about putting them out like that, so I'm treating them to a meal."

"Are you hiring their men?"

"Oh no. Why, in a busy season like this even hiring men wouldn't be easy. But he's really good-hearted, the Party secretary. When he heard my man had fallen ill through worry, he came to our house to see him and then, without saying a word, brought people to plough and re-sow our land, even supplying the seeds. Whoever heard of such a thing? I tell you, they've saved us!"

As they were chatting, a group of strong men marched up. There was Chu Chan-kuei shouldering a plough, Teng Chiu-kuan leading a draught-animal, Sung Lao-wu carrying a wicker crate, Su Tsun-yi and Lu Chun-chiang with spades and empty dung crates.

Tsun-hsiao's wife went to welcome them, beaming with gratitude. "Well! Finished all the sowing so quickly?"

Chu Chan-kuei told her: "Just wait for your harvest!"

"You mustn't go. You must all have lunch in our house."

"Our team of helpers has a rule: we must help people out of their difficulties, but we mustn't eat their food."

"I know how kind-hearted you all are. But this isn't like taking payment. You must have a bite with us."

"Wait till autumn after you've had a good harvest. We must hurry now and sow the gaps in Old Sung's fields."

With tears in her eyes Tsun-hsiao's wife exclaimed: "But how can we ever repay you for all your kindness?"

"That's easy," said Chu. "When you go back, persuade Brother Tsun-hsiao to join the mutual-aid team and go the co-operative way. That's the best payment we could have."

"How can he stay pig-headed after this? If he still refuses to join, I'll . . ."

"What will you do? Divorce him?" chuckled Chu.

They all burst out laughing and, still laughing, marched away.

When Tsun-hsiao's wife saw they were gone, she turned to Tsai-feng who was hanging her head lost in thought.

"All right," she said. "As they won't let me treat them to a meal I'm in no hurry to use the mill. You can have it."

Tsai-feng said nothing. She spread her wheat on the millstone and started turning it without a word.

13

Tsai-feng was still in the dark.

She hardly slept that night, first for worrying about the fields, then to make sure that she got up in time to cook an early meal. Sitting on the *kang* in the unlit room she stared at the murky windows.

The night was unusually still. The occasional human voices, the croaking of frogs and the shrilling of insects from the fields only accentuated how still it was.

Tsai-feng's mind was occupied with many things—from the seedlings ravaged by hail to her own fate. Having suffered in her teens, she craved security and happiness. Her marriage to Kao Erh-lin whom she found a considerate husband had given her hope, but their life together was still very hard. She felt vaguely that by working for Feng and waiting for handouts from him they were farther away than ever from "building up the family fortunes". If they reaped nothing that year they would have to borrow grain and money, and how could they ever repay it? Her husband's absence increased the weight on her shoulders. She must at all costs re-sow their few *mu* of land so as to ensure some yield; for then even if their life improved only slowly, they could at least escape ruin.

She would have been spared this worry if her capable husband had been home. He'd have found some way to finish the re-sowing two days ago. She wouldn't have had to tackle it single-handed. But he was far away, working for Feng Shao-huai. . . . Her latent resentment against Feng welled up in her heart. She tried to suppress it by looking on the bright side and thinking about the future. She told herself that if they put up with things for another year or so till they'd stored up some grain, they'd be able to live on their own, not at the beck and call of anyone else.

Feeling more cheerful then she got up, fetched some firewood, lit the stove and washed the cauldron. First she fried a stack of flapjacks, cooked a pot of millet gruel with lentils and cut up some

pickled cucumbers which she had been saving for some special occasion. She then washed the bowls and chopsticks again and polished the table until it shone. Before daybreak she had everything ready. As she sat in her room waiting, gazing out at the twinkling stars in the high mysterious sky, she turned over once more in her mind the thoughts which had occupied her earlier on. Little by little the sky changed from black to grey and then to blue, and all around her she began to hear the sound of doors opening, water buckets clanking, children crying and cattle lowing. Jumping up she made for the gate, her legs numbed from sitting too long. Standing inside the low trellised gate she watched the villagers going off to the fields till they disappeared from sight at the end of the street.

Misgivings gripped her. Usually, when her brother-in-law hired farmhands, they would have eaten and gone to work by this time. Why weren't they here yet? Perhaps Feng was worn out and had overslept, and the two hired hands, not knowing where to go for breakfast, were waiting in the cart shed. She opened the gate and ran over to Feng's house.

The glossy black door of the cart shed was wide open. The little child-bride was sweeping the courtyard. Eggplant sitting by the window was leisurely combing her thin hair.

As she stepped into the house, Tsai-feng looked around eagerly and asked anxiously: "Where's my cousin?"

Listlessly, still drawing her plastic comb slowly through her hair, Eggplant replied: "He went out just a minute ago, taking the mule."

"Without breakfast?"

"He'll have some presently when he's hungry."

"I've got breakfast ready."

"Eat it yourself."

"I'll take it to them in the fields."

"Ha! Think you can catch up with him?"

"What?"

"By this time, if he started right away, he should be at Pear Blossom Ferry."

"Where's he going?"

"The eggs in our village consumers' co-op piled up because of the rain; so the village head came last night to ask your brother-in-law to cart them to Persimmon Town. As it's on the way and the rate is higher than usual, he agreed..."

"Goodness, what does this mean? Didn't he promise to sow my fields today?"

"Don't you worry. He hasn't forgotten you. He told me last night that I and that dratted child-bride were to help you for a day."

"That won't do! With the mule and men gone, how can the three of us manage with our bare hands? How can we plough, cover up the seeds and pull the roller?"

"My husband says your fields don't need re-sowing completely. We'll dig holes with a pick and just sow in the gaps."

"So after ploughing and re-sowing your own fields, you're ditching us, eh? Leaving us to make shift as we can? You can really call yourselves smart."

"That's no way to talk. People will laugh at you. An experienced farmer like your cousin Feng knows what he's talking about. If he says your fields don't need re-sowing he can't be wrong. Go home and get ready so that we can make an early start."

It was all Tsai-feng could do to control herself. She didn't want the neighbours to hear them quarrelling. That would look bad and be a loss of face; it might even lead to trouble when it reached her husband's ears. Besides, what use was it to fly into a temper when both mule and men were gone? Better follow Feng's instructions until he returned and swallow her anger as well as her resentment.

Eggplant tried to pacify her by showing her a piece of cloth and promising to cut out a pair of shoe-uppers for Erh-lin.

Tsai-feng was in no mood to appraise the cloth, being anxious to go home. In her hurry she had forgotten to lock the door. She now walked quickly back.

The sun had risen above the eastern horizon. The road was full of people on their way to the fields. Some of the women called greetings to Tsai-feng.

She smoothed out her brows and suppressed a sigh. She must show a calm front in public, must give the impression that she had

someone to rely upon. It was against her own interests to offend Feng. Above all, she mustn't give others a chance to gloat over her by revealing the fact that Feng had let them down. She felt sick at heart all the same. Quickening her steps she gritted her teeth as she stepped into her own courtyard. At the sound of footsteps in the house she looked up in astonishment.

Kao Ta-chuan's wife Jui-fen came out. She had never before set foot in this courtyard since Tsai-feng married Erh-lin, and they seldom talked when they met. What had brought her here today? And why was she looking so strangely at Tsai-feng? The latter, as the younger of the two, felt she should greet Jui-fen first. Forcing a smile she said: "Good morning, sister-in-law."

"I didn't sleep a wink last night," Jui-fen said gravely.

"Come inside and take a seat."

"No, the children are still sleeping. I want to tell you something, though perhaps you know it already."

"What is it?"

"Ta-chuan wanted me to wait till noon, when he'll be back. But I thought you ought to know earlier."

"Well, what's happened?"

"Ta-chuan and Tieh-han have gone to Spring Water River to fetch Erh-lin back."

"Fetch him back? What's the matter with him?"

"He's ill. Feng Shao-huai left him in an inn there, just ditched him."

"Surely not! I can't believe it."

"Last night Li Pei-lin sent a man from the district with a letter telling Ta-chuan to go right away to see to him. As Ta-chuan was digging drainage ditches in the fields, Chang Chin-fa just sat on the letter until Li-ping and Chun-fang happened to see it early this morning. There can't be any mistake."

"But how can it be true? Could he really do such a thing?"

"I want to tell you something, sister-in-law. Maybe I should have spoken earlier, maybe I should have waited till later; but the fact is Feng Shao-huai is a beast in human form who rooks everyone he can get his claws into. His heart is so set on money, what does he care for relatives and friends? Wake up, don't let him go on fooling you."

Tsai-feng was dumbfounded. She gaped, her hands quivering. Her lips moved but not a word could she get out. She could hardly believe her ears, yet she knew Jui-fen to be a trustworthy person. Even though the two brothers had split up, Jui-fen would never deceive her just to make trouble between her and the Fengs. She would never play a dirty trick like that. So this was the truth then? Could Feng be so vicious as to leave his own relative in the lurch? Tsai-feng recalled the worries her husband had confided to her in the past year and all the talk she had heard about what a scoundrel Feng was. The tragic death of Liu Wan's wife a few days ago flashed suddenly to her mind. Her heart sank, pierced through with pain. She turned her glazed eyes to Jui-fen, as if to speak. But instead she spun round and dashed out, frightening the chickens who flapped off in all directions. Taking a shortcut to the Fengs' house through a lane, she spotted two carts in front of the village office and ran to see whose they were.

One of the carts belonged to Feng, the other to Chin Fu's son Wen-chi. Both were already loaded, but the drivers were waiting for Wen-ching to copy out the forms Chang Chin-fa had asked them to take to the Tienmen district administration.

Tsai-feng dashed over. Controlling her fear and indignation as best she could in front of Wen-chi, her lips quivering she finally managed to ask: "What are you doing, cousin?"

Leaning against the shaft smoking, it had not occurred to Feng neither had he noticed that the woman before him was on the verge of exploding.

"We're off to cart some goods," he replied casually.

Tsai-feng, who even now still retained some illusions about Feng, hoped that it was only a rumour that he had deserted her dangerously ill husband. So when Wen-ching came out from the office she quickly changed the subject.

"You promised to sow my fields for me today," she said.

Tsai-feng's aggressive tone annoyed Feng. "The village head's given me a new task," he said. "Besides, your fields don't need to be re-sown completely. Just fill in the gaps."

"Let me tell you that I've already cooked a meal. You shouldn't have deceived me..."

"What do you mean? Who's deceived you? You mustn't be so selfish. More urgent jobs must be done first."

"Who're you calling selfish? You've gone too far. Cut the cackle and give me my husband."

"What?"

"I want my husband, Kao Erh-lin."

"He'll be coming back with me in a couple of days."

"How is he now?"

"He's all right. Don't you believe me?"

Tsai-feng turned to Wen-chi. "Won't you tell me the truth?"

Caught unawares, Wen-chi stuttered, "Of course, he's all right..."

"Don't be Feng's cat's-paw!" she cried.

"Who are you calling names?" Feng fulminated.

Her face darkening, her eyes flashing, Tsai-feng pointed at him and screamed: "You're not a man, you're a beast. You've ruined us. If you don't give me back my husband I'll kill you!"

She made a grab at Feng who, trying to dodge, tripped and fell on his back, knocking his head on a cart-wheel.

Tsai-feng lunged at him again.

Scrambling up, one hand nursing the bump on the back of his head, Feng scuttled like a crab towards the office, yelling at Wen-chi who was scared stiff: "Stop her, you, quick!"

Wen-ching who had been gaping at one side began to catch on. Stepping forward to cut off Feng's retreat, he asked Tsai-feng eagerly: "What's up? What's happened?"

Ignoring him, Tsai-feng dashed over to grab Feng by the collar.

"I want my man. Give him back to me!" she shrieked.

Jui-fen came up now, having seen to her children.

"Erh-lin fell ill on the road last time they went carting," she explained to Wen-ching. "Feng Shao-huai just dumped him there without a word, not leaving him a cent, hoping he'd die..."

"You devil, Feng Shao-huai!" Tsai-feng stamped her foot. "Give me back my man!"

Wen-ching told Jui-fen: "You and Tsai-feng keep an eye on Feng. Don't let him get away." Running over to his brother then he demanded: "Weren't you out carting with Erh-lin? What actually happened? Tell the truth."

Shrinking back by his cart Wen-chi stuttered: "I really don't know."

"Is that the truth or are you lying?" The younger brother glared.

"I... I only heard about it the next day on my way back."

"Then why didn't you tell Tsai-feng when you got home? Have you no heart?"

By now such a crowd had gathered that Wen-chi protested: "This is nothing to do with me, Wen-ching. Why pick on me?"

At this point Chang Chin-fa came out from the village office.

"What does this mean?" he demanded. "Take the forms and get started, quick."

Feng promptly wrenched free from Tsai-feng and took refuge behind the village head. Trying to sound casual he said: "Tsai-feng is behaving like a child. Help me to pacify her."

"Well, well," said Chang, intercepting Tsai-feng. "Don't make such a scene. Tell me what's eating you."

"You mustn't let him go. He's got to come with me to the district court!"

"What ever for? Aren't you relatives?" Chang inquired.

"It's the business of sowing her fields," Feng prevaricated. Then with an oily smile he told Tsai-feng, "Let's stop quarrelling or people will laugh at us. I'll go to Tienmen and find a few farmhands right away to sow your fields as soon as I get back. Won't that do?"

Before Tsai-feng could answer, someone else put in: "You needn't trouble, Feng Shao-huai. We have men and draught-animals. We've already re-sown her fields."

The speaker was old Chou Chung. Behind him stood Liu Hsiang, Teng Chiu-kuan, Chu Chan-kuei, Chin Kai, Su Tsun-yi and others.

Feng tried to shift the target, for fear this business get quite out of hand.

"This is our family's affair," he said. "You keep out of it."

"Who belongs to your family?" demanded Jui-fen standing beside Tsai-feng. "Kao Erh-lin or Chien Tsai-feng? Let's get this clear."

"That's a good question," said Chou Chung as he walked over with the others. "Who's in your family? Erh-lin and Tsai-feng both belong to us. You trapped and tricked them. But now they've seen through you."

Unable to contain herself any longer, Tsai-feng covered her face with her hands and burst out sobbing.

Jui-fen, Li-ping and Chun-fang clustered around her to take her arms and comfort her.

His eyes fixed on Feng, Chou Chung went on indignantly: "For over a year you've exploited the young couple cruelly. The time has come now to settle accounts with you."

"Give them double pay," Liu Hsiang put in.

"He must pay for a doctor to cure Erh-lin too," Teng Chiu-kuan added.

"And make good all their losses," Chu Chan-kuei chipped in.

Stamping his foot Feng blustered: "Look, village head! The mutual-aid team's ganging up to bully me."

"I hardly know what's going on. I can't express any opinion until I've made investigations," hedged Chang, unwilling to offend either side.

"I didn't mean to butt in," put in Chin Kai. "But I can't let this pass. D'you mean to say you've no idea of what's been going on in Sweet Meadow in the past year, village head? Haven't you seen everything that's happened here?"

Challenged like this, Chang amended: "It's this quarrel I'm talking about. I can't criticize anyone without knowing the rights and wrongs of the case. Both you and I have nothing to do with this, Chin Kai. We should pour water on this fire, not add fuel to the flames."

"You're wrong there, Chin-fa," Chou Chung retorted. "You're a Communist and our village head. How come you have nothing to do with poor peasants and hired hands?"

"I mean we should help them to make it up."

"How?" insisted Chou Chung. "Do you expect us, not to mention yourself, to make it up with Feng Shao-huai who left Erh-lin to die on the road?"

"That's not true."

"Oh yes, it is. Just read that letter you sat on last night."

"Even if it's possible, I must have witnesses and material evidence before I take any action."

Wen-ching cornered his brother again. "Come on, you. You were a witness. Speak up."

Teng and Chu went over to question Wen-chi too.

Although knowing that it was impossible to cover up for Feng any longer, Wen-chi had no wish to offend him by exposing him completely. "I don't know much," he said hesitantly. "That day when I was unloading in Persimmon Town I knocked into Uncle Shao-huai. When I asked where Erh-lin was, he told me he'd fallen ill in Bridge-side Village by Spring Water River. . . ."

Surging around Feng, the others fired angry questions at him.

"What can you say now?"

"Come clean quickly. Why did you try to kill him?"

"He fell ill himself," countered Feng. "I didn't make him fall ill. . . ."

"Why did you leave him there all on his own?"

"Why didn't you tell Tsai-feng on your return?"

"Speak up. You're not dumb, are you?"

"I was afraid to upset her. . . ." Feng improvised.

The others shouted: "So kind-hearted are you?"

"You know that's a lie!"

"Well, village head, he admits it himself," said Chou Chung. "What other witnesses and evidence do you need?"

Chang rolled his eyes, his expression suddenly changing. Pointing at Feng, he fumed: "Look at you. How could you do anything so stupid?"

"They've got their knives into me," rejoined Feng. "But you know me, village head. I've never done anyone any harm."

Tsai-feng sprang forward. "You can't fool me!" she cried. "You've harmed plenty of people. For two years my husband and

I have slaved for you, he as a hired hand, I as a servant; but have you paid us a cent? You're for ever scheming to do people in, first Uncle Liu Hsiang, then Li Kuo-chu and now us. Let me tell you something. Last summer we started having doubts about you and we've been worrying ever since — hoping you wouldn't play us a dirty trick but afraid you might gobble us up. It's only today though that I've really seen what a black-hearted brute you are. If you hadn't talked me into making Erh-lin leave his brother, we'd never have come to this. . . .”

Quite a few of the villagers applauded.

“A good exposure!”

“Unmask him thoroughly.”

Feng countered frantically: “How can you make all these false charges, Tsai-feng? It was you who wanted to better yourselves and begged me to help you out.”

“Erh-lin and I had decided to get married and had even set the date. But you made me tell him that my aunt had found me another young man, and if he really wanted to marry me he must leave his brother first. You threatened Erh-lin like that to make him break with Ta-chuan. Can you deny it?”

Feng had no chance to speak. He had hoped to intimidate Tsai-feng and then slip away, but now the villagers all fired denunciations at him.

Just at this juncture Chin Fu came running over. He had been brooding over his devastated fields when his wife told him that their two sons were bickering by the village office, so he hurried to the spot. Not noticing the predicament his neighbour Feng and his respected village head were in, he darted up to his sons and bel-lowed: “You stupid idiots! Why haven't you gone carting, Wen-chi? Why aren't you in the fields, Wen-ching? Why are you bickering here?”

Wen-chi tried to seize this chance to sneak away, but Wen-ching grabbed hold of his whip. “Stay put!” he cried. “Tell everybody how our family tried to buy Uncle Liu Hsiang's land.”

This made Wen-chi more flustered than ever. “Why bring that up?” he asked.

“I've kept quiet about it for a whole year. Now it's time for a reckoning.”

Chin Fu glared at his younger son. “Give me that whip and scam, the two of you!”

Wen-ching rounded on his father. “Wait a moment. You were the would-be purchaser. You must make it clear why you put pressure on Liu Hsiang to sell his land.”

“Don't talk such nonsense in front of all these people. It was Uncle Feng who told me that Liu Hsiang needed money to pay his debts and was selling his land to help out Kao Ta-chuan. So I asked Liu Wan to act as middleman and put through the deal. How can you accuse me of putting pressure on him?”

Burly Liu Hsiang took this up, demanding of Feng: “You must explain clearly today. Who told you that I wanted to sell my land?”

Feng stammered: “I...I guessed it...”

Everyone burst out laughing.

“So he was the source of the rumour, the root of the trouble.”

“Come clean now. Why did you incite people to buy and sell land?”

“Speak up!”

“I didn't incite anyone,” Feng protested. “Chin Fu and I are good neighbours. I only told him what I'd guessed. How was I to know that he'd take it seriously?”

Chin Fu would not take this lying down. To clear himself he made haste to object: “You must have forgotten, Shao-huai. You didn't tell me that day it was only guesswork. You said Liu Hsiang was sure to sell, and you were thinking of buying.”

The villagers started shouting again.

“What does this mean, Feng Shao-huai?”

“Who's telling the truth, Chin Fu or you?”

Tsai-feng interrupted: “Before Liu Hsiang agreed to sell his land, Feng Shao-huai came to see Erh-lin and advised him to go quickly to ask Liu Hsiang to pay us back what he owed us because he'd come into some money. Later on, when we learned that he really had no money, we felt very bad about it.”

The villagers exchanged indignant comments:

"How vicious!"

"What a devil he is."

"In this land-buying business who made Chin Fu take the case to the county court?" Chou Chung raised another point.

"Tell them about it," Wen-ching urged his father.

Only then did it dawn on Chin Fu that this wasn't a quarrel between his sons but that the villagers had ganged up against Feng. Waving his hand he said: "Let bygones be bygones. The Party secretary and I have made it up long ago. Why bring that old business up again?"

"I know what happened," a woman called from the crowd. "Father went to town on Feng's cart that day and Feng treated him to a meal."

All turned and saw that the speaker was Chao Yu-ngo, Chin Fu's daughter-in-law.

Li-ping, Jui-fen and several others applauded.

Livid with anger, Chin Fu shouted to Wen-chi: "Take her home. Who told her to butt in?"

Chou Chung stepped forward. "Everyone has the right to speak, brother. You can't stop them."

"What's the use of chewing over things that are past and done with?" Chin Fu retorted.

"It helps us to see them clearly," Chou Chung rejoined.

Chang Chin-fa knew that the situation was already quite out of hand. In desperation he put in: "We'll talk about that later, Uncle Chou Chung. The most urgent thing now is to fetch the sick man home."

Chou Chung thought: Enough's been brought into the open to make Feng's name stink; that'll do for the time being. So he said: "You must look into your mistakes, Feng Shao-huai, and make a clean breast of them at a mass meeting after the Party secretary comes back."

As Feng showed signs of wanting to talk back, Chang Chin-fa signed to him, saying: "That's enough. I forbid you to say any more. Hurry up and fetch Erh-lin home and nurse him back to health."

We'll deal with the other matters all in good time. Wen-chi, bring the cart round."

This way of handling things disgusted the villagers.

"The village head's trying to shield him. That won't do."

"Make him own up right away."

"There's more to this than Kao Erh-lin being cheated and losing out," declared Chou Chung. "It concerns us all, not just the Fengs and the Kaos. Just think, if fellows like Feng Shao-huai build themselves up and throw their weight about, what's to become of us peasants?"

Fury burned in the eyes and hearts of the villagers. And the young men, their fists clenched, could hardly keep from striking out at Feng.

"Now we're organized, we're on a bright road," went on Chou at the top of his voice. "If we're united as one and keep marching forward, we've nothing to fear from them." Glancing at Feng, he told the villagers beside him: "Just have patience. When the Party secretary gets back, the Party committee will discuss this and call a mass meeting. You can all take part in exposing him so that everyone in Sweet Meadow knows what he's up to."

The others called out their approval.

Tsai-feng wiped her eyes with her tunic, then stepped forward to join the villagers who welcomed her warmly as one of themselves.

14

It was a beautiful morning. The sky was a cloudless blue above the vast plain through which clear Spring Water River flowed tranquilly.

A cart pulled up by the inn in Bridge-side Village, and Kao Ta-chuan jumped down and ran into the courtyard.

Several waggoners getting their carts ready to leave looked up in surprise at this newcomer who seemed so tense. The fat attendant hurried out to greet him.

"Is a man called Kao Erh-lin staying here?" Kao asked bluntly.

"Yes, he's in that little shed on the east." The attendant looked Kao up and down.

Kao dashed to the shed.

After parking the cart, Chu Tieh-han followed him into the courtyard.

The place was a fodder shed with a newspaper-covered window no bigger than a basin. Some sacking hung over the opening which served as the doorway, through which one could only squeeze sideways with lowered head.

As Kao raised the sacking a swarm of flies buzzed out. He smelt a foul stench but could see nothing in the darkness.

"Erh-lin, Erh-lin!" he cried.

Erh-lin, lying semi-conscious, heard his name called by a dear familiar voice. It was the voice of his elder brother, the brother who had trundled him in a handcart all the way from Shantung to Hopei, to escape from famine; who had led him to struggle against the landlord, who had helped him dig up the tree stumps from the land allotted to them in the land reform. His elder brother had gone in the pouring rain to Tienmen to buy medicine for him when he was ill, and when they split up had given him the better house and better furniture. Although hurt, he had never uttered a word of complaint. And now that Erh-lin was so seriously ill, abandoned alone to die in a little inn, his elder brother had come to his rescue again.

Kao Ta-chuan struck a match. Like a ray of sunshine, it lit up the ramshackle shed with its smoke-darkened beam and spider-webs in the corners. It also shone on the waxen, bloodless face looking like death which had only a brick as a pillow. With an effort Erh-lin opened his listless eyes, his cracked lips parted slightly in astonishment.

Chu Tieh-han had stopped outside the window with mixed feelings. He listened carefully, his hands clenched on the whip while beads of sweat broke out on his forehead.

Throwing away the match, Kao Ta-chuan put his hands on the edge of the *kang* and stooped over his brother. He told him softly: "Erh-lin, I'm taking you home." Then he started propping him up.

At the touch of his brother's warm hands Erh-lin could no longer contain his grief and resentment. Clutching his brother's strong

arms, he leaned his head on Kao Ta-chuan's broad chest and broke down.

Kao sat down on the *kang*, stroking Erh-lin's sweating head, his heart in too much of a tumult to speak.

The sound of sobs shook Chu Tieh-han, tough as he was, as he stood outside the window. His eyes reddened. Then his lips parted in a smile. It was not a cynical or caustic smile, but a smile of sheer joy from his heart. He felt as if he had been waiting all along for this happy signal, the sobs announcing Erh-lin's remorse as he realized that he had taken the wrong road. So these sobs gave him the greatest satisfaction. He stepped into the shed and without a word grasped Erh-lin's hand.

Erh-lin had something in his hand which he had clutched for so long that it was warm. It was the mouthpiece of the pipe given him by his brother a year ago on Kao's return from Yenshan. Had he only treasured it for the last few days when he lay alone in this dark little shed not knowing whether he would live or die? As he fingered this mouthpiece he must have thought over many things, recalling many scenes which he had forgotten and realizing what he had failed to realize before.

Chu passed the whip to Kao. Putting Erh-lin's arms round his own shoulders and gripping his thin waist with one hand, he hoisted him on to his back and, stooping, carried him out.

To Erh-lin the sun had never been so bright, the air so fresh!

Kao struck another match. The shed was bare except for a mat, two bricks and half a bowl of gruel. As he too stepped outside he took a deep breath. Then he caught up with Chu and helped him to lay Erh-lin on the cart and cover him with the quilt they had brought. After that he turned back to pay the innkeeper.

The fat attendant looked round and told him softly: "You shouldn't pay him. He behaved like a brute."

Kao nodded in agreement.

"When Mr. Feng didn't turn up for three days, our boss dumped the sick man in that little shed. If I hadn't stopped him he'd have thrown him out. I reported it to the district..."

Kao clasped his hand. "I don't know how to thank you."

"It's the poor that helps the poor. I only did what was right."

Kao's heart was too full to say more. But the man's behaviour and his brief remarks left a deep impression on him. By the time they were leaving Bridge-side Village he regretted not having asked the good-hearted attendant's name.

The cart rumbled away from the village along a willow-lined track beside a pool before it reached the highway.

Seated beside his brother, Ta-chuan watched over him carefully, afraid the jolting might increase his pain.

Chu cracked his whip vigorously as he trudged beside the cart, eager to arrive home to set at rest the hearts of the dear ones waiting for them there.

So Erh-lin left the little inn where he had spent five days and nights — only a very short chapter in his life, but for this peasant, so eager to take over the centuries-old legacy of individual peasant economy and who had had illusions about "building up the family fortunes" by working alone, this experience had helped him to pass through a long and important historical stage. He now lay comfortably on the cart acquired with such difficulty by the mutual-aid team — the first socialist collective property in Sweet Meadow. Safeguarded by two men he loved, two Communist Party members, he was riding eastward on a road bathed in sunshine. Birds chirruped on the broad-leaved poplars which rustled beside the road. The cart-wheels seemed to be drumming a song of welcome.

Two rubber-tyred carts were approaching from the opposite direction, the first driven by Feng Shao-huai, the second by Wen-chi.

The incident in front of the village office that morning had been a heavy blow to Feng. His head still ached, his heart was in a tumult. He himself could not tell whether what irked him most was regret, hate or anger. All these days his mind had been on carting goods. He had rushed through his re-sowing so that he could come out and earn more money, not giving any thought to other matters. That was where he had slipped up. The scene by the village office still frightened him. It had never occurred to him that Tsai-feng would break with him over such a trifle and that the mutual-aid team would show such deep concern for Erh-lin and his wife. Still less had he

foreseen that the name of a well-to-do man like himself would stink so much in Sweet Meadow that the villagers were itching to attack him. One wrong move and the whole game could be lost, he thought. What should his next step be? He was at his wits' end, at a loss for a good plan. Well, first he must race the others to the inn in Bridge-side Village. If he could talk Erh-lin round that would be a good start.

As they bowled along, Wen-chi's face was glum. To his mind, he himself had clean hands, but now that he was involved in this dirty business even if he had a hundred mouths he could never clear himself of the charge of being Feng's "accomplice". As he recalled the scene by the village office, his brother's anger, his wife's annoyance with him and his father's unfounded complaints, his resentment rankled. He could have cleared himself if he hadn't been afraid of offending Feng. But when he weighed the pros and cons in the way taught him by his father, he felt that offending the other villagers would do him less harm than offending this one man. That had stopped him from denouncing Feng on the spot. Neither had he avoided Feng when he left with the cart but had kept him company and even tried to humour him on the road. His one hope was that everything would have blown over by his return to Sweet Meadow and he would no longer be in the least involved. He cracked his whip now and looked up casually. A cart was approaching. The sight of it made him start.

"Uncle! Uncle!" he cried. "Isn't that Chu T'ieh-han driving that cart?"

Feng gaped. Rubbing his eyes he looked ahead. "Nonsense! Chu was out all night in the fields. What could he be doing here?"

Jumping down, Wen-chi took a more careful look. "It's him all right. And the one sitting on the cart is the Party secretary."

Feng's heart was in his mouth as it dawned on him what this meant. His teeth chattering, he exclaimed: "Confound them! They've been to fetch Erh-lin."

"Better turn back and make a detour, to keep out of their way," said Wen-chi.

Feng shook his head. "The way things are, even if I avoid them today I can't avoid them tomorrow." He clenched his teeth, resolved to brazen things out. "A gentleman must be resilient and tolerant," he went on. "Besides, a high-ranking cadre like Kao Ta-chuan can't afford to lose his temper, and Chu has been trained to control his temper too. They must carry out the policy towards middle peasants like me. Don't you worry. Just watch while I try to cope. If I succeed, so much the better. If I don't, we'll think of some other way." Having taken a grip on himself, he flourished his whip and drove on.

It seems that enemies are fated to meet. The two carts driving in opposite directions were bound to bump into each other.

Kao had spotted Feng Shao-huai too. Eyecing him, he said softly to Chu: "Watch out, Tieh-han. Instead of keeping out of our way Feng is driving up. He must be going to soft-soap us."

"There's so much to be done back home, we can't waste time talking with him. We'll deal with the bastard later."

"Quite right. But he wants to put on an act here. We'd better see what he's up to."

Feng's cart had reached them by now. He reined in the mule and jumped down. While walking over to Kao he kept his eyes on the patterned quilt on the cart. When he was sure that his guess had been correct, he at once assumed a smile.

"So it's you, Secretary Kao..."

Chu pretended not to have seen him. Cracking his whip he swerved and drove past Feng's cart.

Feng ran after them, still smiling. "So you're taking Erh-lin home?" he cried. "I must thank you. I was on my way to fetch him. Let's move him to my cart, it's steadier... Is he better now? Do stop! I've something to say to him."

Kao saw that Feng was out of breath. "Pull up, Tieh-han," he said. "Let's see what he has to say."

Reluctantly, Chu pulled up.

Feng leaned forward apprehensively, reaching out to raise the quilt.

Chu brushed his hand away. "Gently! Don't disturb him."



Nodding repeatedly, Feng gently lifted a corner of the quilt.

Erh-lin, roused from his peaceful sleep, opened his eyes. What he saw startled him, making him knit his brows. Before him was the cruel ugly face of a man who cared for nothing but money, a man who disowned his own relatives and treated all the poor as enemies. He had tried to ruin Liu Hsiang who was no relation of his and then abandoned Erh-lin, related to him by marriage. His heart was more poisonous than any viper or scorpion.

His eyes on Erh-lin, Feng asked with a great show of concern: "Are you better now? I shan't be easy in my mind till you've recovered. There's been so much to see to these last few days, I've been in a regular tizzy, not able to handle everything at once. The fields were wrecked by hailstones, so we had to rush to re-sow them or that would have been the end of this year's harvest. Besides, I thought a tough young fellow like you would get over a fever in no time. I planned to come and fetch you home today, but they beat me to it..."

Erh-lin wanted to swear at him but hadn't the strength; nor could he find terms strong enough to vent his hatred.

Feng misunderstood Erh-lin's silence and a spark of hope flickered in his dastardly heart. Playing his trump card, he fished out a few bank-notes, flipped through them instinctively and thrust them at Erh-lin.

"Take these to buy whatever you fancy to eat. You must build up your strength."

The indignant eyes of Kao and Chu turned simultaneously from Feng to Erh-lin.

His thin hand trembling, by dint of a great effort Erh-lin managed to clutch the bank-notes.

Chu was frantic. But before he could protest something happened to delight him.

Glaring at Feng, Erh-lin yelled: "Get away, you swine!" He flung the money with all his might in Feng's face.

The bank-notes scattered on the ground like leaves blown down by the wind.

Feng hastily flopped down to pick them up.

Chu started roaring with laughter.

That laughter, coming from his heart, frightened the birds from the trees. The mule pricked up its ears in alarm. Feng shivered convulsively.

One hand at his waist, the other brandishing the whip at Feng's forehead, Chu demanded: "How about it? Another defeat, eh? The fact is you were licked long ago. Ever since the winter before last when you came with your scabby mule to threaten us, we've been getting the better of you step by step. And however hard you try nothing is going to save you. Why not admit it?" He flourished the whip. "If you try again, you'll bite the dust again." With that he cracked his whip and the cart rumbled on.

To avoid being knocked over Feng sat down on the ground. After the cart had gone he went on chasing his bank-notes.

The joy of victory filled Kao's heart. Standing up on the cart he called out: "Feng Shao-huai, that day you tried to force Liu Hsiang to sell his land, I warned you, didn't I? The bright road of socialism was pointed out by Chairman Mao and blazed by us working people. No one can block it! All the facts before us make it clear that if you don't admit defeat you'll be crushed to smithereens by the wheel of history."

The big cart-wheels rumbled away.

Clutching the bank-notes in his hand, Feng felt as if all his strength had seeped away. In a low voice he told Wen-chi: "It doesn't matter. Money can buy the devil himself. It may be hard to find a three-legged toad, but there are plenty of two-legged men to be had. I can pick those who'll serve me."

Wen-chi stood there woodenly. He did not yet understand all that had happened, but the scene was imprinted none the less on his heart.

Getting no answer from him, Feng watched the cart receding into the distance. Blinking in the blazing sunlight, he heard thunderous peals of laughter.

The men on that cart, the victors, were blissfully happy.

His eyes closed, Erh-lin listened to the lively conversation between his brother and Chu. He recalled how his brother had led the other peasants to help Liu Hsiang out of his difficulties the previous year while Chang Chin-fa insisted, "It's none of our business," Pinchfist tried to make money by hiring out his draught-animals and Feng lent out money at an exorbitant rate of interest. Thinking back to that episode he gained a clearer understanding of the character of all the people involved. Then he recalled how the liberated peasants who joined mutual-aid teams had bettered their conditions in the past year. Teng Chiu-kuan no longer had to make do with wild herbs for half the year; besides having three square meals a day he now sent his son to school. Burly Liu Hsiang who had been debt-ridden all his life now owed nothing to anyone and had even put by some money and some grain. The Lu family who had never had any cattle, now owned a big brown cow; while Aunt Chen had new clothes and new quilts on her *kang* for the first time in her life. The socialist road was the only right road. He must take that road with his brother. . . .

Tucking the quilt round Erh-lin, Chu felt his arm and said with concern: "Look at you, you used to be such a strapping young fellow, but now Feng Shao-huai's made a bag of bones out of you."

His eyes on the distant prospect, Kao rejoined confidently: "He'll fill out again. He'll soon have fresh blood and recover all his strength."

The cart sped towards Sweet Meadow.

They had brought Erh-lin home from the inn beside Spring Water River. Much more than that, they had brought him back from the enemy camp to their own working-class ranks.

Glorious sunshine shone down on the broad level highway.

Illustrated by Chen Yen-ning

NEW FOLK SONGS

The Miners' Battle Cry

White clouds girdle the granite hills, while below
Day and night, there's a continuous roar of blasting.
Amid swirling smoke and flying rocks,
The heart of the hill goes "thump! thump!" with fright.

There's no need to be scared, you foolish old mountain,
But listen well to what we have to say:
Just think what a fine time you're living in now,
Yet you're still hiding treasures in your big rock belly.

Tell us how much iron and copper you have,
Come tell us about the wealth you're hiding.
You'd better give us an accurate account,
Remember, we'll not stand for any nonsense.

Today, our miners' fighting slogans fly,
We're determined to explore your vast subterranean depths.
From your sheer rocky cliffs echoes will roll,
Repeating and repeating our ringing battle cries.

Listen to that rumble: Is it thunder? No.
That's just our drill testing its sharp bit.
See the fiery sparks fly when our hammers clang,
As we lay rail lines around your mighty flanks.

Tomorrow vast socialist industries will rise among these hills
As we force you to disgorge your many treasures.
In the fiery years ahead we'll smelt your precious ores
To forge the girders for our great communist edifice.

White clouds girdle the rugged hills,
Below, our furnace roars like a hurricane.
Old hill, you'd better be prepared and ready,
For now here we come, a whole contingent of us.



The Cook's Decision

The clock's struck twelve,
But no one comes for food,
What shall I do?

Quickly I run to the workshop, where
Around the furnace, they're all at work,
Determined to break the production record!

I rush up onto the platform
Above the flow of molten steel,
I shout, "Hey stop! It's time for lunch!"

Not a single one even hears my call,
So, rolling up my sleeves I decide,
I'll pitch in too!

Our Accountant

Our accountant
Works in mighty queer ways,
A bottle of ink lasts him but a day or two.
As soon as he's jotted down one high record,
Quickly another one tops it again.
Oh my, oh my!
How busy our accountant is!

Our accountant
Is really smart. He uses
A ladder to draw the up-shooting targets gained.
But one ladder's not enough,
He has to fetch another to reach still higher.
Oh my, oh my!
How happy our accountant is!

Tao Tai-chung

Skipper Chang

In April 1949, the Chinese People's Liberation Army, after crossing the Yangtse River and capturing the Kuomintang capital Nanking, swept on through southern China. The glad tidings of a swift succession of victories cheered the people of the whole country, including the soldiers and civilians who were preparing to liberate all the enemy-occupied islands, large and small, along the coast of Kiangsu and Chekiang. A mighty contingent of civilians did their part in the war effort by transporting supplies to the front lines day and night. In an endless stream they marched along the roads with their wheelbarrows and carrying-poles or sailed and punted along the waterways.

Among this huge contingent was a team of Shantung fishermen headed by Chang Shan known as Old Skipper Chang. Having finished loading their boat by evening they put out to sea, sailing southward in the teeth of the wind. Their instructions were to cross the strait and deliver their cargo to the front about sixty nautical miles away before dawn.

Skipper Chang had the task of guiding the whole convoy. Hurricane lantern hanging on the stern-post, their boat raced one or two


miles ahead of the others. From afar the convoy looked like a huge dragon winding through the waves.

1

It was a pitch-dark night. The wind howled and the sea threw up angry billows. Skipper Chang stood erect at the stern, one hand on the tiller and the other cupping his pipe as he gazed into the distance. Though over fifty, he was still strong. He had spent his whole life battling waves and wind and his feet seemed glued to the deck. Everybody admired his skill in swimming, fishing and foretelling the weather. In fact he was known throughout southern Shantung as the "Walking Sea-Chart".

The intermittent glow from Skipper Chang's pipe illuminated his drawn features. The old fisherman was thinking over his task, an uncommonly difficult one. Gales, high seas and hidden reefs held no terrors for him, but what worried him was having to pass East Rock Island near the northwest shore of the East Sea fishing ground. He knew that tiny island well, for five years ago he had taken his twelve-year-old son Hai-sheng fishing there. To elude the Kuomintang steamboats which would have seized their catch, they had risked crossing Crouching Tiger Shoal west of the island. Tonight the convoy, heading south, had to pass near that small island which was thought to be guarded by enemy soldiers. For the succession of victories on the mainland had sent these bandits scuttling like rats to the off-shore islands, where they were putting up a last-ditch fight to block the strait and save their own skins, and this island was located close to the sea route. To cope with all eventualities the PLA command had assigned platoon leader Chin Chun and a squad of men to escort Chang Shan's team. Despite these precautions, Old Chang was on his guard, for he knew that the sea could change from one minute to the next.

Two young men now emerged from the cabin and having glanced around came swiftly to the stern. One was Chin Chun, a handsome young man with a revolver slung over his broad shoulder; the other, thickset Hai-sheng, had a boyish face but looked very capable. The



long, weary voyage hadn't lowered the morale of Chin Chun and his fighters. In spite of their seasickness, they all made themselves useful aboard without a word of complaint.

"Once the islands are liberated, you'll make a good skipper, Chin Chun," said Old Chang approvingly.

Chin Chun looked about him impatiently, eager to come to grips with the enemy. He took a deep breath of the sea air, then asked, "Are we near East Rock Island yet, uncle?"

The old skipper grunted non-committally, then studied the sky and listened to the wind. "It'll take us another two hours," he answered slowly.

Chin Chun fished his watch out of his pocket. The hour-hand pointed to nine. "We'll have to make good time to cover more than sixty miles before dawn."

"If our convoy doesn't reach port before daybreak," said Hai-sheng, "we'll have Kuomintang planes and vessels after us, dad. Then we'll be in for trouble."

"I know." Puffing at his pipe Old Chang eyed their billowing sails. "At this speed, we'll make it."

"If East Rock Island is still so far off, why not go below and rest," Chin Chun suggested with concern. "Hai-sheng and I can take the tiller."

"I'm not tired," was the old skipper's resolute reply.

"But you haven't had a wink of sleep for two nights. You'd better take a nap," Chin Chun insisted.

The old man laid his hand on Chin Chun's shoulder and answered fondly, "I'm all right, lad!"

"No one can talk my dad round, platoon leader," Hai-sheng whispered. "He's stubborn as a mule."



Old Chang turned to glare at his son and whacked his pipe against the tiller. He was thinking: We've battled our way here through wind and waves from our own province Shantung and across the Yangtse to take part in the last battle to overthrow Chiang Kai-shek and liberate our motherland. How can I sleep when we're so close to East Rock Island? But all he said was: "Chin Chun, delivering supplies to the front by sea isn't like pushing a barrow on land. There's no telling when we may run into trouble."

Chin Chun said no more. His company leader had told him Old Chang's story. During the anti-Japanese war, he had gone out regularly in his little boat to take munitions and provisions to the guerrillas out at sea. Earlier this year when the old man heard that the PLA needed more oarsmen to cross the Yangtse, he at once sent his elder son there, then set off with his younger son Hai-sheng and some other young fishermen to volunteer to ship supplies to the front. At a rally to celebrate victory he had been cited as a "Model Worker" and given a red flag imprinted with the characters "Support the Front". After coming on board Chin Chun had got to know the old man's temperament. Skipper Chang said little but kept his brains at work. Just as he never cast his net without first reflecting carefully, he never spoke without first weighing his words.

Suddenly their boat began losing speed. Old Chang pulled at the running rigging — it wasn't taut — the wind was falling. He thought anxiously: We've no time to lose. Every minute is precious now.

"The wind's dropped, Chin Chun," he shouted. "Quick, rig up the sweeps." Before Chin Chun could reply, the Old Skipper ordered Hai-sheng, "Fetch the sweeps."

"Right!"

But already the stout machine-gunner Big Kuo and two of the crew were coming out of the cabin with two sweeps over their shoulders.

Skipper Chang wound his tobacco pouch round his pipe stem and stuck it into his belt, then deftly fixed the sweeps at the stern. Four young oarsmen began pulling hard and the boat put on speed.

Presently, the dim outline of East Rock Island loomed up ahead. On it Chin Chun caught sight of faint flickering lights as ghostly as will-o'-the-wisps.

"It's just as we expected, uncle. The enemy is on the island."

Old Chang glanced at the island, then lowered the wick of their lantern.

Enemy searchlights cut into the darkness, sweeping the sea. A few shots rang out in the distance.

"Your days are numbered, you bandits. Our southern expeditionary force'll soon put paid to you," Chin Chun thought as he sized up the situation. The lights were bright on the eastern side of the

island along the main navigable route, but the western side was in darkness.

"Uncle," he exclaimed, "the enemy's defence is weaker on one side of the island."

"Mm." The old man stopped filling his pipe and looked up. "Of course! Crouching Tiger Shoal is on the western side."

"Crouching Tiger Shoal?" Chin Chun remembered that the old man had mentioned that name once before.

Old Chang lit his pipe, then continued, "The reefs of Crouching Tiger Shoal cover about a dozen square miles. There's a narrow navigable passage through them but Tiger Head Rock bars the way, right smack in the middle. We fishermen have a saying: If your boat hits Tiger Head you're as good as dead. Few boats ever dare go through there. That's why the enemy have concentrated their forces on the other side."

Chin Chun gazed thoughtfully at the island, one hand on his revolver.

Hai-sheng plied the sweep, eyeing his father as if to say, "Do you mean we don't dare either? You took me through it once."

Skipper Chang slowly puffed at his pipe as he analysed the situation, taking many different factors into account: Though only a small cog in the total war machine, their boat was responsible for guiding a whole convoy of war supplies for the front. It was thus a vital factor in the battle on the East Sea. Chang's thoughts turned to the liberation of the whole of China. Now, apart from the islands still in enemy hands, most of the motherland had been liberated. The people in the liberated areas were carrying out land reform and sharing out the land. But life was still bitter for those living on the islands where the Kuomintang had not yet been crushed. He recalled his fellow-villagers' parting words: "All the poor are brothers. Go and help liberate the islands of the East Sea fishing ground. Show the islanders that we're one with them." The more he thought about the task entrusted him, the more significant it seemed. If we can get the convoy safely to its destination and deliver the supplies, we'll be doing our bit to ensure victory in the coming battle, he reflected. Even though the enemy's defences are weaker on the western side, there're so

many hidden reefs there and such violent gales sometimes spring up that we mustn't risk taking the convoy that way. No, unless forced to alter course at the last minute, the convoy must take the usual route.

2

As the boat approached East Rock Island, Skipper Chang covered the lantern, a signal for the boats behind to halt. Hai-sheng and the others stopped rowing, letting the boat glide slowly before the wind.

Old Chang scanned the sea. As their boat rose on to the crest of a huge wave, he spotted a faint green glimmer moving slowly along the main shipping lane. The glimmer soon grew into a beam of light, and a strange sound was carried to them by the wind. As the sound drew nearer, they recognized the chugging of a motor. Instantly Old Chang's eyes met those of Chin Chun.

"An enemy patrol boat!"

"Get ready for action!"

In a flash the atmosphere became tense. The crew furled the sails. The fighters manned their posts. Big Kuo set up his machine-gun at the bow while Hai-sheng snatched up a harpoon. The swift chugging of the motor found an echo in the hard, steady beat of the fighters' hearts, all burning to wipe out the enemy.

"Full speed ahead and kill the dogs!" urged one fighter softly.

"As long as the shark roams the sea, the fish will never live in peace," approved one of the crew. "Let's ram them!"

"Give the order, platoon leader," pleaded Big Kuo. "Let me open fire and wipe out the bastards!"

Brows knitted, Chin Chun gripped his revolver. Although the patrol boat was not far off, he knew that the enemy hadn't yet spotted them. The boat was merely cruising to block the shipping lane. If they launched a surprise attack, they could surely overpower the enemy on the boat. But they'd be running the risk of alerting the troops on nearby East Rock Island, who'd immediately lay down a barrage of gunfire. Then the convoy would really be in a fix. He

turned to Old Chang who was calmly puffing at his pipe, considering how best to deal with the situation.

We're racing against time to reach our destination before dawn, so we can't stop to engage the enemy, Old Chang reflected. Of course, our boat could easily steer clear of the patrol boat. But what about the convoy? The only way out is to lure the enemy away from the shipping lane. Where to? He gazed westward at the waves over the shoals. . . .

"Dad, now that they've barred our way, why don't we fight it out?" His face flushed with hatred for the enemy, Hai-sheng brandished his harpoon and glared in the direction of the patrol boat.

"Fight it out?" His father frowned.

"It's the only way to get our convoy through."

Old Chang glanced repressively at Hai-sheng, then said in a low voice to Chin Chun, "We fishermen have a saying, 'Never cast your net without first observing the sea. Never set sail without first gauging the wind.' The same holds for attacking the enemy. It's no good catching shrimps and frightening away big fish." As he spoke, he glanced at the dim outline of Crouching Tiger Shoal.

"So you're thinking of heading for Crouching Tiger Shoal!" Approval flashed in Chin Chun's eyes.

"Yes, we'll lead the enemy a dance while our convoy slips past the island to safety."

"Perfect!" Chin Chun was overjoyed. Then he suddenly remembered that they were also leading the way as a pilot boat. "But, what about. . . ?"

Thinking that he was worried by the danger involved, the Old Skipper said, "I've crossed Crouching Tiger Shoal before. Although it's strewn with reefs and has tricky cross-currents, if you know the shoal well it's not really dangerous. Besides, it's worth running a little risk to get our convoy safely to the front line."

"Of course, uncle," responded Chin Chun, deeply moved. "What I meant was: you're acting as pilot boat and that's an important task. If something should go wrong, who'll lead the way?"

"Don't worry. That shoal won't stop us. I guarantee to get our boat through it safe and sound. It's a northeast wind tonight, so there

won't be any waves from the south or west to rock our boat. Once we're through the shoal, we'll take the lead again."

"What if the enemy boat chases after us?" Big Kuo put in.

"That's just what we want them to do."

"But what if those cowards are too scared to follow us, dad?" Hai-sheng asked.

"A donkey hitched to a millstone plods blindly round it. They'll follow us, don't worry." A mocking smile played on Old Chang's lips. He felt in his bones that the Kuomintang soldiers, new to the area, didn't know what the civilian contingent was like. Once they realize we're just an ordinary fishing boat, they'll surely give chase, he thought. Then he declared: "Let's lead them to Tiger Head Rock and see which is harder, their boat or the rock."

"We're pressed for time, uncle," Chin Chun urged. "Let's inform the other boats quickly."

"Right. We've got a messenger and boat at hand." Old Chang patted Hai-sheng on the shoulder and pointed at the sampan hitched to the boat. "My son's been fishing with me since his childhood. He swims like a fish and knows the sea route well. He can go and tell the others and act as their guide. What about it?"

"Good." With a sweep of his arm Chin Chun urged: "Let's go into action."

Hai-sheng had already drawn the sampan close to the boat.

Old Chang told his son: "As soon as we lure the enemy boat off the main route and the bandits on East Rock Island begin bombarding the shoal, lead our convoy eastward first, then out of the strait."

"Our boats are still far behind," Chin Chun added, "so the enemy can't have spotted them. Still, be very cautious when you pass near the island. Don't make any noise or show any lights. We'll meet you further south."

Hai-sheng nodded, then leapt on to the sampan and soon disappeared into the darkness.

Readying the tiller, Skipper Chang ordered, "Hoist the sails!" As four young fellows smartly carried out his orders, the old man removed the shield and turned up the wick of the red lantern at the stern, so that

it cast a bright light over the waves. Then he took the tiller and headed the boat due west — straight for Crouching Tiger Shoal.

3

The red light from the lantern put the wind up the enemy on the patrol boat. Several days before they had learned that a civilian contingent carrying supplies to the PLA front would pass through the area on its way south. A company of enemy soldiers and a patrol boat had been hastily brought up to reinforce their blockade. They had patrolled for two days and nights without finding anything and were just beginning to think it had been a false alarm when they spotted the red light. In a flurry they loaded their guns and reported to their superiors on the island: "Communist troops have arrived!" That news threw them into a panic too and they began firing wildly at the red light. Shells whistled across the night sky and exploded in the sea, throwing up huge columns of water.

Firmly gripping the tiller, Skipper Chang shouted to Big Kuo and the others who were bending to the oars: "Don't pay any attention. Just keep calm and row for all you're worth!" The men rowed in double quick time. The small craft was galloping towards Crouching Tiger Shoal when a shell exploded just in front of the prow, flooding the deck with an avalanche of water and nearly capsizing the boat.

"We've been hit. Sprung a leak!" yelled someone from the fo'c's'le.

Chin Chun and some of his fighters rushed to the hold and saw the water pouring in. In an instant it was ankle-deep. Chin Chun knitted his bushy eyebrows, then tore off his cotton padded jacket. "Bail the water out, quick!" he shouted as he plugged the hole with his jacket. The fighters worked swiftly, bailing with wooden basins and buckets. But in no time the jacket was swept out by the waves. Chin Chun forced it back into the hole, but again the same thing happened. In desperation he pushed it back once more and threw the weight of his whole body against it. But the water continued to pour in and soon was knee-deep.

The wind was howling; billows pounded the boat, making it toss violently. Skipper Chang knew that the only solution was to furl

the sails and plug the leak from outside, using the pressure of the water. He looked around. In the distance, the enemy patrol boat was still firing from the shipping lane. Quickly covering the lantern, he shouted: "Lower the sails!" A few steps took him down to the after hold. Big Kuo and several of the crew crowded round him, all wondering what he was up to.

"We must plug the leak from outside, otherwise we'll capsize." Grabbing a bottle of wine, Old Chang took a few gulps, then started unbuttoning his jacket.

Diving into the sea in this weather was no joke. Besides, the night was pitch dark and the swift current kept throwing up huge waves. Skipper Chang knew better than anyone else how dangerous the task was. But he also knew that if they remained there, the whole convoy would be endangered. For though they had drawn the enemy gunfire, the patrol boat was still barring the shipping lane. And the convoy still needed him to guide it through the treacherous reefs which lay ahead. So the battle to stop the leak not only involved saving his own boat but carrying out their important mission to support the front.

On learning that Old Chang intended to do the job himself, Chin Chun told a fighter to take over, then dashed on to the deck. "You're too old, uncle. Besides, you're the skipper. Let me go instead."

His brows knit, Old Chang looked at the young man. "Don't think I haven't faith in you. But the currents here are tricky, you have to know them."

"Let me go!" "I'll go!" shouted members of the crew.

Skipper Chang slipped off his padded jacket. "No, you've plenty of harder tasks ahead of you. And for all that I'm old, I'm the strongest swimmer here and know the sea better than any of you." He picked up a rope, tied one end round his waist and handed the other to Chin Chun. "Keep the rope taut and haul me up when you feel a tug." Before Chin Chun could reply, Old Chang had uncoiled the rope and plunged into the billowing sea, his padded jacket under his arm.

The icy water chilled him to the bone; his teeth chattered. Nevertheless, he swam along the hull, groping for the hole. When he

reached the starboard bow, he found it — as big as a bowl! He pushed his padded jacket into it with all his might and made sure the "plug" was tight.

The crew stood round Chin Chun, their eyes glued to the rope, counting the seconds to themselves under their breath. A minute passed and then another... Suddenly the rope jerked. With a sigh of relief Chin Chun swiftly hauled it up.

The enemy on the island was only shelling sporadically now since their target was no longer visible. The patrol boat was firing at random into the distance to ward off a counter-attack. Now, thinking that our convoy must have scattered, they turned on all their searchlights, making the sea bright as day.

When Chin Chun and the others hauled Skipper Chang aboard, his face was blue and his lips white. He was almost frozen to death. Chin Chun hurriedly wrapped his padded overcoat round the old man and clasped him to him, to warm him with his own body. By then the fighters had bailed all the water out of the hold and joined the men clustered round Old Chang.

"The leak," gasped Skipper Chang, "has it been stopped?"

Chin Chun nodded.

"Shall we hoist sail again, platoon leader?" Big Kuo asked.

"No hurry." Chin Chun looked round. "The enemy's still on the main shipping lane."

"We must lure the boat away!" Skipper Chang struggled to his feet. Pointing to the mast, he told one of the crew: "Uncover the lantern and hoist that red flag of ours on the mast."

The man ran to fetch the red flag from the after hold, and quickly hoisted it. That fiery flag with "Support the Front" inscribed on it in golden characters fluttered proudly in the wind.

The enemy searchlights sweeping the sea soon spotted the lantern and the red flag. Converging their lights, they disclosed the tossing boat pounded on all sides by waves. The Kuomintang troops exulted. They had been searching for two days and nights to seize a boat from which to get information. Now that they had discovered one, they weren't going to let it slip through their fingers. They revved up and headed for the little craft.

When Skipper Chang saw the patrol boat coming their way, he shouted: "Hoist the sails!" and strode over to the stern to take the tiller. All sails spread to the wind, the boat cut through the waves towards Crouching Tiger Shoal.

4

The shoal lived up to its name: it bristled with rocks, half-hidden by swirling foam. Now that the tide was high, the pounding of the angry waves mingled with the howling of the wind as if a roaring tiger were crouching there.

Firmly gripping the tiller, Skipper Chang steered towards the shoal, leading the enemy by the nose.

"Halt!" the enemy yelled from behind at the top of their lungs.

"Halt?" Skipper Chang spat in rage. "If you devils have any guts, come and catch us!"

As he spoke a narrow channel appeared among the maze of reefs not far ahead. Boiling waves raced southwestward through it. His eyes fixed on the winding channel, Old Chang worked the tiller and shouted to the oarsmen, "Watch out for the reefs!" With marvellous precision the boat swung into the narrow channel.

The enemy hadn't dreamed that the boat would enter Crouching Tiger Shoal. The place was so dangerous that they hadn't even stationed a guard there. Knowing that since ancient times countless boats had been wrecked on Tiger Head Rock, they figured that Skipper Chang couldn't make it through. If they overtook him before Tiger Head Rock, they could surely capture the Communists alive! They opened the throttle wide.

Skipper Chang's boat cut through the jutting reefs, tacking continually. Suddenly they heard the roar of the motor not far behind. The patrol boat was closing in. The rowers strained at the big sweeps.

"Come on, you devils! You're going to get what you deserve!" cursed Chin Chun, brandishing his punting pole. He ordered his men to get ready for action and, his eyes on the approaching boat, considered the best way to deal with the situation. Skipper Chang, as calm as ever, swung the tiller now alee, now aweather while direct-

ing the fighters who were ranged with punting poles by the bulwarks. The boat advanced by spurts, tacking from side to side, as it put one reef after another behind it and kept ahead of the patrol boat.

As they neared Tiger Head Rock, Skipper Chang planted his two sturdy feet more firmly and stood erect, his eyes fixed on the sea ahead. Immense waves crashed on the boat, throwing up huge cascades of spray. Several times the small craft heeled so that its sails brushed the rocks flanking the narrow channel. A monstrous wave suddenly thundered by. Rising on its crest they caught sight of a towering rock right in the middle of the passage not far ahead. The waves hurling themselves against it broke into clouds of spray. The swift current was churned into a whirlpool here before roaring on to the southeast. So this was the notorious Tiger Head Rock!

His eyes sparkling, Old Chang gripped the tiller so hard that the veins stood out on his hands. He was thinking: By now Hai-sheng's delivered the message and the convoy's probably already safely past the island. We must bypass this dangerous rock, shake off the enemy and lead the whole convoy to its destination.

Chin Chun and his fighters watched round-eyed and waited with bated breath, bamboo poles in hand, for Skipper Chang's next orders.

As the boat entered the shadow of jagged Tiger Head Rock, it seemed as if a dense black cloud had blotted out the sky. Just as the little vessel was bearing down on the rock, Skipper Chang wrenched the tiller round and shouted: "Punt starboard!" Chin Chun and his fighters poled with all their might. The boat veered, shaved Tiger Head Rock, then headed southeast.

Expecting the little boat to be trapped at Tiger Head Rock, the enemy had raced in pursuit like a pack of wolves and as they closed in they were licking their chops. But in a flash the fishing boat disappeared, and the next second Tiger Head Rock was towering above them.

In terror they yelled, "Cut the engines!" But since the patrol boat had been going at top speed with the wind behind it, they couldn't stop. Their shouts of fear were drowned by a thunderous crash as the boat struck Tiger Head Rock. Its stern shook convulsively in the air an instant then, slowly, the whole vessel sank. The soldiers



struggled desperately in the boiling rapids and a few managed to fire a few shots hoping thus to get their superiors on the island to come to their rescue.

Not expecting their own men to be in difficulty, the enemy command assumed that more Communist vessels had been discovered. They hurriedly converged all their searchlights on Tiger Head Rock and

deluged the area with a heavy bombardment. The explosions threw up geysers of water and rocks flew in all directions, killing outright those soldiers who had been fortunate enough to escape drowning.

Skipper Chang and the fighters laughed as they watched this spectacle. The wind blew fiercer, the waves surged higher, but the little boat sped on.

Just before dawn, the wind had fallen but a heavy swell still threw up angry waves. When they emerged from Crouching Tiger Shoal, Old Chang turned to look back at distant East Rock Island. Its lights looked more ghostly now. The sporadic booming of guns could still be heard faintly. Evidently the enemy soldiers were still playing cat and mouse among themselves!

While Skipper Chang was leading the enemy on a wild-goose chase, the convoy had slipped past the island. It now came in sight. Standing at the bow, Hai-sheng clapped his hands and leapt for joy, while the others waved their caps and signalled to each other, triumphant smiles on their faces.

When day broke, the convoy was cutting through the waves with Old Chang's boat in the lead. High atop the main mast the red flag bearing the golden characters "Support the Front" fluttered gaily in the wind. The convoy with its gleaming white sails swept southward like a huge tidal wave across the boundless sea.

Illustrated by Lin Yung

Wang Ying and
Li Jung-teh

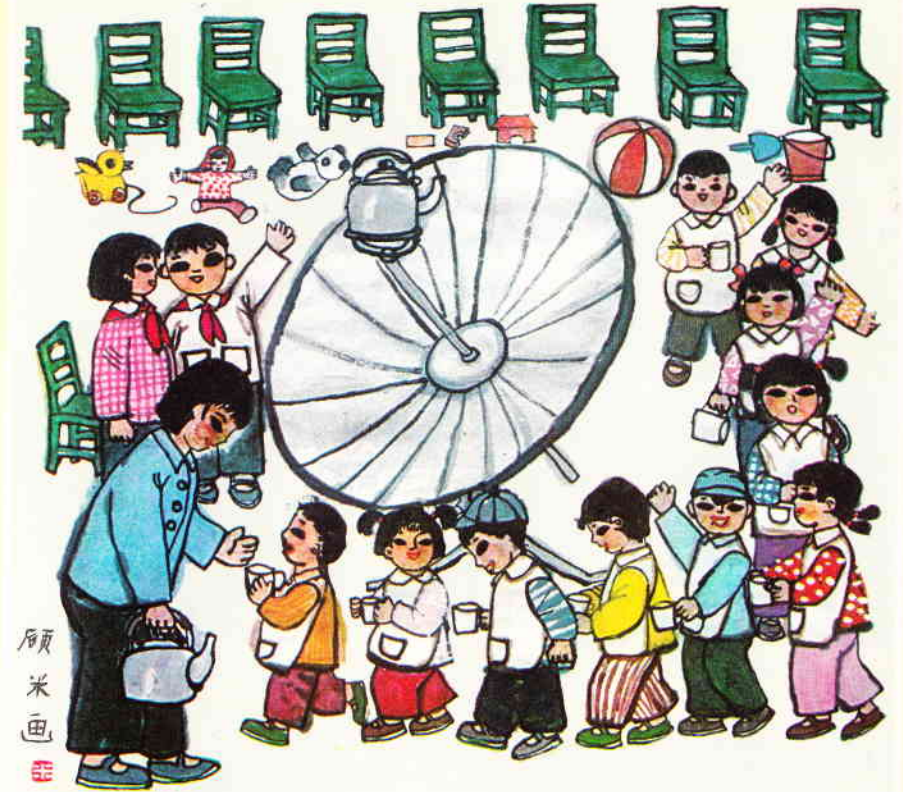
Sturdy Young Poplars

In front of our barracks, some magnificent poplars are reaching towards the sky — each one sturdy enough to weather any storm.

The trunk of the big one in front of the kitchen is as thick as a good-sized bucket. It was planted ten years ago by the squad leader of our mess. Then, reluctant to leave his comrades who had gathered round the sapling, he said to them: "I'll soon be demobbed, but this poplar will take root here to remind you that I'm with you all in heart as you guard our motherland." That evening, he had a long talk with his successor Niu Chang-chi to whom he explained the squad's work in great detail. Before leaving, he reminded Niu once again: "And don't forget to take good care of Aunt Yang!"

Aunt Yang was an old widow who lived in the village near the barracks. Her husband had been pressganged by Kuomintang soldiers and beaten to death after trying to escape. She had led a wretched life in the old society and developed cataract which had made her blind.

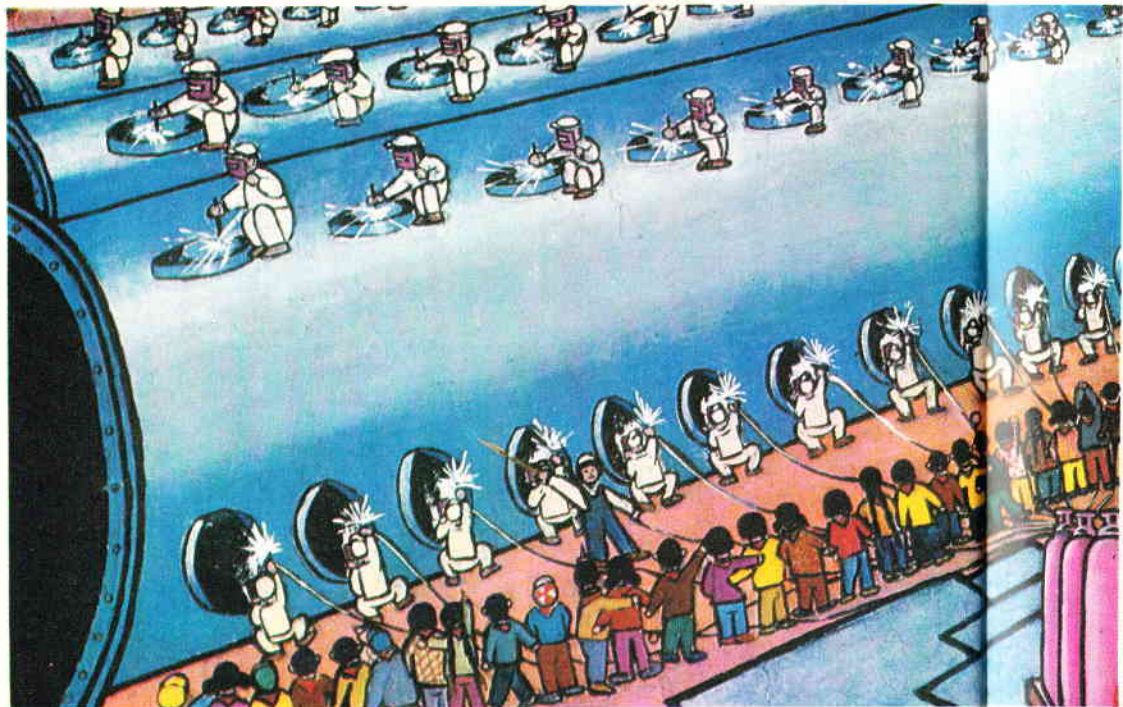
After Liberation, the people's government took care of her and when the people's commune was set up the brigade in her village looked after her daily needs.



Using Sunlight to Cook

by Ku Mi (aged 7)

Exhibition of
Children's Art in Shanghai



Our Welders Work Hard

by Lu Kai (aged 13)



I've Learned to Sew On Buttons

缝钮六岁画
一九七五年四月六日

by Pan Chien-mei (aged 6)



Motorbikes

by Chiang Cheng (aged 5)



Long Jump

by Wang Chien-fen (aged 9)

for her over a thousand *li* away, tears streamed down her cheeks. She clasped the boy's hands.

"Lad, you're really good fighters trained by Chairman Mao."

Next, the diary was entrusted to Squad Leader Chang Shu. One day he rushed into Aunt Yang's house and panted: "Aunt, your sight can be restored!" A PLA medical team had come to their regiment headquarters and Chang heard there was an eye specialist among them.

But this good news made little impression on Aunt Yang. She thought: I've been blind for so many years, how can they cure me now? Didn't a doctor once say that if I could be made to see again, then hens could be made to crow?

Nevertheless, Squad Leader Chang was persistent. After asking leave from company headquarters he went with a cart to fetch the old woman.

"Let's go and see the doctor, aunt," he urged her. "It's worth a try."

Once persuaded, the old woman got on the cart and they set off at dawn on the thirty *li* journey to regiment headquarters. It was almost noon when they arrived. After examining her eyes, the doctor asked her to stay there as an operation would be necessary.

A fortnight later company headquarters received a call from the medical team — they had performed the operation and would be removing the bandages that day. The company commander sent Chang to see Aunt Yang, telling him to take her some eggs and apples.

The doctor carefully unwound the gauze bandage and after he lifted off the last layer Aunt Yang slowly opened her eyes. But she immediately clapped her hands over them to shut out the light. Then, with one hand shading her eyes, she looked round. Yes, she could see now! Golden sunlight, bright red stars and fiery red flags dazzled her eyes. Great changes had taken place! This was a completely different world! She gripped Chang's hands and drank in his ruddy face, jet-black brows and sparkling eyes. She smiled and could not hold back tears of joy.

On her return to the village Aunt Yang went straight to the PLA unit with Squad Leader Chang. She wanted to see the faces of the



soldiers who had taken such good care of her. She met every one of the fighters but still was not fully satisfied, for she missed some of the familiar voices to which she had grown accustomed.

The company commander told her: "If you really want to know what they look like, aunt, have a good look at this face." Taking the diary from Chang, he pointed to the portrait of Lei Feng. "He's the model we learn from. Each of us wants to be a fighter like him."

Then he turned towards the poplars. "Look at those trees in front of the barracks, aunt. They were all planted by our demobilized comrades. They're growing well now. See what a size they are!"

The diary in hand, Aunt Yang walked over to the poplars. Looking at the fine soldiers, she said with emotion, "You're good fighters taught by Chairman Mao. With you to safeguard our motherland, we've nothing to fear — neither tigers, foxes nor scoundrels can harm us!"

Ten years have passed since the first squad leader planted that sapling. He is now the Party secretary of a production brigade in the countryside. Niu is a Youth League secretary in a factory and the others are still in the army. Wang is the unit's assistant logistician and Chang Shu one of the company's political instructors. These fighters have grown strong and sturdy like the poplars. Each in turn received the diary of Lei Feng, and his spirit took root in each of their hearts.

Now a new squad leader has taken up the task of caring for Aunt Yang. And the poplars round our barracks are increasing in number and growing ever taller.

Illustrated by Huang Chia-yu

NEW CHILDREN'S SONGS

A Cloud in the Sky

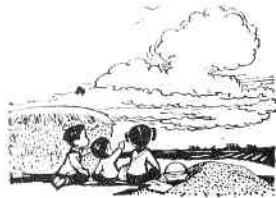
Through the sky drifts a snow-white cloud,
Over the threshing ground floats merry laughter.
Brother says it's like our commune's stack of grain,
Rice rolling down from its tip.
Sis says it's like cotton raised by our "iron" girls,
With bolls past counting swaying in the breeze.
To me it's neither; what it's really like
Is the flock of sheep I herd for the commune.

Through the sky drifts a scarlet cloud,
Over the threshing ground floats merry laughter.
Brother says it's like our commune's iron works,
Sparks spurting from the blazing furnace.

The first three children's songs printed here were written by Chu Chao-hsueh, the fourth by Li Hsing.

Sis says it's like our village's peach orchard,
The trees a mass of red on the southern slope.
To me it's a troop of Little Red Soldiers drilling,
Red flag, red tassels and red scarfs fluttering.

Through the sky drifts a lustrous cloud,
Over the threshing ground floats merry laughter.
It's like red lanterns hung from the emerald roof over red walls,
A broad highway bright as a mirror;
A clear river of rippling water;
And splendid marble pillars* wrapped in white clouds. . . .
This time we see eye to eye: it's like Peking
Beneath rosy clouds covering the whole vast sky.



*Referring to the big carved pillars on either side of Tien An Men Gate in the heart of the capital.

The Eve of the Wheat Harvest

In June the fields are seas of golden wheat,
The grindstone whirrs, a record crop to greet.

Reaping will start tomorrow once it's light,
But grandad can't get off to sleep tonight.

He gets up and slips out to wander round,
First scans the plain then climbs to higher ground.

The ripe ears of the wheat droop heavily,
Each grain as bright as any pearl could be.

He strokes them softly, studies them with care,
His heart rejoiced by crops beyond compare.

Then, spotting a dark figure, grandad stops.
Who is this sitting gazing at the crops?

He strains his eyes and sees beneath the moonlight;
It's his team leader chuckling at the sight.

"The moon looks good out here," the old man cries.
"It's stuffy indoors," the team leader replies.

At that the ears of wheat with laughter shake —
They know quite well what's kept both men awake!



Sister Sews a Print Blouse

Sister's bought five feet of gaily printed cotton
And is making a blouse, sitting beneath a tree;
Stitch by stitch she sews, thread by thread,
While butterflies flit round her merrily. . . .

Granny leans on the gate to watch
And smiles to see her fingers fly so fast;
Her eyes are blurred with happy tears
But her heart starts aching when she recalls the past.

In the dead of winter snow fell thick and fast
But she, a girl of eighteen, had no clothes to wear;
All they had was a patched and tattered quilt
To shield the whole family from the freezing air.

Tears are streaming down granny's cheeks
Till a call from sister makes her raise her eyes
To the cotton gay with a hundred flowers in bloom.
"Granny, isn't this lovely?" Sis cries.



Golden Bamboo

Golden bamboo, closely jointed,
We cut one to make flutes:
One for elder sister, one for little sister,
And the biggest one of all for little brother.

We've formed a small orchestra
And file in now to perform:
Loud fluting, tuneful singing,
Every note voicing our love for Chairman Mao.

Chumahunq Suritan

Introducing the Uighur Opera “The Red Lantern”

Recently the opera company of the Sinkiang Uighur Autonomous Region presented to Peking audiences a new version of the opera *The Red Lantern* in Uighur with traditional Uighur music. Based on the well-known modern revolutionary Peking opera of the same name, this adaptation has retained the militant spirit of the original.

The action in *The Red Lantern* takes place during the War of Resistance Against Japan (1937-1945) in a town in the northern part of China. Li Yu-ho, a railway worker and an underground Communist Party member, carries on revolutionary work with Granny Li and young Tieh-mei for China's liberation. Although living as one household, the three of them did not originally belong to one family. During a railway strike in the early twenties Granny Li's husband and Tieh-mei's father, both of whom were railways workers, were killed by the reactionaries; whereupon Li Yu-ho adopted his mate's daughter and took in Granny Li as his own mother, making up a new revolutionary family. A red signal lantern left by the martyred railway workers is their family heirloom, and they use it to make contact with



A scene from the Uighur opera *The Red Lantern*

other members of the underground. While trying to deliver a secret code-book to the guerrilla forces in the mountains, Li is betrayed by a renegade; then he is arrested together with his mother and daughter. The Japanese military police torture him to make him reveal the whereabouts of the code-book, but the three of them remain steadfast and unyielding. Li and his mother die a heroic death, after which the enemy release Tieh-mei in the hope that she will lead them to the code-book; but the seventeen-year-old girl sees through their trick, and with hatred in her heart takes up the red lantern and continues her father's work. Finally, helped by the masses, she succeeds in delivering the code-book to the guerrillas.

In the mass movement to popularize the model revolutionary theatrical works, members of this Sinkiang Opera Company realized that by adapting it and using the Uighur language and Uighur music they could make it more intelligible to the local people. This would extend the militant influence of the model revolutionary theatrical works, thereby helping to combat and prevent revisionism and to

consolidate our proletarian dictatorship. The process of adaptation would also spur the revolution in traditional Uighur art forms. The attempt to adapt *The Red Lantern* as a Uighur opera began in July 1971, and after three years' hard work the new version was produced.

The music of this Uighur opera is based mainly on the traditional twelve *mukams* — twelve works of symphonic music popular among the Uighur people on both sides of the Tienshan mountain range. This is a valuable heritage of Uighur music created by the working people. Each *mukam* consists of three movements, in each of which vocal and dance music intermingle to form one harmonious whole. The twelve *mukams* comprise two hundred and forty-two tunes in all, their exquisite melodies and varied rhythms having a marked regional flavour. Many of these tunes expressed the Uighur people's resentment against the old society and their eagerness to rebel against oppression and exploitation. However, owing to historical limitations and distortions introduced by the exploiting classes in the past, this good music possessed certain unhealthy features. This meant that when these traditional tunes came to be adapted to express the life and struggle of the working class, they had to be critically evaluated and some reforms and innovations were necessary. The revolutionary artists of the Sinkiang Opera Company followed Chairman Mao's instructions to make ancient things serve present-day China and to evolve the new from the old. By this means they have scored notable successes in their adaptation and renovation of the traditional music.

To create musical images of heroic proletarian characters and tunes which reflect the spirit of our age while retaining the special flavour of Uighur opera, these musicians took special pains over choosing the *leitmotif* for these characters. The tune chosen for the chief hero Li Yu-ho was based, with certain innovations, on the *Mushaujek Mukam* which has a relatively high pitch and wide tonal range, being a simple, unadorned and typical Uighur tune full of vitality. The tune for Granny Li, an experienced and well-tested old revolutionary, was chosen from the *Chepiati Mukam* which is well adapted to narrative and expresses both her grief and her indignation. The young heroine Tieh-mei sings different tunes on different occasions to bring out

various facets of her character. Her *leitmotif* comes from certain clear, passionate passages in the *Chepiati Mukam* and the *Lakb Mukam* which show her youth and impulsiveness as well as her strong hatred for the enemy.

To project the central figure most forcefully, Li Yu-ho's tune has a completely different tonal quality and melody from those of the other characters. And because it recurs throughout the opera, appearing not only in the prelude and intermezzos but also in his arias and the choral singing, the musical image of the chief hero is enhanced while the musical accompaniment and singing passages of the whole opera are better integrated and rounded out.

When composing arias for different characters, the musicians learned from the model Peking operas and used long arias with varied tempos, integrating these with the special features of Uighur music so as to create whole sets of fine new singing passages distinctively Uighur in style and imbued with the spirit of our age. During the adaptation

Discussing the opera



attention was also paid to operatic singing techniques, not only to solo singing but also to choral singing and choruses, in such a way as to build up the atmosphere and the central figures' nobility of spirit.

Experiments were also made in the use and improvement of Uighur musical instruments. On the principle that foreign things should be made to serve China, they used Uighur folk instruments as the chief components of the orchestra while including some western musical instruments too. The Uighur bowed fiddle known as *aijek* and the strummed *rawap* were the chief instruments used in this opera; but the appropriate parts given to the *suona* trumpet, the flute, the *satar*, the dulcimer, the tambour and other instruments added to the symphonic effect and distinctive Uighur style. Various Uighur percussion instruments such as the stone and the *nagra* hand-drum were also used to good effect.

The adaptation of the Peking opera *The Red Lantern* into a Uighur opera is yet another achievement in the proletarian revolution in stage art which started with the model theatrical works, showing that this revolution is gaining in depth and extending its range. The successful production of this new opera has given the old Uighur music, the *mukam*, a new lease of life and at the same time provided useful experience for revolutionizing the theatre in national minority areas and developing their revolutionary art.

Exhibition of Children's Art in Shanghai

On June the first, Children's Day, an exhibition of children's art opened in Shanghai. The more than four hundred exhibits shown in the spacious Shanghai Art Gallery included traditional Chinese paintings, gouaches, crayon drawings, woodcuts, scissor-cuts and pictures made of pasted velvet cut-outs. These spirited and naive works by children between the ages of five and twelve made the exhibition hall unusually lively. The children used their art to celebrate their own festival and at the same time to show their warm love for the Party, Chairman Mao and their socialist motherland. Their art reflects the fact that they are growing up healthily in the sunshine of socialism.

This was the third exhibition of children's art held in Shanghai since the Cultural Revolution. The Cultural Revolution, as well as the campaign to criticize Lin Piao and Confucius, and the present movement to study the theory of the dictatorship of the proletariat, have given new vigour to children's art. This is clear from the paintings *Poetry Contest* and *New Books for Our Library*. The former was painted by Yeh Chun, a twelve-year-old member of the art group in the Chil-

dren's Palace in Shanghai. During the movement to criticize Lin Piao and Confucius he, like many other Little Red Soldiers, took up his brush to denounce Lin Piao's criminal attempt to restore capitalism and debunk the Confucian doctrines which encourage retrogression. Poetry contests to criticize Lin Piao and Confucius are often held in the Children's Palace, and young Yeh Chun has depicted this lively scene: new poems denouncing Lin Piao and Confucius are posted all over the walls, and many children are waiting their turn to go to the platform to recite their new compositions and express their militant feeling. *New Books for Our Library* depicts children eagerly reading newly republished Marxist classics in their library during the mass movement to study the theory of the dictatorship of the proletariat. It shows that these children have the determination to study more political theory just like grown-ups.

Painting by children in Shanghai has developed mainly from drawing classes in schools and art activities in the Children's Palace. In the past, the art teachers in schools usually taught children to draw pots and plates, cats and dogs, or flowers and plants, not giving free play to their imagination. The current revolution in education has brought about a radical change in the teaching of art. Now, art teachers take their pupils to factories and communes to sketch from life. The vigorous growth of production and tremendous changes in our socialist motherland deepen our children's love for the Party and Chairman Mao. *I've Learned to Write!* by Ku Mi, a girl of seven, vividly expresses the youngsters' delight when they learn to write "Long Live Chairman Mao!"

The traditional Chinese painting *Study Hard* and the crayon drawing *Long Jump* show how conscientiously children work in school and take part in sports for the sake of the revolution. The gouache *Our Welders Work Hard*, the traditional Chinese painting *Using Sunlight to Cook* and the crayon drawing *The Commune's Dairy Farm* make it clear that our children are in touch with society and like to record what they see in factories and communes. Another drawing *Take a Photo of Us, Uncle*, shows two sisters posing for a photograph before the elder leaves to live and work in the countryside. It reflects the children's fine determination to work on the land when they are old enough.

The scissor-cut *Our Dear Brothers in Taiwan* expresses the love of children of different nationalities in China for our compatriots in Taiwan, and their resolve to liberate this island. The traditional Chinese painting *A Song of Triumph* depicts children from different continents singing lustily together, reflecting the close ties of friendship between the children of New China and those of other countries. Another traditional Chinese painting *Our Railway Workers Are Busy* was done by five-year-old Chiang Cheng who loves to draw locomotives and other means of transport. When his kindergarten teacher taught him the song *The Train Whistles, Our Railway Workers Are Busy*, he decided to depict it in a painting. That Sunday his father took him to see the trains speed north and south. He watched raptly and remembered all the details of the trains, the railway and the freight being hauled. When he went home, with his father's encouragement he made several rough drafts before finally producing this painting. He has succeeded in catching the main features of the train, depicting it with simple vigorous strokes and vivid colours. The wheels of the train slant forward and are oval, not round, suggesting the urgency of work on the transportation front. His painting *Motorbikes* is similar in style, reflecting the activities of the Shanghai militia.

The several hundred young artists whose works were displayed are all active in propaganda work in their schools. They help their teachers to make drawings needed for class work and produce wall-newspapers. Children of the art group in the No. 1 Primary School in Kanchuan New Village, after learning Chairman Mao's instruction to store up more grain, produced eight paintings on this subject and took them to a nearby grain shop. Although it was raining that day, they picked up all the grain which had been dropped on the ground in front of the shop, then took it in with their paintings. The shop assistant was very touched and asked them what school they belonged to. Their answer was: "We're Chairman Mao's Little Red Soldiers." Later their eight paintings were pasted up before the shop, and their school launched a drive to save grain. Another group of children from the No. 1 Primary School in Hsin-chang Street made a series of paintings depicting how sixteen young workers in a restaurant resisted bourgeois corruption. They sent

these paintings to a nearby kindergarten, where they were warmly welcomed. The two primary schools just mentioned have over a thousand pupils each, and ninety per cent of them take part in art activities.

Learning to paint and draw requires hard work, but once children realize that paintings and drawings can serve the revolution they become very eager to learn. When they see the keenness and drive of factory workers, they paint them with great enthusiasm too. They say: "When we draw our worker-uncles we must learn from their spirit."

As a result of the help and encouragement given them by their teachers and their own painstaking practice, these children have produced some fine works with fresh themes and good composition. This exhibition shows the healthy state of children's art in Shanghai.

Children living in socialist China have a happy life and enjoy depicting it. This is one reason for the vigorous development of children's art in China. Many other cities held exhibitions of children's art on June the first this year. And in October an All-China Exhibition of Children's Art is to open in Peking to display the achievements in this field and foster the further development of children's art.

Relics of the Long March

Some revolutionary relics of the Long March of the Red Army have recently been exhibited in the Historical Museum in Peking. This article tells the story of two of these relics, a length of iron chain and a leather belt.

In 1931 Wang Ming, the head of the third "Left" opportunist line, usurped the leadership of the Party Central Committee at the Fourth Plenary Session of the Sixth Central Committee called in January and pushed through a completely wrong political line which dominated our Party for four years. He reversed Chairman Mao's correct leadership over the Party and the Red Army, with the result that the Red Army failed to smash the Kuomintang's fifth counter-revolutionary military "encirclement" and the revolutionary forces suffered heavy losses. So in October 1934, the Chinese Workers' and Peasants' Red Army was compelled to leave the revolutionary bases in western Fukien and southern Kiangsi to start the Long March. In January 1935, in the course of the Long March the Party Central Committee held an enlarged meeting of the Political Bureau at Tsunyi in Kweichow Province which put an end to Wang Ming's "Left" opportunist line and established Chairman Mao's leading position in the Party.

After that, the Red Army marched on from victory to victory under the correct leadership of Chairman Mao. They climbed mountains capped with snow the whole year round and crossed marshlands seldom traversed before. They smashed the cordons formed by hundreds of thousands of Kuomintang troops and after journeying more than twelve thousand kilometres finally reached the revolutionary base in northern Shensi in October 1935.

The Battle for Luting Bridge was one of the famed campaigns of the Long March.

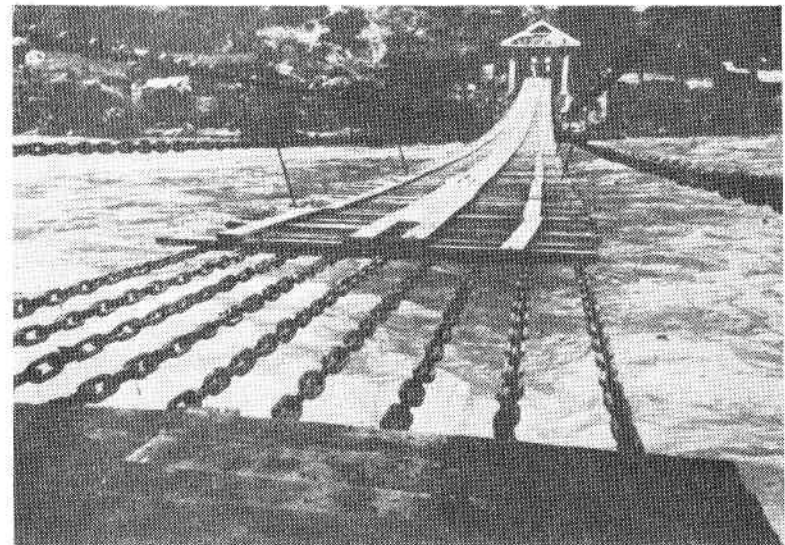
In May 1935, the Red Army reached Anshunchang Ford on the south bank of the Tatu River in western Szechuan. Sheer cliffs rose on both sides of the ford, leaving no room for manoeuvre. In 1863, the well-known Taiping general Shih Ta-kai had attempted to cross the river here but failed; so the enemy predicted that the Red Army would also meet defeat here for they forgot that the Red Army fighters led by Chairman Mao were very different from Shih Ta-kai's troops.

The Kuomintang had a whole battalion stationed on the south bank and had removed all boats except one which they kept for liaison purposes. The Red Army wiped out this battalion and used the boat to ferry a shock team of eighteen men across the river, this team being swiftly followed by other troops. Thus they routed the enemy on the north bank and quickly occupied both banks of the ford.

The Tatu River flows from north to south, then at Anshunchang veers east. Though the vanguard had crossed it successfully, the swift current made it difficult to build a bridge here over which the main force could cross. Accordingly the troops proceeded in two columns, one along each bank, towards Luting, planning to cross over there.

Luting Bridge, a suspension bridge, was the only one over the Tatu. It must therefore be seized to facilitate the crossing. One hundred and ten metres long and three metres wide, it consisted of thirteen iron chains spanning the river from east to west several hundred metres above the water. To stop the Red Army from crossing, the Kuomintang had removed all the wooden planks.

The First Division of the Red Army marched northward along the east bank, with the river on its left and a high mountain on its right, over rugged and difficult terrain. Enemy blockhouses guarded



Luting Bridge

the strategic passes; but the First Division smashed through these obstacles one after another, routed the enemy and pressed rapidly forward.

The Second Division with the Fourth Regiment as its vanguard and the main force led by Chairman Mao behind it set out from Anshunchang along the west bank towards Luting a hundred and sixty kilometres away, with orders to reach the bridge within three days. Their way, too, was very tortuous and narrow, high cliffs on one side, the river on the other. When this column had advanced about fifteen kilometres the enemy on the opposite bank opened fire. To avoid unnecessary casualties, our troops made a detour over the mountains. Further on when they passed a high mountain our vanguard was confronted by a company of enemy troops. Fearless as tigers, our Red Army fighters launched a fierce attack and routed the enemy, then advanced even more swiftly.

Before long, they discovered a whole enemy battalion stationed in a pass ahead. The only way forward was a small steep path flanked on the right by the river. There was no way to make a detour, but

a frontal attack was also impossible. After careful reconnaissance they sent a small force over the cliff on the left to circle round behind the enemy. The enemy kept the pass sealed with machine-gun fire; but in less than an hour firing sounded from their rear. Then our troops in front attacked simultaneously and the enemy, caught between two forces, surrendered. Our troops captured more than two hundred men and several commanders.

The next day, before this column continued its march, orders came for the Fourth Regiment to make a forced march to Luting Bridge. As they were still a hundred and twenty kilometres from the bridge, they had to complete a two days' march in one day.

By now Luting Bridge was guarded by two Kuomintang regiments, and two more brigades were on their way as reinforcements. Some of these troops were assigned to slow down the advance of our First Division, but the main force was deployed northward along the east bank, advancing towards the bridge on the opposite bank, parallel with our Fourth Regiment. We therefore had to race them to the bridge; otherwise we would lose the opportunity to capture the bridge.

Presently our troops reached Tiger Mount, a strategic height involving a climb of nearly twenty kilometres. The pass commanding the road from Anshunchang to Luting was guarded by an enemy battalion. A dense fog at the time made visibility virtually nil. Taking advantage of this fog, our troops climbed up to the enemy fortifications and overpowered them with hand-grenades, putting paid to this battalion.

At nineteen hours, a thunderstorm suddenly broke. It was pitch-dark: a man stretching out his hand could not see his own fingers. Our troops were still about fifty-five kilometres from the bridge, they had not stopped to eat all day, and the downpour had turned the road into a morass. Nevertheless, they advanced at full speed through the night and succeeded in reaching the bridge by six the next morning. They then occupied the west bank and the bridge-head.

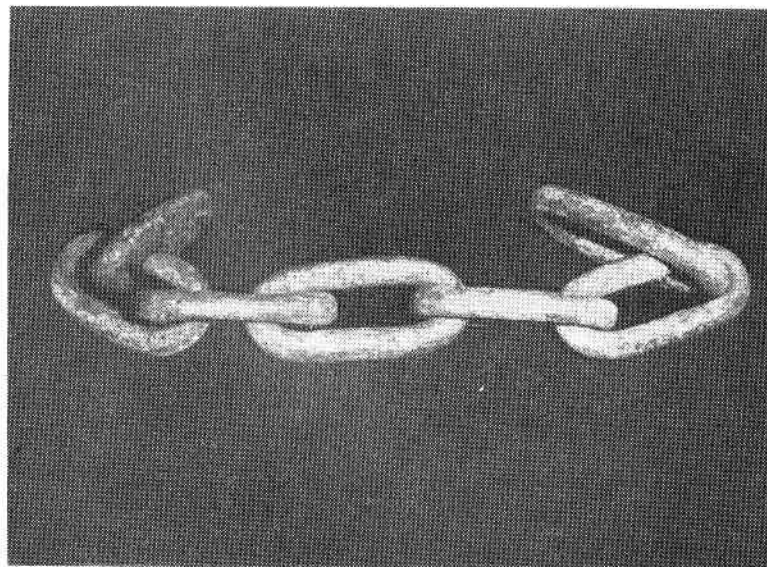
The city of Luting lies east of the bridge, built half on the east hill and half adjoining the river. The city wall was more than seven metres high, and the west gate was at the bridge-head. Thus after crossing the bridge it was necessary to pass through the city gate.

This was the only way forward. There were two enemy regiments in the city, and they had built strong defences on the hillside. Their machine-gun fire was concentrated on the bridge-head.

After studying the terrain, the Fourth Regiment decided to send a shock detachment consisting of twenty-two men to start the attack at sixteen hours. As the charge was sounded the whole regiment opened fire at the opposite bank. Bugling, gunfire and shouts shook the mountains. Then our twenty-two heroes, armed with submachine-guns or pistols, each with a sword on his back and twelve hand-grenades at his waist, charged through the enemy barrage to the bridge, crossing its iron chains by grasping the railings. The troops following them carried a plank of wood apiece apart from their arms, repairing the bridge even as they charged.

When our shock troops reached the far end of the bridge the west gate of the city was one big conflagration. The enemy hoped this would halt our men and that then they could wipe them out on the bridge with concentrated fire; but our intrepid shock troops rushed through the flames to the street and engaged the defenders in fierce

The length of iron chain



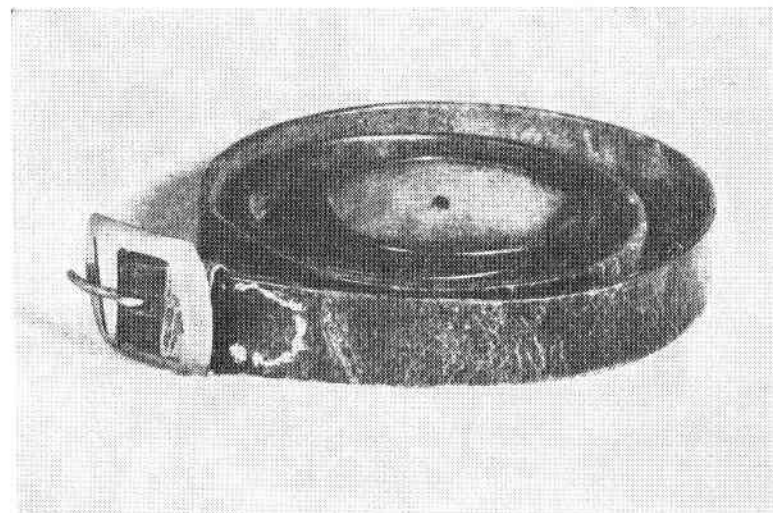
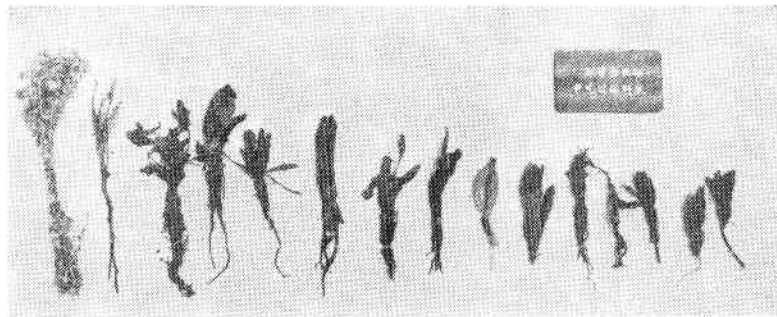
hand-to-hand fighting. Then more troops behind them raced across the bridge and entered the city too. After a fierce battle lasting some two hours, both enemy regiments were virtually wiped out and the few survivors fled. By dusk our troops had captured the whole city and were in firm control of Luting Bridge. By twenty-two hours they triumphantly joined forces with the First Division on the right bank of the river.

The next day the main force of the Red Army led by Chairman Mao reached Luting, crossing the strategic Tatu River by means of this suspension bridge.

The seven links of iron chain in the exhibition came from Luting Bridge. They are a significant memento of the victory won by our Red Army there.

In August 1935, after successfully crossing high snow-capped mountains, the Red Army reached a vast marshland hundreds of square kilometres in extent in northern Szechuan. These marshes were uninhabited, generally covered with a thick pall of mist; there were cavities under the grass, and the water was toxic. No road could be found through the seemingly endless morass. If a man trod too heavily over the quagmires, he could sink in. The weather was fickle too, blazing sunshine alternating with sudden storms, the raging wind followed by pouring rain, snow or hail. At night it was freezingly cold. When they bivouacked they built shelters of sticks and grass which they covered with groundsheets. They gathered firewood or dry grass to light fires to heat water, and gathered round these for

Edible wild herbs from the marshland



The leather belt

warmth, trying to dry their wet clothes. But sometimes storms sprang up at night, water seeped through their shelters and the ground was swamped so that they had to remain on their feet till dawn.

But the greatest difficulty presented by the marshland was the lack of food. Before entering it, they prepared some barley flour and fried barley. After several days on the march, however, this was nearly exhausted and they had to eat wild herbs. There was a variety of these in the marshes, but many of them were poisonous. They picked and washed those which were edible and cooked them over the fire in enamel mugs, face-basins or tins. As the days went by, even wild herbs became more scarce; sometimes there were none to be found. Then some soldiers started boiling leather belts. Normally no one would dream of eating leather, but it had now become quite a delicacy. Overcoming cold and hunger in this way, they succeeded in crossing the marshland and reached the revolutionary base area in northern Shensi.

The leather belt displayed in the Historical Museum was originally part of a long gun-harness captured from the enemy. Most of this harness was boiled and eaten during the crossing of the marshland. The remainder was made into a leather belt.

CHRONICLE

Another Festival of New Stage Productions Held in Peking

Sponsored by the Ministry of Culture, another festival of new stage productions from different provinces and autonomous regions was held in Peking in early August. This was the sixth and last festival of its kind held since the North-China Theatrical Festival of last year. From their home provinces and regions, Ningsia, Chekiang, Kiangsi, Kweichow and the Tibet Autonomous Region, the participating troupes brought adaptations of such revolutionary Peking operas as *Azalea Mountain*, *Song of the Dragon River*, *The Red Lantern* and *Red Detachment of Women*, or separate scenes from them, in a number of local opera styles — *chinchiang*, *yuebchu*, Tibetan opera, *chienchu*, *kanchu* and *tsaicha* opera. In addition, this festival featured new Peking operas, plays and ballads produced in recent years.

The six theatrical festivals organized by the Ministry of Culture since last year are a general review of the achievements on the literary and art front in our country's 29 provinces, municipalities and autonomous regions. These festivals reflect the vigorous development of our proletarian revolution in this field under the guidance of Chairman Mao's proletarian line on literature and art as marked by the revolutionary model theatrical works. They are also a manifestation of the completely new spirit of the broad masses of our literary and art workers. These festivals will do much to spur on the revolution in literature and art and the creation of socialist literary and art works.

Cultural Activities in the Countryside

Various cultural activities are now developing in China's vast countryside, two of the most popular being story-telling and the recitation of poems.

Take the twelfth brigade of Tungchang Commune, Changshu County, Kiangsu Province for instance. In this production brigade great emphasis has been laid on story-telling. The story-tellers often make up stories based on the actual struggle in the villages and tell them to peasants in tea-houses before work or during resting time. Peasants in south China have the habit of drinking tea early in the morning in tea-houses. So tea-houses are the place where they congregate and where the story-tellers find most of their audiences. During the past year Chen Yung-hsing, a story-teller of the brigade, has told more than thirty stories on over 130 occasions.

Story-telling in this brigade has played a great part in popularizing new people, new deeds and new culture. The villagers think highly of the story-tellers and affectionately call them their light cavalry on the cultural front.

The popularity of poem recitals is exemplified by Shentaokou Production Brigade of Tientsun Commune, Shantung. Besides developing a wide range of other cultural activities, it holds rallies at which both cadres and commune members recite the poems they have written themselves.

These poems, realistic and rich in content, sing warm praises of the new things and new social customs that have emerged in the socialist construction in the countryside and fully express the unity and revolutionary spirit of the broad masses of the poor and lower-middle peasants who whole-heartedly love their collective.

In Shentaokou Brigade, the writing and recitation of poems have become an indispensable part of life. Since last winter the villagers there have written more than four hundred poems.

Ancient Pottery Warriors and Horses Unearthed in Shensi

Recently, China's archaeological workers excavated several hundred life-size pottery figures of warriors and horses from a huge pit

east of the tomb of Chin Shih Huang (259-210 B.C.), founder of the Chin Dynasty (221-207 B.C.), in Lintung County, Shensi Province. The figures provide valuable data for the study of warriors and weapons in the days of Chin Shih Huang and the sculptural art of his dynasty.

A survey showed the pit to be 210 metres from east to west, 60 metres from north to south and 4.6 to 6.5 metres in depth. The total area covers 12,600 square metres, of which some 1,000 square metres have been excavated. Among the finds are three formations of 216 warrior figures arranged in 72 rows. They stood on a plot of ground extending 60 metres from north to south against a magnificent background of 40 neat columns of warriors.

It is estimated that the pit contains a total of about 6,000 warrior figures, including those already recovered, deployed in a phalanx. The present discoveries show a well-organized, symmetrical array of warriors, chariots and horses with regular spaces in between. The helmeted and armoured warriors are 1.78 to 1.82 metres tall, and carry real bows and arrows or hold sharp swords, spears or crossbows. The war chariots are each drawn by four powerful, life-size horses.

Executed with simplicity and verve, these figures attain a high artistic level, testifying to the superb skill of Chin Dynasty craftsmen. In size, number and quality, these works of art are among the rarest archaeological finds in any part of the world.

A 2,100-year-old Tomb Unearthed in Hupeh

A valuable collection of relics and a fairly well-preserved male corpse buried 2,140 years ago were recently unearthed in a tomb dating from the early period of the Western Han Dynasty (206 B.C.-A.D. 24), on Phoenix Hill in Chiangling County, Hupeh.

With the corpse were more than 500 burial objects including carved wooden miniature chariots, boats, horses, cattle, figurines, utensils of lacquer, wood, bamboo, pottery and bronze, as well as clothes, headgear, shoes and stockings made of silk or linen. Most of the lacquerware was in excellent condition. Made by applying coats

of red and then black lacquer on the wooden base, these articles have beautiful designs and motifs in bright and attractive shades of red, brown and gold, laid on with flowing brushstrokes.

The record on the bamboo tablet that gives the time of burial identifies the occupant of the tomb as an official with the rank of *wu ta fu*, the ninth grade from the bottom on the scale of twenty ranks awarded for meritorious military service during the Chin and Han Dynasties. It was roughly equivalent to the position of a county magistrate.

The body is 165.7 centimetres long and weighs 52.5 kilogrammes. The man is believed to have died at the age of more than 50. At the time of discovery, the corpse was immersed in a dark red fluid in the innermost casket. The features are fairly well preserved, the skin remains resilient and the small and big joints of the limbs are still movable. Though earlier than the Han Dynasty female corpse found in 1972 in the Mawangtui No. 1 Tomb, an autopsy showed that the internal organs and outward form have remained in better condition than those of the female corpse.

LITTERATURE CHINOISE

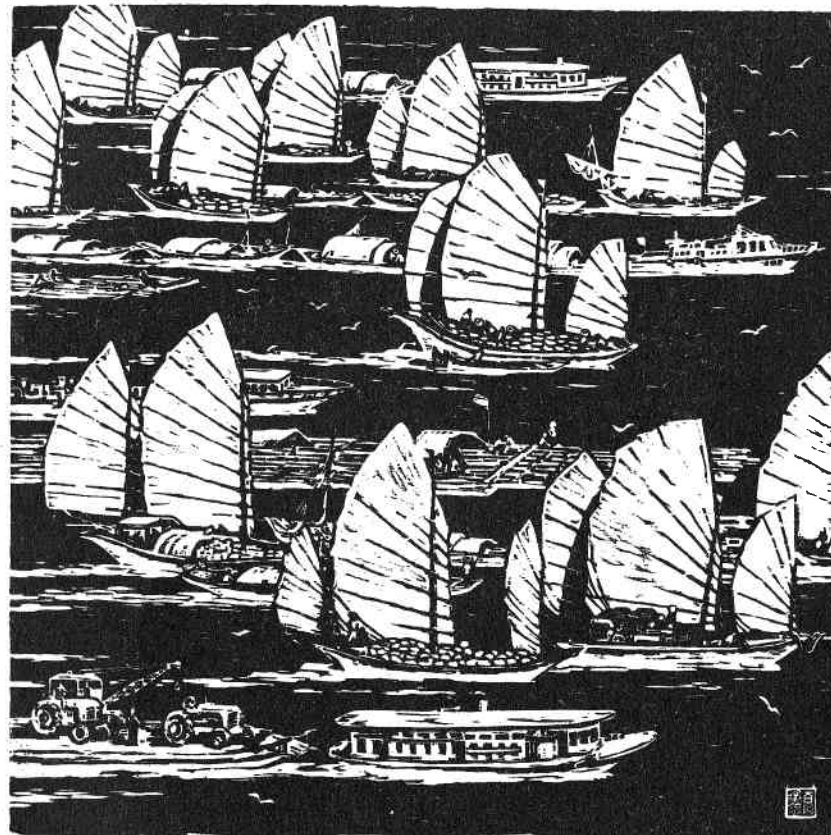
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