

CHINESE LITERATURE

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Zong Fuxian

When All Sounds Are Hushed*

CHARACTERS

- LIU XIUYING *a retired primary-school teacher aged fifty-two, wife of He Shifei*
- HE SHIFEI *head of the revolutionary committee of an import and export corporation of the Foreign Trade Bureau, aged sixty*
- HE WEI *son of He Shifei, a surgeon, aged thirty-four*
- HE YUN *daughter of He Shifei, working in the municipal Public Security Bureau, aged thirty*
- OUYANG PING *former boy friend of He Yun. He works as a waiter in a small snack-bar on the outskirts of the capital, thirty-one years old*

Zong Fuxian, aged 32, is a worker in the Shanghai Heat Treatment Plant. He likes literature and began writing in his spare time in 1974. He has written some short stories and one-act plays.

* This is part of a line from a poem by Lu Xun, written in 1934 during the Guomindang's reign of terror. The poem is as follows:

Thousands of dark, gaunt faces perishing in the thorns;
Yet who dares shake the earth with loud lamentations?
Brooding over this my thoughts roam the vast universe;
When all sounds are hushed I hear a peal of thunder!

MEI LIN *mother of Ouyang Ping and a veteran revolutionary cadre, who was sent back to her hometown as a punishment, aged fifty-eight*

Time and Place

The action takes place during one day in early summer of 1976.

All scenes are set in the sitting-room of He Shifei's home.

Scene I 10 a.m.

Scene II 4 p.m.

Scene III 5 p.m.

Scene IV Immediately following previous scene.

Scene I

A hot, stifling morning in the early summer of 1976. He Shifei's sitting-room is elegantly and quite luxuriously furnished, with a settee, a bookcase, a piano and other well-arranged furniture. To the left of the stage is a staircase leading upstairs, beside which is a corridor leading to He Yun's bedroom. A door at the right leads to He Wei's room. Another door leads to the kitchen. In the middle of the stage are French windows leading to the front garden.

It is the rainy season, and the sky is heavily overcast although it has not rained for some days. The sitting-room is unbearably hot.

As the curtain rises, the clock strikes 10 a.m. Liu Xiuying opens the French windows and the other windows. The annoying shrilling of the cicadas is heard. Kind and good-natured, Xiuying has always humoured her husband. But in the past two years she has become withdrawn, nervous, sometimes speaking nonsense or bursting into tears. When questioned she says nothing. Nobody knows what has caused the change, and so they assume she has become mentally ill. Forced to retire early, she has become even more reticent, silently running the household.

As the clock strikes, she becomes still.

Footsteps are heard on the staircase. He Shifei descends. Eight years older than his wife, he looks younger. He is of medium build and slightly overweight, with dark hair and a high colour. He is well-groomed and in a cheerful mood. He carries himself proudly, speaking slowly and confidently, aware of his social status.

He enters carrying a bottle of maotai and one of brandy.

SHIFEI: Xiuying, you're at it again! Our family's fine except for you. What's eating you? We've always shared everything. Why can't you tell me what's wrong?

(Xiuying is flustered.)

SHIFEI *(sighing deeply)*: Where are the children?

(Xiuying shakes her head.)

SHIFEI *(calling in the direction of the corridor)*: Yun!

(No answer.)

SHIFEI: Gone out? Her boy friend's coming and she doesn't give a fig! Just goes out. Ah, Wei!

(Wei enters from his bedroom, wearing his slippers, and holding a book and a palm fan.)

WEI: Yes, dad?

SHIFEI *(sarcastically)*: You might give your mother a hand, young sir. Don't sit back and let her do all the work.

XIUYING: He's not well. Let him rest.

SHIFEI: You shouldn't spoil him. Anyway, you know what's wrong with him? I tell you, it's his ideology. He doesn't take any interest in the revolution or join in the struggle. No, he just idles away his time. A lazy good-for-nothing!

WEI *(waving the book in his hand)*: What? Here I am, studying seriously *Gone with the Wind*, that masterpiece recommended

by our illustrious authority on literature and art.* This is a most important work!

SHIFEI (*angrily*): You...

(*Wei yawns lazily.*)

SHIFEI (*to Xiuying*): It's already past ten. He'll be here soon. Hurry and get everything ready. Where's the white tablecloth, Xiuying?

XIUYING: In the right-hand drawer of the chest of drawers.

SHIFEI (*glancing at Wei as he goes upstairs*): You should take a good look at yourself, young man! What sort of a revolutionary are you? (*Exit.*)

(*Wei sprawls on the settee, reading.*)

XIUYING (*going over to Wei*): Don't lie about like that, Wei. Your father will get angry if he sees you.

WEI: Let him. How could he have sired such an unworthy son?

XIUYING: What's he like, this new friend of your sister? Is he a good person?

WEI: Mother, you've asked me that twenty times already! I told you the newspapers declare he's the most wonderful man in the world. No faults.

XIUYING: Is he honest?

WEI: Of course! He's extremely honest. (*Sticking up his thumb*) After all, he's number one in the Shanghai militia. His job is to arrest and kill.

XIUYING: What?

WEI: Now, mum, no need to be frightened. Don't you know, only bad people fear him. Good ones don't. Better ask dad all about him. He found you this wonderful son-in-law!

(*Yun enters from the corridor, a pretty, sweet girl. Today she is preoccupied with the decisions she must make about her future.*)

* Referring to Jiang Qing, who claimed to be the "banner-bearer" in literature and art.

WEI: You were in your room, all the time. Why did you keep quiet when father called you?

(*Yun is silent.*)

WEI (*seeing her reddened eyes*): Why weep on such a happy day? If you lack the will to fight a forced marriage, what's the use of weeping a thousand tears?

YUN (*angrily*): Wei!

WEI (*getting angry too*): If I'd been you, I'd have waited for Ouyang Ping. I'd have searched high and low for him. I'd never marry that Tang!

XIUYING: Don't listen to him, Yun. Ignore him. (*She clutches hold of Yun and shakes her head.*)

YUN: What's the matter, mum? What have you been saying, Wei?

WEI: I was praising your new boy friend. Well, it's none of my business. Look, this book is called *Gone with the Wind*. (*He says in English.*) Now I'm going with the wind! (*Exit.*)

YUN: Pay no attention to him, mum.

XIUYING: That man can't be good!

YUN: I don't know him, but father praises him. Perhaps he's all right.

XIUYING: No! Your father... he... he doesn't judge people well.

YUN: Nonsense, mum! Of course he knows if a person is good or not!

XIUYING: You don't understand, Yun.

(*Shifei comes downstairs with the tablecloth and a framed photograph. Xiuying chokes back her words and with a sob runs to the kitchen.*)

SHIFEI: Where were you, Yun? (*Putting the frame on the cabinet, he admires it. Turning he notices Yun has been weeping. He pauses.*) Come over here, Yun.

(*Obediently Yun goes over to the settee with him.*)

SHIFEI: Tang Youcai's coming today. How do you feel about it?

YUN: I don't know.

SHIFEI: In the past we didn't bother about your getting married. Your brother's very selfish and not concerned about others. Your mother's sick. As for me, I should have. . . Anyway, time passed. Now you're almost thirty.

YUN: Oh leave it, dad.

SHIFEI (*gets up and puts the cloth on the table. Looking at his watch, he suddenly asks Yun*): Are you still in love with Ouyang Ping?

YUN: Dad!

(Shifei searches her face, but she turns away.)

SHIFEI: You and Ping grew up together and loved each other from childhood. I thought well of him, but he was too ruthless.

YUN (*standing up, her chest heaving*): Enough, dad!

SHIFEI: You should finish with him. He deserted you nine years ago for no good reason. You tried to trace him. You waited in vain for a word from him. Not one word!

(Yun is in anguish.)

SHIFEI: I'm not trying to rub salt into old wounds, Yun, but end it. You shouldn't be so involved in the past. Make up your mind. Tang Youcai comes from a politically good family. He understands class struggle and has a firm standpoint. Certain people in the Central Committee think very highly of him. He'll have a promising future.

YUN: But I heard. . .

SHIFEI: All rumours! He's head of the Shanghai militia. Of course some people hate him. All prominent people make enemies.

(Yun is silent.)

SHIFEI: You think your own father doesn't want you to be happy?

YUN: Of course not, dad.

SHIFEI: Good. Of course I'll never force you to marry him. Today you can just meet him. Then you can get to know each other. If you really don't like him, tell me. O.K.?

YUN (*after a while, rather unwillingly*): All right.

(Xiuying enters with a basket.)

YUN: I'll go, mum. (*Takes the basket from her.*)

SHIFEI: Let your mother go, Yun. No, tell you what, I'll go. I'll do some work. You get ready. (*Exit.*)

YUN: Where do you think Ouyang Ping and Aunt Mei are now, mum?

XIUYING: I've often dreamt of them. I think they're dead.

YUN (*aghost*): Mother!

(Sobbing again, Xiuying goes to the kitchen. After a while Yun walks over to the piano and automatically picks out a tune. The soft voice of Ping is heard from the past saying: "Come on, Yun, let's sing the 'Ode to the Red Plum'. We both love it. I'll sing and you play. O.K.?" This was the theme song of the revolutionary opera, "Sister Jiang", about a woman communist fighter who was imprisoned. Yun suddenly sits down and begins to play. Ping enters from the French windows. He is carrying two hold-alls. His eyes shine in his dark, lean face. He seems to have experienced much and has lost his youthful air. The familiar tune, stirring and poignant, makes him stop abruptly. Gazing at Yun's back, he listens with emotion. As she finishes the tune, Yun flops down emotionally exhausted on to the piano keys, making a discordant sound. Ping opens his mouth to speak and then bites his lips hard. Quietly and in confusion he turns to the door. . . Yun rises, closing the piano lid with a bang.)

YUN: It's over! Finished! (*Turning round she catches sight of Ping.*) You!

(*Everything stands still; time is suspended.*)

YUN: Ping?

PING: Yes. It's me.

(*Yun rushes forward. Ping stretches out his hand. Yun clasps it. They gaze at each other.*)

PING (*tearing his eyes away from her*): My mother is outside.

YUN: Aunt Mei?

(*Ping goes out, while Yun stands there, dazed, trying to control herself.*)

YUN: Wei! (*Rushes out.*)

(*Wei enters from his room, still holding his book and fan.*)

WEI (*looking at the piano*): Always that tune! So depressing!
(*Sits down on the settee, lost in thought.*)

(*Yun and Ping help Mei Lin in. Though only in her fifties, she looks old and frail, her hair white, her face lined. She walks with difficulty. Hearing their footsteps, Wei lies back on the settee, his book raised.*)

YUN: Wei, we have visitors.

(*Wei turns his back.*)

PING: Wei!

WEI (*slowly turning round*): Ping?

MEI LIN: Yes. It's him, and I'm here too.

WEI (*dubiously*): Aunt Mei?

MEI LIN: So you don't recognize me any more, you little monkey?

WEI: Oh, Aunt Mei!

(*They help her to the settee.*)

YUN (*going to the kitchen door and calling*): Mum! Come and see who's here. (*Goes into the kitchen.*)

MEI LIN: Go and see Aunt Liu, Ping.

(*Ping goes to the kitchen also.*)

WEI: Well, Aunt Mei, how are you?

MEI LIN: You're not much of a doctor! Can't you see I'm seriously ill?

(*Wei looks away painfully. A loud crash is heard coming from the kitchen.*)

WEI: Excuse me a moment, Aunt Mei. (*Goes to the kitchen.*)

(*Mei Lin surveys the room. After a while, exhausted, she leans back on the settee, pressing her hand to her liver. Shifei enters from the French windows and spots Mei Lin.*)

SHIFEI: Whom do you want?

(*Mei Lin stares at him saying nothing.*)

SHIFEI (*going to shout in her ear*): Old woman, I asked you, what do you want?

MEI LIN: I'm not deaf.

(*Shifei withdraws embarrassed. It slowly dawns on him that this is Mei Lin. He steps back.*)

MEI LIN: Just a dirty old beggar woman, messing up your clean room. . . .

SHIFEI: Sister Mei?

MEI LIN: Yes, Mei Lin.

SHIFEI: I didn't recognize you.

(*Xiuying enters unsteadily from the kitchen followed by Ping, Wei and Yun. She walks silently over to Mei Lin and embraces her with all her might.*)

MEI LIN: Xiuying!

YUN: Aunt Mei is very weak now, mum.

(Xiuying weeps.)

MEI LIN: It's ten years since we last saw each other. You should be happy!

XIUYING: I never thought I'd see you again.

WEI: You're always pessimistic!

YUN *(to Mei Lin)*: Mum was so excited when we told her that she dropped the frying-pan.

MEI LIN: We haven't met since I was transferred from Shanghai in 1965.

SHIFEI: Let's have some tea, Yun.

MEI LIN: How are you, Xiuying?

XIUYING: I'm all right, but you! You've suffered so much.

MEI LIN: I'm all right, too. Look!

YUN: Aunt Mei, all these years you. . . . *(She glances at Ping.)*

WEI: You just disappeared. . . .

MEI LIN: Just got buffeted by the wind and the rain, that's all. How about you, Shifei?

SHIFEI: Ah, yes. Now Sister Mei, you're. . . .

MEI LIN: I was sent down to the countryside. I swept the streets every day.

WEI: Wonderful! A great advance in socialism! A high cadre sweeps the streets in her hometown.

YUN: But why? What was the reason?

MEI LIN: They said I was a renegade.

YUN: A renegade?

WEI: What proof was there?

MEI LIN: They just told me that there was irrefutable evidence given by a witness.

PING: But she was never allowed to see it.

MEI LIN: You mean you never knew what happened to me?

SHIFEI: It's outrageous! They should follow our Party policy.

XIUYING: You've been wronged, Sister Mei, deeply wronged.

(She breaks down again weeping.)

WEI: I feel like writing a letter to those in the Party Central Committee, who are in charge of that debate between the Confucians and the Legalists, requesting that Qin Hui* be rehabilitated.

MEI LIN: Who?

WEI: Qin Hui. You know the one who condemned Yue Fei to death. He should be recognized as the most revolutionary and greatest legalist in history.

MEI LIN: Why?

WEI: Because he invented frame-ups! It helps certain people now to consolidate their power.

MEI LIN *(bursting out laughing)*: How interesting! But they're cleverer than Qin Hui. Nowadays they can fabricate truckloads of phony evidence!

SHIFEI: Now, Sister Mei, we must have faith in the masses and the Party. We must be able to weather. . . . But how silly! A veteran revolutionary like you knows more than I do about these things.

XIUYING: How they've made you suffer! *(Embracing Mei Lin, she weeps.)*

SHIFEI: Yun, take your mother upstairs to rest.

(Yun helps Xiuying upstairs.)

MEI LIN: What's wrong with her?

SHIFEI: She's mentally ill.

PING: Ill?

WEI: Who knows? Two years ago she suddenly became ill. When she recovered, she was like this. Sometimes her mind is clearer than ours; at other times she talks nonsense. For instance, she often said that she saw in her dreams you were dead.

MEI LIN: Perhaps she had some sort of shock.

SHIFEI: We can't understand it. What could have happened?

* An evil minister in the Southern Song Dynasty who condemned a loyal general, Yue Fei, to death on false charges.

Her life was always smooth. She won't tell me anything when I ask her. *(He sighs.)*

MEI LIN: Give me some biscuits please, Ping. *(Ping hands her the biscuits.)* Are you still in the same job, Shifei?

SHIFEI: Well. . . .

WEI: Why, Aunt Mei, father has risen to the top! He's head of the revolutionary committee of the import and export corporation in the Foreign Trade Bureau.

MEI LIN: What about Old Chen and Sun?

WEI: They're doing hard labour at cadre school.

(Mei Lin and Ping exchange looks silently.)

SHIFEI: Did you want to see them, Sister Mei?

MEI LIN: They're old friends. I haven't seen them for years. I just wondered how they were.

(Shifei looks at his watch. Yun comes downstairs.)

MEI LIN: Is your mother feeling better now, Yun?

YUN: I gave her a sedative.

MEI LIN: And where do you work?

YUN: At the municipal Public Security Bureau.

SHIFEI: Ever since the incident at Tien An Men, she's been kept very busy. What about that counter-revolutionary who's wanted throughout the country?

PING: Throughout the country? What was his crime?

(Ping and Yun exchange glances.)

YUN *(hesitantly)*: He's been distributing copies of those poems written in memory of Premier Zhou.

MEI LIN: So commemorating Premier Zhou is a crime? Really I don't understand.

SHIFEI: It isn't as simple as that, Yun. Those people honouring the premier are using it as a pretext to attack the Party Central Committee.

PING: There's no connection between the two. I hope someone will explain to me the connection.

(Ping and Yun exchange another brief glance.)

WEI: How can you be so earnest? How can one explain such things? You can only guess. See?

MEI LIN: How interesting! What about you, Wei? Are you still a surgeon?

WEI: Well, I'm not very busy. I just while away the hours.

MEI LIN: I can see that. You look like a scarecrow.

(Embarrassed, Wei tidies his clothes.)

SHIFEI: He's very lazy these last years. He complains when he's not ill, takes time off if he's slightly sick and fools around all day doing nothing. He only needs to have a bird in a cage and a dog to complete the picture of a parasite. He's not fit to live in our New China.

MEI LIN: It's that serious?

WEI: Almost.

MEI LIN: But you were devoted to your work! You and your professor did some research on liver transplants?

WEI: Ah, but that was due to the bad influence of the "revisionist line in medicine and public health" in the seventeen years after Liberation. Now it's wrong to attack such difficult medical problems. The leadership hopes we'll perform a more popular operation.

MEI LIN: Really? What?

WEI: It's called "lip-sealing". *(Gesticulating)* Bore two holes in the lips and thread a wire through these. Then twist. . . .

(Mei Lin and Ping burst out laughing. Even Yun laughs.)

SHIFEI: You're a man of over thirty. Stop playing the fool all the time!

MEI LIN: Interesting. I wanted to ask you to treat my illness, but I won't accept your lip-sealing operation. I like to speak out.

YUN: What's the matter with you, Aunt Mei?

MEI LIN: Recently I've had a lot of pain in my liver. I feel nausea all the time. I've no appetite.

SHIFEI: Wei can look after you. Wei, you'll be responsible for Aunt Mei's treatment.

MEI LIN: No need. We just dropped in because we were passing through Shanghai. We're leaving soon.

PING: I'm going to take mother to Beijing for treatment. But, mother, why not let Wei. . . ?

WEI: You can have an examination in my hospital first.

MEI LIN: I understand that in Shanghai class struggle is put first before everything. I've no letter of introduction. . . .

YUN: That doesn't matter, Aunt Mei.

WEI: You can stay here.

SHIFEI: We're a bit pushed for space, but you. . . .

PING: We don't want to give you any trouble.

WEI: You're not normal either! You must stay! (*Looks at his watch.*) Let's have lunch. We'll discuss it later.

YUN: Food's ready! Come and help serve, Wei! (*Goes to the kitchen.*)

WEI: Yes. When you came, dad prepared everything for you. (*Also goes to the kitchen.*)

PING (*looking around*): Are you expecting guests, Uncle Shifei?

SHIFEI: Yes. Yun's boy friend is coming here for lunch.

(Ping's hand jerks violently, splashing some water from his glass. Excruciating pain in the liver makes Mei Lin clutch her side. Wei brings two dishes to the table.)

WEI: Look, a bottle of *maotai* and one of brandy. Dad bought these specially to welcome you. (*He breaks open the seal.*)

PING: Mother!

(Hearing his urgent call, Yun rushes out of the kitchen.)

MEI LIN (*sweating*): It's nothing. Ping . . . fusses too much.

SHIFEI: You must go to hospital immediately.

WEI: Better rest in my room first.

(Ping helps Mei Lin to the other room, followed by Wei and Yun. Shifei remains on the stage and looks at his watch. He goes to the telephone, pauses and then replaces the re-

ceiver. He leaves from the French windows. After a while Ping and Yun enter.)

YUN: But Aunt Mei was always healthy. Why is she so weak now?

PING (*shakes his head sadly*): She was shut up for six years in a dark cell, three metres square with no window. Once she didn't see daylight for fourteen months. They beat her, hung her up by her hair and kicked her. They forced her to bend over and then suspended a heavy brick from her neck with a fine thread. . . . They prevented her from sleeping for thirteen consecutive nights and whipped her whenever she closed her eyes. They. . . .

YUN (*horrified*): Stop it! I can't bear any more. . . .

PING: Then mother had pain in the liver. Instead of treating it, they tortured her more.

(Silence.)

YUN: Ping, you must stay here. For the sake of Aunt Mei.

PING (*smiles bitterly*): Is it wise to have two strangers under your roof these days?

YUN: Strangers? Our families have been close friends for nearly twenty years. How can you say I don't know you or Aunt Mei?

PING: But the Ping I am today is not the Ping you once knew. (*Stares at Yun.*)

(Yun is silent. Then Wei enters.)

PING: How is she?

WEI: Perhaps it's. . . . There's a lot of ascitic fluid. She has at least cirrhosis of the liver. How could you be so negligent, Ping? Why didn't you take her to a doctor sooner?

PING: I . . . I haven't been living with her these last years. Where she was in the countryside, no clinic would treat her. She had the label "capitalist-roader" stamped on the first page of her medical card.

WEI: But you could have brought her here to see me.
PING: She had no money, and I got kicked out of the PLA because of her. I work as a waiter in a snack-bar on the outskirts of Beijing. I only earn 32 yuan a month.

(Silence.)

WEI: I'll get a car to take Aunt Mei to hospital. *(Enters the inner room.)*

(Yun is about to leave.)

PING: I'll go, Yun. I believe you're expecting your boy friend soon.

YUN: Who told you that?

PING: Why hide it from me? *(Leaves through the French windows.)*

(Shifei enters.)

SHIFEI: I rang up Tang Youcai, and he's already on his way. He'll be here pretty soon.

YUN *(her head bowed)*: I'm going with Aunt Mei to hospital.

SHIFEI: What about Tang?

YUN: I don't know.

SHIFEI: You're dreaming again.

YUN: Don't press me too hard, dad. I can't see Tang today.

(The telephone rings and Shifei answers.)

SHIFEI: Hello. . . . *(Hands Yun the receiver.)* It's for you. Goodness! Something's burning! *(Goes into the kitchen.)*

(Ping enters. Yun tries to stop him, but he ignores her and goes to his mother's room.)

YUN: Hello . . . yes. . . . Come to the bureau now? I can't come today. . . . I must? Oh, very well. *(Replaces the receiver and walks to the corridor.)*

(Mei Lin enters helped by Ping and Wei.)

MEI LIN: Where's my bag, Ping?

PING: I'll fetch it. *(Goes to inner room.)*

(Wei helps Mei Lin to the French windows and they leave. Yun enters wearing her policewoman's uniform. Ping enters with the bag.)

YUN: I'm sorry, Ping, but I can't go with you to the hospital.

PING *(smiles)*: That's all right. They wanted you to stay at home! *(Turns to go.)*

YUN *(stops him anxiously)*: No, it's not that. I have to go to work.

PING: You can go wherever you like!

YUN: I'm going to an urgent meeting. The counter-revolutionary wanted throughout the country is now in Shanghai.

PING: Really?

YUN: Don't leave after you come back from the hospital. I must talk to you. Promise?

(Wei is heard calling from outside: "Hurry up, Ping!" Ping dashes out.)

YUN *(running after him)*: Wait at home for me, Ping! *(Goes out in another direction.)*

(Shifei enters from the kitchen with a pot.)

SHIFEI: The rice is burnt. We can't eat it. Yun! Wei!

(Xiuying slowly descends the stairs.)

SHIFEI *(angrily)*: They've both gone!

(The noise of a horn hooting and a car braking are heard.)

SHIFEI *(flustered)*: Ah, Tang Youcai! *(Goes to the door to welcome him.)*

(Curtain)

Scene II

Four o'clock the same afternoon in Shifei's sitting-room. The atmosphere is close, with no breath of wind. It looks as if it might rain. The curtain rises as the clock strikes four. Xiuying stares out of the French windows for some time and then walks over to the table, on which lies a piece of paper. She looks at it for a moment and then snatches it up. Looking around nervously, she finally plucks up enough courage to tear it up. Shifei enters from the French windows.

SHIFEI: Xiuying. Are you all alone?

(Xiuying is silent.)

SHIFEI: But it's already four o'clock. Haven't they come back from the hospital yet?

XIUYING: Yes, they're back.

SHIFEI: Good. Has anyone from the militia been here?

XIUYING: Militia? No! *(She hurries over to the table, crushing the torn paper in her hand.)*

SHIFEI *(noticing her guilty look and her hand clenched behind her back)*: What have you got there in your hand?

XIUYING: Oh, nothing important.

SHIFEI: Then let me see.

XIUYING: No! . . .

SHIFEI *(snatching it and smoothing the pieces out, angrily)*: Are you crazy? How could you destroy this, you liar?

(Xiuying looks at Shifei in astonishment.)

SHIFEI *(changing his tone to a softer one)*: When you were a teacher you always told your pupils to be honest and not lie. How strange you yourself are now. . . .

(Xiuying reacts as if stabbed. A moment later she goes upstairs weeping. Ping and Wei enter from the bedroom.)

PING: Hello, uncle.

WEI *(seeing Xiuying's receding figure)*: Mum was all right a moment ago. What's happened?

PING: Can't you do something for her, Wei?

WEI: What can we do? We haven't diagnosed her illness.

SHIFEI: Ah, yes! How is Aunt Mei?

WEI: She's certainly got cirrhosis of the liver. As for the prognosis . . . well . . . we'll have to see the results of the tests. I'll go and get them in a minute.

SHIFEI: Why not hospitalize her?

WEI: There aren't any free beds at the moment. Perhaps in a day or two.

SHIFEI: I see. Now don't worry too much, Ping. She'll soon recover. I'm sure she's going to be all right. You're welcome to stay here with us.

PING: Thanks very much, uncle.

SHIFEI: Just one thing, a Comrade Zhang from the militia came and left a note asking you to register as temporary residents. You should take your identification papers and letters of introduction from your work units. Sorry, but Xiuying tore the note by mistake.

PING: I've got my identification papers, but mother. . . .

WEI: Don't forget the letters of introduction. Have you got them?

SHIFEI: Go when you have a moment to spare. It's not difficult. I'll see how your aunt is now. *(Goes upstairs.)*

PING *(silent for a moment)*: As for me, I don't give a damn! But mother! . . . She risked her life for years like so many old revolutionaries. They liberated our country. Now there isn't even a toehold for them in all of China!

WEI: That's what we mean by the "overall dictatorship" exercised by such people as Tang Youcai.

PING: All right, then we'll leave Shanghai today.

WEI: Impossible. Aunt Mei is in no condition to travel.

(Ping is silent.)

WEI: Stay. To hell with Tang!

PING: What is he?

WEI: A dirty bastard! The biggest shit in Shanghai! No ability, no sense of justice! He's a freak! Like a fat hippopotamus!

PING (*smiling*): That's rather unflattering!

WEI: I'm not joking! I tell you, once this ass hole was asked to meet some foreign friends. In an interview lasting just an hour and a half, he swore more than a hundred times. "You motherfuckers!" he kept repeating, about once every half a minute. After a while even the foreigners were curious. "What is he saying?" they asked. The interpreter was lost for words for a moment. Then he had to say that Tang was greeting them in his local dialect.

PING: Then how on earth could Uncle Shifei introduce such a man to Yun?

WEI: Tang is in a powerful position and he's got strong backing. He once rescued that "commander-in-chief of the Shanghai rebels".* Now he's his big brother! Tang's only a militia leader, but he's got his fingers in every pie, in industry, transport, finance, trade, public security, art and literature. He even poked his nose into our hospital and the city's waste disposal centre. No one dares question it.

PING: So these local despots Chairman Mao once mentioned have emerged again! But how could Uncle Shifei have changed so much?

WEI: Bah! Your "Uncle Shifei" . . . perhaps it isn't he who has changed for the worse. Perhaps it's me.

PING: Yes, you've changed! You used to be earnest and serious about your work.

WEI: Now I'm sick, incurably sick.

PING: How?

WEI: I've seen through everything. That's my sickness!

PING: Seen through everything.

WEI: The two-line struggle has turned everything upside-down. If you tell the truth, you've committed a crime; if you tell lies, you're rewarded. Repeat what the papers say and you're safe. Talk shit and get promoted. So I don't give

* Referring to Wang Hongwen, one of the "gang of four".

a damn! Eat well, sleep well and let the world go to hell!
(*Lies down on the settee.*)

PING: But you're not like that. In your doctor's white coat a little while ago you were a different person, serious and considerate!

WEI (*sitting up*): I am a doctor. I should be serious and considerate to my patients. And because of this I'm criticized. They say I work hard for personal gain. So I listen to them and play the fool!

PING (*laughs*): I know just the cure for you!

WEI: What? D.D.T.?

PING: O.K. I'll give you a dozen bottles.

WEI: You really want to finish me off?

PING: Well, life's so hard for you. You act like a clown, but you're actually eating your heart out. Do you really want to live to eat?

WEI (*putting in*): Come on! You sound as if you were back in your pilot days! Do you remember: "With wings of idealism at my sides, I'll fly freely in the skies!"

PING: I came down to earth a long time ago!

WEI: So what can I do? This is a living death. . . .

PING (*softly*): You're pathetic!

WEI (*stung*): O.K. I'm pathetic. But . . . I. . . .

PING: But you're not like that, Wei. You shouldn't be like that.

WEI: If I'm serious, I'll suffocate.

PING: Then why don't you shout out? Give vent to your sufferings, your hatred, your love!

WEI: What? I'm just one of the masses. . . .

PING: Yes, but there are eight hundred million in China.

WEI: They're too patient. . . .

PING: That's not true. Remember what Lu Xun said: "If you want to know what the Chinese people are like, dig below the surface."

WEI: What's below the surface? Earth? Rock?

PING: Yes, hard rock, solid earth, molten lava. Molten lava, Weil

(*Wei is silent.*)

PING: If only you'd been at Tien An Men Square to mourn Premier Zhou! The square was packed to overflowing, and there was a mountain of wreaths. The pine and cypress trees were decked with little white paper flowers. It was magnificent. The people called softly: "Where are you, Premier Zhou?" The base of the Martyrs' Memorial was pasted full of poems and posters showing the anger of the people. One said: "Shedding tears we come to mourn the premier. We will fight those treacherous villains to the end." Day and night hundreds of thousands, even millions, gathered there. . . . It was like an angry sea of people. If you could have been there even for a moment, you would have understood that the Chinese people have awakened. They have learnt from the Cultural Revolution and the good leadership of Chairman Mao. There is hope for us!

(*Silence.*)

WEI: And now? All sounds are hushed again.

PING: This unnatural, terrible silence foretells a more fearful storm brewing! (*Taking out from his pocket a pamphlet*) I made a collection of some of those poems. Have a look!

WEI: *Heads Raised We Unsheathe Our Swords?*

PING: A true record of the wrath of the Chinese people during the spring of 1976.

WEI (*reads avidly*): Well done! (*Continues reading.*)

(*Ping tiptoes out.*)

WEI (*unconsciously reading aloud*):

"Our forefathers shed their blood for our country;
Should we do less for the revolution?
Our hearts always loyal to our leaders;
We'll give our lives to crush those monsters!"

(*Deeply moved.*)

(*Shifei meanwhile descends the stairs.*)

SHIFEI: Hasn't your sister come home yet?

WEI: No. (*Concealing the pamphlet, he leaves.*)

(*Shifei paces up and down anxiously. Yun enters through the French windows.*)

YUN: Father?

SHIFEI: Ah, Yun. You're back at last. Did Tang Youcai go to see you in your office?

YUN: Yes. Dad, he's revolting!

SHIFEI: Revolting? What do you mean? Was he rude to you?

YUN: He was too fresh. Ugh! He's disgusting!

SHIFEI: Now don't jump to conclusions! Don't judge him by first impressions. You know why you got that important case? Because Tang put in a word for you.

YUN: What's he got to do with it?

SHIFEI: You don't know? Your leaders felt you weren't doing so well lately. That you were a bit shaky politically, wavering and being indifferent to certain issues.

YUN: I told them what was bothering me. I said I suspected some people were trying to smear Premier Zhou.

SHIFEI: That's only your impression.

YUN (*shaking her head slowly*): But Aunt Mei and Ping share my opinion.

SHIFEI: Do they? Didn't Tang tell you something about them?

YUN: Yes. He said I should break with such a renegade and throw them out.

SHIFEI: I see. Tang is coming for dinner tonight. It's rather inconvenient if they're still here.

YUN: Father, do you really believe Aunt Mei was a renegade? You worked under her in the underground Party before Liberation. You should know her very well.

SHIFEI: How can you expect me to know if she was a renegade or not? She saved my life when I was chucked out of work by my foreign bosses for having T.B. She sent me to hospital. I'll never forget that. You know that. Do you think I feel happy seeing her in such an awful situation? However, we're

all Party members and we mustn't put personal feelings above the interests of the Party. We must believe in the Party and the people. . . . (*Yun is about to go to Wei's room.*) As your father, I'll give you a piece of advice. Don't torture yourself for nothing! (*Yun halts.*) You're a policewoman. He's the son of a renegade. Your affair is hopeless!

(*Stunned, Yun pauses and then swiftly turns and rushes out to her own room. Mei Lin enters, followed by Ping and Wei.*)

WEI: Aunt Mei!

MEI LIN: It's all right. I won't go beyond the gate. I just want to move around a bit.

SHIFEI: Are you feeling better, Sister Mei?

MEI LIN: According to Wei, there's nothing wrong, yet he won't let me move about. Goodness knows what's in his mind.

(*All help Mei Lin to the settee.*)

MEI LIN: I'd like two biscuits, Ping.

WEI: But you just vomited. . . .

MEI LIN: There, you're at it again! How can I recover if I don't eat anything? (*Taking the biscuits and chewing them with some effort.*)

(*Shifei quickly brings her a glass of water. Wei gestures to Ping not to let Mei Lin go out. He is about to leave.*)

MEI LIN: I don't suppose your work has been easy these years, Shifei?

SHIFEI: I try my best, but. . . .

WEI (*unable to stop himself from joining in*): Now, dad, you're too modest! Father's been working flat out all these years. Have a look at this. (*Picking up the framed photograph from the table and handing it to Mei Lin*) Here's father being re-

ceived by Zhang Chunqiao.* A great honour! This photograph is of great historical significance.

(*Mei Lin puts on her spectacles to look at it.*)

WEI: The one in the middle is Zhang. The third from the left in the back row is father. See, how high he's holding his little red book!

MEI LIN: That was the time when I was locked up.

WEI: After that father hit the big time and was rapidly promoted. (*Goes out with a swaggering gait.*)

MEI LIN: Amazing! The Cultural Revolution has been a good chance for some people!

SHIFEI: Mmm, unprecedented. Swept away all the pests!

MEI LIN: Correct! The storm not only blew away the cobwebs from the revolutionaries' minds, but also washed the grease-paint from the faces of the clowns.

SHIFEI: A profound remark! You've been in the Party for forty years now. You're an old veteran.

MEI LIN: No. I was expelled. A renegade, remember?

(*Silence. The telephone rings. Shifei picks up the receiver.*)

SHIFEI: Hello. . . . Yes, it's me. . . . Register? . . . O.K., O.K. (*Puts down the receiver.*) The militia headquarters wants you to go and register, Sister Mei.

MEI LIN: Tell them I'm going to sleep in the streets. They can look for me there.

SHIFEI: Now, don't get upset. We'll attend to that later. Now I must go and see to Xiuying. (*Going upstairs.*)

MEI LIN: Switch on the fan please, Ping.

PING: It's not good for you, mother.

MEI LIN: Switch it on. It's stifling.

(*Ping switches it on but moves it further away from her.*)

* One of the "gang of four", formerly head of the Shanghai Revolutionary Committee.

MEI LIN (*talking to herself*): He can't have lowered himself so much. . . . Surely he must have improved since Liberation, even if he always did seem a bit mercenary in the old days.

. . .

PING: That's right! That's the root of the evil! The scum in society and in people's hearts has been stirred up. Now it's on the surface for all to see. Corruption has found an ideal opportunity.

MEI LIN: Well, someone's political line is making use of such scum, harming the people, the Party, the state! (*Winning at the sharp pain in her liver.*)

PING: Perhaps we shouldn't have come here.

MEI LIN: I wanted to find out about Uncle Chen and Aunt Sun. I've something important to tell them. Besides, I hoped that you and Yun might. . . .

PING: Mother!

MEI LIN: You did such a foolish thing nine years ago.

PING: Really, mother! Please drop it.

MEI LIN: Why?

PING: Because it's impossible.

MEI LIN: But why?

(*Ping looks away.*)

MEI LIN (*slowly*): You're hiding something from me.

PING: No, mother.

MEI LIN (*heavily*): Yes! Something important! (*Racked by another pain.*)

PING: Mother!

(*Xiuying descends the stairs and rushes to Mei Lin.*)

XIUYING: Sister Mei, you must leave here at once. Quickly! Take Ping with you!

MEI LIN: Xiuying! What's the matter?

XIUYING: Hurry! Go quickly!

PING: But Aunt Xiuying. . . .

XIUYING: Go away! Hurry!

(*Shifei comes downstairs.*)

SHIFEI: Having one of your turns again? What have I done to deserve this? (*Pulling Xiuying away from Mei Lin and taking her upstairs. Her sobbing can be heard.*)

MEI LIN: How strange? What's got into her?

PING: Now, mother, you'd better have a rest.

MEI LIN: Then you go and have a look at Aunt Xiuying. Find out what's going on. (*She leaves.*)

(*Yun enters. Yun and Ping stare at each other in silence for some time.*)

PING: I wonder if Aunt Xiuying is feeling better? (*Turns to go upstairs.*)

YUN (*unable to control herself*): Ping!

(*Ping stops.*)

YUN (*after a moment*): How is Aunt Mei?

PING: We'll have the diagnosis later. (*Trying to leave again.*)

YUN: Ping! (*Sadly*) Don't you even want to speak to me?

PING: Don't exaggerate!

YUN: Then come and sit down here. (*Ping is forced to sit down on the settee.*) You're thinner.

PING: But I'm well.

YUN: Yes, you look fit enough.

PING: A waiter needs to be fit, shouting from morning till night: "One bowl of noodles and beef! Two ounces of fried dumplings!"

YUN (*smiling*): Just the same old Ping! (*A short silence*) Ping, tell me what really happened nine years ago.

PING: Why dig up the past?

YUN: Please tell me, otherwise I'll never be at peace.

PING: I was slandered as the son of a reactionary. Suddenly I was an outcast. I didn't want you to be contaminated.

YUN: Did you think I was such a stupid girl?

PING (*shaking his head*): I was confused myself then. I always

thought the socialist revolution would be smooth, but after the last ten stormy years I understand now what it means.

YUN (*silent for a moment*): Perhaps you understand it better than I, but we're all Party members. . . .

PING (*cutting in*): No! I'm not a Party member any more.

YUN: What?

PING: Yes, they kicked me out. I've applied dozens of times since, but no good. The reason they give is that my mother is a renegade. My dear mother!

YUN: Ping, please don't get upset. They'll take you back later.

PING: "They"? Mother said long ago that the Party doesn't belong to "them". It belongs to Chairman Mao and the people! The Party will one day defeat "them" as it did Lin Biao and his anti-Party clique. "Their" turn is coming!

YUN (*after a pause*): Aunt Mei labelled as a renegade. How can that be?

PING (*scornfully*): They say my mother was arrested between March and May 1947, when she turned traitor.

YUN (*startled*): March to May 1947? But that's impossible! That was the time when she helped father get treatment and then took mother, Wei and me to your home. I was just born. We were together for eight months. We shared all the hard times. Our family can give evidence that she wasn't in prison then. That's simple, Ping. Just ask father to write out a statement as proof and. . . .

PING: But it isn't so simple. They know very well the charge is false. Her real "crime" is that she offended two high cadres.

YUN: Who?

PING: Mother worked under Premier Zhou during the Anti-Japanese War. They tried to get something out of mother against Premier Zhou. So she wrote to the Party Central Committee to expose the conspiracy.

YUN: What? Attacking Premier Zhou? (*Ping stares at Yun.*) I've suspected it for some time. So many so-called counter-revolutionaries have been arrested recently. Just for mourning Premier Zhou! We've been ordered from higher up to track

down their supporters. Recently the heads of all the security bureaus in the country held a meeting and issued a document about this. Fortunately Premier Hua stopped it from being distributed. But here, in Shanghai, it was secretly issued. What's going on?

PING: Think! Why was the slogan raised two years ago to criticize Lin Biao, Confucius and the Duke of Zhou? Why speak in the press about criticizing prime ministers? Why demand the criticism of "today's Confucius"? Why refute the four modernizations put forward by Premier Zhou the moment he died? Why persecute those who mourn the Premier? They want to wipe his great image from our hearts. How can we tolerate this? We must raise our head and "unsheath our swords"!

YUN: Unsheath our swords? That's the title of a collection of poems, *Heads Raised We Unsheath Our Swords*. A counter-revolutionary is distributing it. All the police forces throughout the country are on the alert. He was so bold, he even dared to send a copy to Zhang Chunqiao. It was like a bombshell. Zhang was enraged and demanded his quick arrest. This morning the pamphlet was handed out at the railway station, so it's assumed he's now in Shanghai. I'm in charge of the case.

(*Ping is shocked.*)

YUN: What's wrong, Ping?

PING: Nothing.

YUN: Are you feeling ill?

PING: Just a bit tired.

YUN (*tenderly*): When we were children you always told me what was wrong. You can tell me now.

(*The "Ode to the Red Plum" is heard.*)

PING: All right. I'll tell you everything. Do you remember how when we were children, we wished we had been born in Sister Jiang's time so that we could have laid down our



Wei shows Yun the poems

lives for the revolution. But now I understand that even in a period of socialist revolution, there are times of "freezing cold" and "a thousand miles of ice and frost" like the song says. We need to be like the red plum and fight against the bitter cold. Yun, I'm prepared to die for my country that our veteran revolutionaries fought to liberate. I'm prepared to sacrifice everything for Chairman Mao and Premier Zhou.

Yun (*emotionally*): You're still the old Ping I remember! Believe in me, Ping. If there are people trying to attack Chairman Mao and Premier Zhou, then I'll fight at your side!

PING: Yun! (*Grasps her hands passionately.*)

YUN (*leaning forward on Ping's shoulder*): Ping, how you made me suffer these last years!

(*Ping stands up abruptly and Yun almost falls. She looks at him, astonished.*)

PING (*forcing a smile*): Let me tell you something . . . I . . . I've a wife.

YUN: What?

PING: My heart, everything . . . is hers!

YUN: Stop!

PING (*pausing*): Yun . . . I . . . I'm sorry! (*Unable to control his feelings, he dashes off. Heartbroken, Yun collapses on the settee, her face in her hands.*)

(*Wei enters.*)

WEI: I've just been to the hospital for the report but it wasn't ready. . . . What's the matter? Why are you so upset? I was hoping you'd be giving me some engagement sweets.

YUN (*desolate*): Oh, Wei!

WEI: There, there! Cheer up! Look, here's a marvellous pamphlet compiled by Ping. It's called *Heads Raised We Unsheath Our Swords*.

YUN (*looking up aghast*): What? (*Faints.*)

(*Curtain*)

Scene III

At five o'clock that afternoon in He Shifei's sitting-room. The sky is overcast and threatening to rain. The curtain rises as the clock strikes five. Ping sits on the settee while Wei walks around him in agitation.

WEI: So what's up with you two? Come on, out with it!

(*Ping remains silent, his head buried in his hands.*)

WEI: When Yun recovered consciousness, she looked demented. And you sit there saying nothing!

(*Ping remains silent.*)

WEI: You'd better speak it out, my friend!
PING (*raising his head*): I've only this to say. I'm sorry I kept her waiting for . . . nothing.
WEI (*after a pause*): For nothing! That's all you have to say? Do you know how she got through these past nine years? She went mad trying to trace you. She longed for you, hoping you would return one day. Every day she'd play the *Ode to the Red Plum* on the piano. It broke my heart to hear her! . . . Now you get out! Get out at once!
PING: Wei!
WEI: You know the kind of person my father is. My mother's mentally sick. Only my sister is well. Don't you understand? I don't want her to become like mother.
PING: Oh, Wei!
WEI: I . . . you're right to criticize me for destroying my life. There's no hope for me. But my sister! She deserves a sweet, happy, peaceful life.
PING: No one more than I wished that for her.
WEI: You liar! You could give her that happiness if you were only willing.
PING: I would do anything for her, but I'm not the man. (*Biting his lips.*)
WEI: Why not?
PING: Don't ask me that, Wei. Don't press me!
WEI: Then get out of here!
PING: O.K. I'll go and perhaps I'll never come back. But, Wei, there's one last thing I'd like you to do for me.
WEI: What?
PING: Take care of mother for me.
WEI: Where are you going?
PING: You're a doctor and perhaps you can treat her.
WEI: No need to ask me. Aunt Mei is like my own mother. (*Glancing at his watch*) I'll go back to the hospital now to get the results. (*Walks to the French windows and then slowly turns around.*) You can wait here until I come back with the results.

(*The two men move towards each other slowly.*)
WEI (*clasping Ping's hand*): I hope you understand.
PING: It's mutual. (*Silently they tighten their grips. After a pause Wei turns and leaves.*)
(*Shifei enters.*)
SHIFEI (*angrily*): Ping, your behaviour's intolerable!
PING (*surprised*): What, Uncle Shifei?
SHIFEI (*shouting*): Are you going to hound Yun to death?
PING: Uncle Shifei!
SHIFEI: You! . . . Go and see for yourself the pain you've caused. I'm going to speak to your mother about you. (*Goes towards the door.*)
PING: Please, Uncle Shifei, blame me if you like, but don't disturb mother. She's just fallen asleep. She's so weak. . . .
SHIFEI: I've nothing to say to you! (*Forces his way to the door.*)
PING (*angrily*): I won't allow you to disturb her!
SHIFEI: This is *my* home!
(*Mei Lin suddenly enters.*)
PING (*rushing to support her*): Mother!
MEI LIN: Does Shifei want us to leave?
PING: You'd better have some more rest, mother.
MEI LIN: With your uncle yelling outside my door?
(*Helplessly Ping aids Mei Lin to sit down on the settee.*)
MEI LIN: I've enough strength to hear what he has to say, Ping.
SHIFEI: Are you having pains in your liver still?
MEI LIN: Pain or no pain, I still have to hear what you want to tell me. So speak.
SHIFEI: Well, Sister Mei, perhaps I shouldn't say this. . . .
MEI LIN: Then keep it to yourself.
SHIFEI: But I. . . .
MEI LIN: But you want to say what you shouldn't. Right?

SHIFEI: But how to say it?

MEI LIN: Honestly.

SHIFEI: Today I welcomed you from my heart into my home again.

MEI LIN: Good. Then, Ping, we'll stay here for some years.

SHIFEI: But I never thought Xiuying would have one of her queer turns and Yun would weep like that. Now my home is in chaos.

MEI LIN: So you want to throw us out?

SHIFEI: Against my will.

MEI LIN: I understand. We've upset your affairs. We've contaminated your fine home.

SHIFEI: No, no! Don't think that!

MEI LIN: But I do! I wanted to have a talk with you. I didn't realize you were in such a hurry.

SHIFEI: Now, don't get the wrong idea. I didn't mean. . . . What I mean is . . . I. . . .

MEI LIN: Go on! You don't even dare to speak out the words in your mouth.

(Yun enters hunched and lifeless.)

SHIFEI: It was Yun who insisted you leave.

YUN: Yes, that's true.

MEI LIN: Yun?

YUN: Father, I want to have a few words with Aunt Mei alone. I'll say what I have to myself.

SHIFEI: All right, but be careful. Aunt Mei is very weak. Don't upset her. Excuse me, Sister Mei. *(Goes upstairs.)*

MEI LIN: What's the matter, Yun. Why are you so pale?

(Yun casts an agonized glance at Ping, who quickly goes out.)

MEI LIN: What's happened, Yun?

YUN: Oh, Aunt Mei . . . please make Ping leave here at once.

MEI LIN: Is something wrong?

YUN: No, no! But just make him leave quickly.

MEI LIN *(thinking for a moment)*: Yes, we'll go. But first I

want to ask you a few personal questions. Did you love him once? *(Yun nods.)* And now?

YUN: Now? I don't know. . . . Perhaps I love him more than ever.

MEI LIN: And he loves you too! Ping's a stubborn man. In these years of struggle, he'd rather break than bend. He's suffered as much as I. Only two things really hurt him deeply. One was when he was thrown out of the Party. The other was . . . he always remembered you.

YUN: But he told me he had a wife!

MEI LIN: Rubbish!

YUN: He told me himself he'd devoted his heart and everything to. . . . *(She stops and then it dawns on her what Ping meant. She is so moved she starts to weep again.)* Oh, Aunt Mei!

MEI LIN: You're just like children, you two. In a bitter struggle like this one, if you know the one you love is firmly on your side, then you'll have even more determination and courage. Promise me you'll never part again, will you?

YUN: I promise . . . but you must make him leave Shanghai immediately.

MEI LIN: Leave . . . Shanghai? *(Winching in pain)* What's . . . happened, Yun?

YUN: You feel pain? Aunt Mei?

MEI LIN: Tell me quickly! Tell me the truth!

YUN: Aunt Mei! Aunt Mei!

(Ping rushes in.)

PING: Mother!

MEI LIN: Tell me . . . Ping. . . . *(Faints.)*

PING: Mother! Mother! *(To Yun)* What did you say to her?

YUN *(painfully)*: I. . . .

(Picking up Mei Lin in his arms, Ping goes to the bedroom. Yun tries to follow, but he stops her. Sadly she goes to sit on the settee. Xiuying slowly descends the stairs.)

XIUYING *(talking wildly to herself)*: Something will happen today! Something will happen!

YUN (*unbappily*): Mother, they want to arrest Ping! Arrest him!

(*Shifei appears like a shadow at the top of the stairs and quickly descends.*)

SHIFEI: Who wants to arrest Ping?

YUN: Father!

XIUYING (*turning pale*): Yun!

SHIFEI: Don't interrupt! Who wants to arrest him, Yun?

XIUYING: Yun! (*Stopping her daughter*) Don't talk nonsense! Stop!

YUN: What's the matter with you, mother?

SHIFEI: Nothing, she just gets worse. Leave her alone, Yun. Tell me quickly who wants to arrest Ping?

XIUYING (*pleading*): Yun! (*Bursts into tears.*)

YUN: Is there something you want to tell me, mother?

(*Xiuying wants to speak, but hesitates. She weeps even more.*)

YUN: Mother! (*Embracing her.*)

SHIFEI: Xiuying, you can speak later. Now, Yun. What's happened? Perhaps we can help. . . .

YUN: It's Ping. . . . (*Rises and takes two steps forward.*) He's. . . .

(*Xiuying is about to shout out something, when Shifei viciously grips her hand.*)

YUN: Ping is "the counter-revolutionary" wanted throughout the country! (*Her face in her hands she dashes offstage. Both Shifei and Xiuying are stunned.*)

SHIFEI: So it is he! (*Paces up and down and then heads for the French windows.*)

XIUYING (*jumping to bar his way*): Where are you going?

SHIFEI: Xiuying, what is the matter with you today? (*Pushes her aside.*)

XIUYING (*stubbornly*): Where are you going?

SHIFEI: To attend to some important business.

XIUYING (*very soberly*): What's so important?

SHIFEI: You. . . . (*Tries to push her away.*)

XIUYING (*not yielding*): You mustn't do that again!

SHIFEI: What?

XIUYING: That . . . that wicked thing . . . you did nine years ago!

SHIFEI: What do you mean? What did I do nine years ago? (*Suddenly panics.*) You knew! How did you know?

XIUYING: I know everything.

SHIFEI: Xiuying!

XIUYING: I beg you not to harm them more. Haven't you done enough? But for Sister Mei, you would have died long ago. I beg you. . . .

SHIFEI: Now I understand why all these years. . . . (*Slumps on to the settee.*)

XIUYING: I'm completely sane. I'm not mad! I only felt bad inside because I couldn't show my pain. . . . (*Weeps.*)

SHIFEI: Xiuying, I was forced to do it. How else could I win the confidence of Tang Youcai and that rebel group? They made me say Sister Mei was a renegade. I dared not refuse. Anyway, it wasn't my idea, but it came from some people higher up. If I had refused they would have ruined me.

XIUYING: What irreparable harm you've done to her family!

SHIFEI: She can't blame me. Political struggle isn't a picnic! Working for Tang and his gang is as nerve-racking as working in the exchange for that foreign company before Liberation. I've learned that unless I risk all my capital and shut my eyes, I may lose. . . . Otherwise. . . .

XIUYING: What? What do you mean?

SHIFEI (*realizing he has said too much*): I'm only joking. Nothing to worry about, Xiuying. You'll have a peaceful old age. You'll have everything you want.

XIUYING: I've never asked you for anything. I've always obeyed you and done what you wanted. But there is one favour I want you to do now for me. Save Ping! Please save him!

SHIFEI: What about me, if I save him? Tang will be coming

any minute. What if he hears that the wanted counter-revolutionary is hiding in my house? All that I struggled for these last years will go up in smoke.

XIUYING: So you don't care about what happens to Ping?

SHIFEI: He's asked for it! He should have seen that the struggle was already settled. The country is in other hands. Why should a waiter pose as a hero? He was bound to be arrested. But to let him go or have him arrested makes a lot of difference to me. *(Trying to leave.)*

XIUYING *(grabbing hold of him)*: No, you mustn't. . . .

(Shifei kicks her to the ground and dashes away. Xiuying lies clutching her chest.)

XIUYING: Yun! Yun!

(Yun enters.)

YUN: What happened, mother? *(She helps Xiuying to her feet.)*

Xiuying urges Ping to leave



XIUYING: Call Ping to come here! Quickly!

YUN: Mother!

XIUYING *(pushing Yun frantically)*: Call him! Call him!

YUN: Ping! Ping!

(Ping enters.)

PING: What's the matter, Aunt Xiuying? *(Helps Yun to take Xiuying to the settee.)*

XIUYING: Go away, Ping, quickly! Take your mother with you! There's a monster in our house . . . a monster. . . . *(Faints.)*

YUN: Mother! Mother! *(Helps Xiuying upstairs.)*

(Ping stands for a moment and then goes to his room. He returns with his hold-all. Yun comes downstairs.)

PING: I wanted to wait until Wei returned with the results. But now I must go. Tell him I'll try to see him in the hospital tomorrow. Tell him mother's in a coma.

YUN: What?

PING: I can hardly bear to leave her like this alone.

YUN: I'll take care of Aunt Mei. Don't worry. Now go at once.

PING: Under her pillow is a small package which she has guarded these past years. Please keep it safe for her.

YUN: Of course. Now go!

PING: Thank you.

YUN: We haven't said thanks to each other since we were children.

(Spotting the collection of poems in Yun's hand, Ping tries to take it.)

YUN: Were the poems edited by you? I've read them. They're wonderful. Listen:

"Is it a crime to weep at *Qingming*?

Blood-stained rain swirls in the wind.

The will of the Party and people cannot be crushed.

The thunderclap will break the silence!"



Yun reads the poems mourning Premier Zhou

PING: I only hope that these poems will help to convince our comrades that the people will not remain quiet for ever.

YUN: They won't! Why didn't you tell me earlier? You've misjudged me again, just like nine years ago! If necessary I'll fight too.

PING (*bis arms round Yun's shoulders, affectionately*): Yun!

YUN (*after a while*): Now you must go away at once!

(Ping turns towards the French windows. Shifei enters from outside.)

SHIFEI: Ping, why are you leaving? (*Pulling Ping away from the French windows.*)

PING: Mother is in a coma. She can't move. I'll go now.

SHIFEI: What? Sister Mei in a coma? Is it because . . . perhaps my foolish remarks . . . ? (*Seizing Ping's bag*) Neither of you will leave. This is your home. It's all my fault. Your stupid uncle is to blame.

PING (*wresting back his bag*): I've thought it over carefully and I can't stay here any longer.

YUN: Yes, father, let him leave.

(Ping is about to exit through the French windows.)

SHIFEI (*hastily barring the way*): In a moment it will pour, and your mother's so ill. I wouldn't have any peace of mind if I let you go like this. Yun, I mean it's not so . . . good to go now. You must stay until we work something out. (*Snatches the hold-all from Ping who has no choice but to stay. The telephone rings and Shifei goes to answer it.*) Hello, Zhang? . . . What? Apply for a temporary permit? So you don't trust me? . . . No, no, you misunderstand me. . . As for Tang, I'll inform him. O.K. Sorry to have given you so much trouble! (*Replaces the receiver.*) So everything's fine. Come and relax, Ping. Don't be angry with me!

(Xiuying appears on the staircase.)

XIUYING: Ping, why haven't you gone?

SHIFEI: What's to be done with you! (*Desperately pushing Xiuying upstairs.*)

XIUYING: I'm not mad! I'm not mad! (*She struggles until finally Shifei pushes her upstairs again.*)

(Ping gets up and paces up and down trying to make a decision. Finally he decides to leave and picks up his hold-all. Mei Lin is heard calling "Ping! Ping!" offstage. Ping goes to her. Yun remains perplexed, Shifei descends the stairs.)

SHIFEI: Ping hasn't left, has he?

YUN: No. What shall we do, father?

SHIFEI: What do you suggest?

YUN: Send him to grandmother's this evening.

SHIFEI: What's the good of that?

YUN: He'll be safer there in the countryside.

SHIFEI (*mocking*): You've misunderstood my meaning. I mean what good will that do us? We're both Party members, remember.

YUN: Aunt Mei and Ping are the best kind of Party members!

SHIFEI: Nonsense! Mei Lin was expelled from the Party nine

years ago, while Ping was only on probation for a while and never joined the Party.

YUN: But they are the Party's most loyal fighters.

SHIFEI: Then how come such a loyal fighter is wanted throughout the country with a warrant for his arrest signed by the Party?

YUN: It's not on the orders of the Party. It's "them". The Party doesn't belong to "them". The Party will defeat "them"! How well Ping puts it! (*She presses the poems to her heart.*)

(*Shifei takes the pamphlet from Yun and reads it eagerly.*)

YUN (*becoming suspicious*): What are you up to, father? (*Shifei goes on reading, ignoring her.*) Answer me, father!

SHIFEI: Then, here's your answer! We must inform against this active counter-revolutionary Ouyang Ping!

YUN: What! (*Snatches away the poems.*)

SHIFEI: I know you are attached to him, but revolution is more important. For the sake of the revolution, we must disregard personal ties and hand him over!

YUN (*waving the poems*): He did this in mourning for Premier Zhou. . . .

SHIFEI: That's forbidden!

YUN: What do you mean?

SHIFEI: Weren't you told by Tang Youcai? Zhou Enlai's name has become a rallying-call for certain people who wish to attack some leading members of the Party Central Committee. So we must. . . . (*He makes a vicious chopping motion with his hand.*)

YUN: So that's it! Now I understand. But it's too late!

SHIFEI: Better late than never, Yun. Don't be so weak. Ping is an active counter-revolutionary. We must hate him, hate him from the bottom of our hearts!

YUN (*turning on her father and mocking him*): From the bottom of our hearts! (*Approaches Shifei slowly.*)

SHIFEI (*nervously*): What's the matter? Have you gone mad?

YUN: Mother's mad, Wei's mad and now I'm mad too!

SHIFEI: Yun!

YUN: From childhood, I thought of you as an old revolutionary and old cadre. I was pleased and proud to have such a father. All these years and especially since Ping went away, you were the one person I trusted. How I trusted and respected you! I always came to you for help or shared my happiness with you. During these past two years, I sometimes doubted you. Yet you always told me secretly that you loved Premier Zhou too, that your situation was very difficult. You said it made you very sad. Was that just posing?

(*Wei enters from the French windows.*)

WEI: What a downpour! Why are there so many people lurking around our house?

(*Yun looks out of the window and is shocked. Wei goes out along the corridor.*)

YUN: You did this?

SHIFEI (*coldly*): Yes, I rang them. Tang Youcai was going to arrest Ping himself, but then for your sake, he decided to give you the chance to do this great service. (*Glancing at his watch*) It's six now. He's ordered you to arrest Ping before seven. Otherwise. . . .

YUN: How despicable!

(*The sound of the clock striking six o'clock.*)

(*Curtain*)

Scene IV

Immediately after the previous scene. In Shifei's sitting-room. Outside it is pouring; the wind can be heard howling. As the curtain rises, Yun is pacing up and down nervously.

YUN: What can I do? What can I do? I'm to blame. It's all my fault.

(Ping enters from the inner room.)

PING: Yun!

(Yun shivers.)

PING: Has Wei come back yet? (Noticing the tears pouring down Yun's cheeks.) What's the matter? (Helping her to sit down in the settee) These days you cry so easily. Before you were always such a happy-go-lucky girl. (Yun weeps.) I hate crying. Until now I only remember crying twice. Once was when Premier Zhou died. Another time was when I met my mother after she had been released from six years' detention.

(Wiping the raindrops from his hair, Wei enters. Seeing Ping and Yun sitting together, he is about to go away, but pauses and listens to Ping's words.)

PING: Mother was very thin. I could hardly recognize her. The first thing she said to me was: "Have you joined the Party yet?" Since I daren't tell her the truth, I was forced to lie. I said some unscrupulous people in our organization had grabbed power, and that I didn't want to join their kind of Party. I was shocked when she rounded on me furiously.

YUN: I never knew Aunt Mei had a hot temper!

PING: Well, you should have seen her that day! She said she was worried about us young people. During the Cultural Revolution, she said we saw that there were serious problems and bad elements within the Party; that this had frightened us and made us lose confidence. She said if everything was so pure, there would be no need for us to join the Party. (The music of "The Internationale" is heard offstage.) When she joined the revolution in 1936, she had pledged to make revolution to the end. She had never worried about her life. Do we have this same spirit? We should sacrifice our lives to defend the Party, to defend Chairman Mao and Premier Zhou!

YUN: Ping!

PING: Now don't weep any more. I'll come back tomorrow to see you. I want to come back. Agreed? (About to leave.)

YUN (bursting into tears): Ping, they've surrounded our house. They want to arrest you.

(Silence. Wei comes back.)

WEI: Why? For what?

YUN: Because he distributed the pamphlet, *Heads Raised We Unsheatb Our Swords!*

PING (opening the French windows for a moment, looks out and then bursts out laughing): Imagine! Just a young waiter, serving fried dumplings in a snack-bar. I only wrote out some small poems and told the truth, yet it seems to have caused that important man, Zhang Chunqiao, so much trouble. Now he's ordered my arrest and sent his thugs searching for me throughout the country. If it wasn't just me and the other hundred or even a thousand who did the same, but all the Chinese people who spoke out, I wonder what he'd do then?

WEI: Well, that day is coming soon! (Grasping Ping's hands tightly.)

PING: Wei, what about mother's illness?

WEI: Well, Aunt Mei is. . . .

YUN: What's the matter with her?

PING: Look, don't beat about the bush. I haven't much time.

WEI: Oh, it's nothing to worry about. She's got cirrhosis of the liver, but it's not serious.

PING: You know, Wei, you've not yet learnt to lie.

YUN: What is wrong with her?

WEI (upset): What's wrong? (Going over to Ping and speaking sadly) Aunt Mei has. . . . She has cancer of the liver. It's in the last stage.

YUN: What?

(Everyone is shocked and silent.)

PING: She has fought many battles all her life. Now she has

been stabbed in the back. (*Silence*) Wei, Yun, say nothing to mother about this!

YUN: Of course, don't worry!

WEI: I'll tell her everything is fine.

PING: I don't mean that. I mean don't tell her they are going to arrest me. You can tell her . . . Tell her any lie you like. Please help me to look after and comfort her. Help me to see her off. (*Yun bursts into tears again, while Wei averts his face.*) I know it's difficult, but these bad times can't last for ever.

WEI: It's all right. I'll look after Aunt Mei.

(*The door is flung open and Mei Lin appears.*)

YUN: And I'll look after her too.

MEI LIN: Why are you fighting over an old woman like me?

PING: Now, mother, why are you walking around by yourself?
(*Hurries to take her arm.*)

MEI LIN: As long as I can keep moving, I'll keep alive! If I had listened to you and stayed in my bed all day, I'd have been dead by now.

(*Ping helps her to the settee. All try to avoid looking at her.*)

MEI LIN: Well, what's the matter with all of you?

PING: Nothing, mother.

(*Yun is about to cry again, when Ping frowns at her, but Mei Lin sees this.*)

MEI LIN: Don't play games behind my back! Well, no need to say anything. I think I can guess. Wei, it's my illness, isn't it? You're afraid I'm finished.

WEI: No, no! I just got back from the hospital. All the tests were normal.

MEI LIN: So you went back to the hospital?

(*Wei is in a dilemma. Mei Lin looks at all three in turn.*)

MEI LIN: Ping, please bring me my bag.

(*Ping goes into the other room.*)

MEI LIN (*reciting*):

Beacons have blazed in the south ten long years;
This head of mine may hang from the city gate.
But you who live on must make redoubled efforts;
News of your victories will be our paper coins.

Do you know who wrote that poem?

YUN: It was written by Chen Yi.

(*Ping enters with her bag.*)

MEI LIN (*taking the bag*): I'm afraid . . . when I lose consciousness, I'll never come to again. Ping, there's something I must tell you. (*Opens the bag and takes out a folded handkerchief. She unfolds it slowly.*) Here are my Party membership fees for the last nine years, which I want to give to the Party.

PING: Mother, where did you get all this money?

MEI LIN: I saved it from the money I put aside for my food. I always handed in my membership fees this way, even before Liberation.

PING: So that's why you're in poor health!

MEI LIN: Party members should make some sacrifice to pay their membership fees.

YUN (*going over to hold her*): Oh, Aunt Mei!

MEI LIN: Why are you all so sad? I hate to see it. Yun, you shouldn't be like this. In the past few days, I've been looking back over my life. I joined the revolution when I was just sixteen and at eighteen I became a Party member. Well, that's more than forty years ago. Looking back, I don't regret a thing. Just remember, my dear, to follow Chairman Mao and the Party. Face the future with confidence. Never waver.

WEI: There's a lesson for all of us in what you say.

MEI LIN: Ping, I've written something important to send to the

Party Central Committee. If I . . . You must do all you can to get it to Beijing.

(Ping is about to take it, when he withdraws his hands and steps backwards.)

YUN: Give it to me, Aunt Mei. I'll make sure it gets there.

MEI LIN *(looks at the bag questioningly)*: Ping . . .

(The clock strikes. Shifei comes downstairs.)

SHIFEI: Half-past six already!

MEI LIN: Don't worry! You don't have to remind us!

SHIFEI: Quite right! There's no need for me to hurry you. It's Ping who is wanted by someone.

MEI LIN: Who?

SHIFEI: Why, Yun, it's somebody you know: Tang Youchai! You see. . . .

(Yun pushes Shifei's hands away.)

MEI LIN: What's the matter?

PING: Nothing.

SHIFEI: What do you mean nothing? Mei Lin, your son is a counter-revolutionary! They've come to arrest him.

(Mei Lin is startled.)

PING *(anxiously takes hold of Mei Lin)*: Mother!

MEI LIN: Tell me what you've done.

PING: I compiled a collection of poems called *Heads Raised We Unsheathe Our Swords*, written to mourn Premier Zhou.

MEI LIN: Why didn't you tell me?

PING: I was afraid you'd worry about me.

MEI LIN: Do you really believe your own mother, an old Communist Party member, is so weak? Look, my head is raised and my sword is unsheathed too. The Party will need my statement when the day of reckoning comes.

PING: My dearest mother!

MEI LIN: My own dear son! *(She caresses his head.)*

PING: Mother!

MEI LIN: Don't worry about me. You should go now. *(Summoning up her last reserves of energy)* Fight them to the end, either in prison or in court. *(Exhausted she falls back into the settee, struggling for breath.)*

YUN and WEI: Aunt Mei!

PING: Very well, mother. I'm going now. I'll come back to see you on the day of victory.

SHIFEI: No. Wait a moment. Mei Lin must leave with him.

YUN: What are you saying? It's pouring outside and she's seriously ill.

SHIFEI: What? Humanitarian feelings? I can't keep a renegade, the mother of a counter-revolutionary in my house. This is my proletarian stand.

WEI *(furious)*: Humanitarian feelings! Are you a human being? Don't you know Aunt Mei has only got a few days to. . . . *(Realizing he has said too much.)*

PING *(quickly taking his mother's arm)*: Mother!

(Silence. Then a loud crash is heard from upstairs, but no one pays any attention to it.)

YUN: Oh Aunt Mei!

Xiuying denounces Shifei



MEI LIN: Ping, please give me some biscuits to eat.

PING: Mother!

MEI LIN: Please, Wei, let me have them. I challenge that doctor who has sentenced me to death. Perhaps one day I'll join in the fighting again.

YUN and WEI: Aunt Mei!

(Xiuying comes downstairs slowly, her face and hands covered in blood.)

PING: Aunt Xiuying! *(Goes over to take her arm.)*

YUN: Mother! What happened?

XIUYING: Your father locked me in my room, so I jumped out of the window. . . .

YUN: What?

XIUYING *(grasping Mei Lin's hand, her face devoid of expression)*: Sister Mei, he is the one who informed them about Ping. He's also the one who told them nine years ago that you were a renegade.

ALL *(shocked)*: What?

MEI LIN: So that's it!

(Tense silence. Shifei is afraid.)

XIUYING: One evening, two years ago, when I was tidying his papers, I suddenly saw a document written by him. I knew then that nine years ago he had. . . . I wanted to tell you this, but I was afraid it would cause Wei and Yun trouble, so I had to keep silent. . . . I was a teacher. I told my pupils to be honest and upright. But I . . . I never thought *(softly)* that he would be such a corrupt person!

(A horrified silence.)

WEI *(to Shifei)*: So you're the one who caused all this misery for Aunt Mei, for Ping, for my mother and younger sister all these nine years. *(In fury he picks up a big vase, and walks slowly towards Shifei. Shifei is frightened. Wei slowly puts down the vase.)*

WEI: You're lucky. Yesterday I'd have given my useless life to settle accounts with you. But now I think I should live a more useful life.

SHIFEI *(scared)*: I had no way out. The situation was complex. . . .

PING: You are the real renegade! You betrayed your soul and comrades in the socialist revolution!

SHIFEI *(running upstairs)*: You can shout and curse me. Go on, curse me! You've only five minutes left. *(Goes upstairs.)*

(Silence.)

PING: I'll go now, mother.

MEI LIN *(embracing Ping silently and then releasing him)*: Yes . . . you should go now.

PING: Yun, did they ask you to go with me?

YUN: Yes, I'll go with you to prison.

PING: But don't forget what mother asked you to do.

YUN *(going over to him and holding him tightly. Weeping)*: Oh, Ping!

PING: Yun, you mustn't be like this. Revolution is made with blood, not tears. In Tien An Men Square, I saw with my own eyes how they beat the people with clubs. This time . . . in prison . . . perhaps I won't. . . . Yun, I still have that photograph taken when we were children. I give it to you now as a keep-sake.

YUN: Ping, I'll wait for you. All my life if necessary!

MEI LIN: Yun, you must be realistic. His so-called crime is very serious.

YUN *(going over to Mei Lin, she kneels down and leans against her)*: Mother, after I've said goodbye to Ping, I'll come back and look after you. I'll never leave you again. Mother, my dearest mother.

MEI LIN: Yun!

XIUYING *(weeping)*: Dear Mei, take Yun as your daughter!

(Wiping away his tears, Wei goes in quickly.)



Yun and Mei Lin

MEI LIN: Ah, Yun, my dear child.

(Wei re-enters carrying a suit-case.)

PING: Where are you going, Wei?

WEI: I can't stay any longer in such a home. I'll go with Aunt Mei and see my old teacher. Together we'll try to fight death and "them" too!

PING *(excited)*: Wei!

XIUYING: I'm going too!

YUN: Good! Let's all go together, mother.

(Shifei appears at the top of the stairs, but he is afraid to descend.)

WEI: Fine! Now hurry up and pack.

XIUYING: No need. Thirty-five years ago I came here empty-handed, so now I'll leave as I came.

WEI: Ping, did you bring any more copies of those poems with you?

PING: Yes.

WEI: Then give me some. We'll help to distribute them.

(Ping takes out some copies and gives them to Yun and Wei.)

PING: I'll keep one copy to give to the security police.

(Shifei comes down the stairs stealthily.)

WEI *(eyeing Shifei)*: No need to act like a thief. Can you see everything clearly? I'll keep four copies. Yun has three. Tomorrow you can sell this information for a good price!

(Yun goes out quickly.)

MEI LIN: I'll tell you the key to success. Inform against everyone in this room! But there are only five of us. Better go out into the streets.

PING: Yes, you can find eight hundred million Chinese people there!

(Yun re-enters wearing her security uniform.)

YUN: There is only one problem. The Chinese people will not remain silent for ever.

(The clock chimes seven. They become tense at its sound. Yun holds Ping tightly. Then Ping goes over to Mei Lin.)

PING (*sadly*): My dear mother! Goodbye, dear mother!

(Yun, Wei and Xiuying start to weep.)

MEI LIN: We revolutionaries had this tradition. Whenever we saw some one off to the wars, we would celebrate with drums and gongs. Everyone must be happy! So today we will part smiling!

(The others regain their self-control.)

MEI LIN (*rising with difficulty*): Right! Then let's go!

(As she takes a step forward, Mei Lin passes her bag to Yun, who takes it solemnly. The five all go to the door.)

SHIFEI (*rushing down the stairs, shouting in a hoarse voice*): Wait a moment! *(All turn to look at him with contempt.)* Are you all going? *(No one answers.)* Wei, Xiuying, it was for you, for our family. *(Everyone remains silent.)* Mei . . . Sister Mei . . . stay here. I'll talk to Tang. . . .

MEI LIN (*taking a few steps towards him, then turning on her heel*): Come on! Let's go!

(Mei Lin opens the French windows. Outside the wind is howling. Wei and Xiuying take Mei Lin's arms and help her out. Shifei tries to pull Yun back.)

SHIFEI: Yun, I'm old now. You can't leave me alone. . . . *(Yun pushes him away from her.)* I've loved you since you were a child. I did this for you.

(Yun pushes him away from her with all her force and then together with Ping walks into the storm, her head held high.)

SHIFEI: Are you all leaving? . . .

(Suddenly there is a big flash of lightning. Shifei, frightened, springs up. . . . Then there is a loud crash of thunder. . . .)

(The End)

Zong Fuxian

My Wish

On the second day of the *Qingming* Festival, I came across a young man from Beijing who was passing through Shanghai. He told me how the people in Beijing were mourning for Premier Zhou in Tien An Men Square, describing the mountain of wreaths and sea of weeping people openly wearing black arm-bands. Although I had not known about this, I was not surprised and listening to him, tears filled my eyes.

Standing in the lobby of a hotel near the station, ignoring the bustling crowds, he openly denounced by name the "gang of four" and the newspaper they controlled, *Wenbui Bao*. He said: "Some people say I'm risking my neck. Of course I'll do that if Premier Zhou is attacked. I can't help it. I'll defend Premier Zhou with my life. And I'm sure blood will be shed." None of us knew that blood had already been shed in Tien An Men owing to the "gang of four's" suppression of the people.

On hearing that I wanted to write, he said to me as we parted: "Now isn't the time to write. But keep your eyes open and watch carefully. All sorts of people will show their true colours at such a time. Put them down on paper. They'll come in useful someday."

The night after he left Shanghai, he was condemned by the "gang of four" as were the thousands who had mourned Premier

Zhou in Tien An Men Square. They were denounced as "counter-revolutionary hoodlums".

I never heard from him again.

Under the fascism of the "gang of four" and in the particular situation in Shanghai, the base from which the gang hoped to usurp power, I often thought of that young man, who had left without giving his address. His simple, honest words brought to mind Lu Xun's famous sentences: "Silence, silence! Unless we speak out, we shall perish in this silence!"

In October the gang was crushed.

Marching with the people, rejoicing at the gang's overthrow, I knew profoundly that oppressed people would not remain silent for ever. Eventually the people always win. It was this that made me decide to write *When All Sounds Are Hushed*.

I wanted to write about the people around me. Some I had met; some I had heard of. I wanted to write about the determination, feelings and thoughts of my friends, relations, school-mates and comrades during the period when the "gang of four" were powerful.

The Cultural Revolution affected everyone. It tested the revolutionaries and revealed political swindlers. Although some veteran cadres were persecuted and even thrown out of the Party by the "gang of four", yet they never lost faith in the Party. Some weak people betrayed their comrades to keep their jobs and save their own skins. Some suffered deeply and voiced their indignation through cynicism. Some became stronger through the struggles. Everyone was severely tested... Married couples, childhood sweethearts, one's beliefs, morals, ideology and feelings, all underwent a harsh trial. Some degenerated; others matured.

I longed to be able to express this, although I was no professional writer.

After the downfall of the "gang of four", I was able to read again the rich literary heritage left by our predecessors. I am a young worker and I tried to study and emulate Cao Yu's style; to express the inner self and its contradictions through the characters, time and place, and to reflect the deep contradictions in the society through those in a family.

Thus *When All Sounds Are Hushed* was written as an exercise.

In all the various stages, from script to rehearsals to performances, leaders in various organizations, teachers and comrades have all shown their concern, support and encouragement for this play. So in fact the play has been a collective effort.

There is still room for improvement. Some of the characters are not drawn sharply enough. Sometimes they appear too general or cliché. The play needs more variety. Tensions are not well presented. Some characters exit too frequently and for no good reason. The final scene seems too loose and chaotic... This can all be revised with the help of my teachers and comrades from all walks of life. I hope to improve this play so that it will become a more effective weapon against the "gang of four". This is my wish.

Cao Yu

A Thunderclap

One evening, Comrade Zong Fuxian, the writer of the play *When All Sounds Are Hushed*, visited me after his arrival in Beijing from Shanghai. It was very interesting to meet this young dramatist. I was nearly seventy; he was only thirty-one. Though young, he had produced a courageous and fine play. This greatly encouraged me, as in him I saw the flourishing future of our new socialist culture, and I imagined before me the young playwrights of the future reading their magnificent plays, aloud, which would be like claps of thunder arousing all the Chinese people.

Before Zong's visit, I had read his play and I felt like congratulating him both for his bravery and for being my teacher. I say my teacher, because in his fine play, he has spoken out the truth and what the Chinese people wanted to say. He has entered a "forbidden zone" and compared to him, we the older generation and full-time writers have lagged behind.

The Tien An Men Incident was a great revolutionary mass movement. Millions of Beijing people went to Tien An Men Square during the *Qingming* Festival in April 1976 to mourn Premier Zhou and denounce the "gang of four".

Every day my children went there, returning home late at night, showing no signs of fatigue. I would wait for their return, when

they would tell me what they had seen and read some of the poems they had copied. During those days, exciting and inspired, we often talked over the Tien An Men events all night long.

Nevertheless we were worried, and after the article denouncing the Tien An Men Incident as a counter-revolutionary action was published on 7th April 1976, my home became silent. The Tien An Men Square became silent as history was distorted and people were indignant. All this was due to the fascist acts of the "gang of four". In the hearts of the people, however, burned the flames kindled by the Tien An Men mass movement. With such good people, the future for China was hopeful.

Chairman Hua overthrew the "gang of four" and realized the wishes of the people expressed during the Tien An Men Incident. Many persecuted by the "gang of four" have now been rehabilitated. Today the revolutionary Tien An Men mass movement can be shown on stage. This wonderful, exciting event is warmly

Cao Yu and Zong Fuxian



welcomed by the people, as it helps them to understand this great truth: that they are the masters of China as well as of history!

In my home I kept hidden several different versions of the Tien An Men poems. One selection was edited by Tong Huaizhou of the Beijing No. 2 Foreign Languages Institute, another by the Automation Research Institute. . . . Both my children and I were delighted to have these copies and at night I would sit carefully reading the poems. I saw that they expressed the real strength and feelings of the people and that they would be eternal weapons in the fierce battle between the forces of light and dark in China. These poems taught the people and gave them enormous encouragement.

Ouyang Ping, one of the characters in *When All Sounds Are Hushed*, edits such a selection of these revolutionary poems entitled *Heads Raised We Unsheath Our Swords* and distributes it among the people at a time when the "gang of four" was particularly powerful. He knows the ruthless nature of the gang and is aware that he will probably be arrested and persecuted like his mother, Mei Lin. Yet he is not afraid, since he cannot act against his conscience. He loves China and refuses to see it destroyed by the gang. He loves our great Premier Zhou Enlai and cannot bear to see him slandered by them. He sees through the gang's ultra-left slogans and behaviour. He is a materialist, courageous fighter who is determined to speak the truth, even at the cost of his own life. People like him are the heroes of our times, for it was no small action to speak out the truth in those days. Some kept a grim silence; some an indifferent one. Others spoke out against their conscience. Worse were those who flattered the gang. China needed comrades like Ouyang Ping and with such people, there could never be a lasting silence.

The most disgusting types were those without guts, souls, beliefs or any recognizable humanity. He Shifei expresses such creatures well in the play. He fully knows the notorious actions of the gang and the people's hatred of them. He is neither stupid nor naive. Having assessed the situation, he decides that the gang will gain supreme political power and so he throws in his lot with them. His actions are conscious and premeditated: framing others on

false charges; passing informatoin to the gang; selling his friends; persecuting and murdering people. I have seen such creatures. Alive they are looked on as swine; dead they are regarded as dust.

When All Sounds Are Hushed depicts the fierce struggle waged by the Chinese people against the "gang of four" in 1976. Based on the Tien An Men Incident, it concentrates on two families during one day in one setting. Within this strict plot, the drama rapidly and thrillingly develops. What an apt title! It is part of a line from a famous poem by Lu Xun: "When all sounds are hushed, I hear a peal of thunder."

Jia Pingao

Two Sisters

Last summer, in June, after recuperating in the countryside for a while, I visited my aunt. On the sixth of June, the peasants traditionally hung out their best clothes and covers in the sun to prevent them from being eaten by moths. Suspended from lines slung between the poplar trees were colourful fur coats, silk quilts, hide bed-covers and woollen stockings. As I was looking at them, I heard someone giggling. Behind a tree I found a young girl in her teens who was folding some damp cloth with an older woman. The girl kept pulling so strongly that her mother was jerked forward a little each time.

"Now, now, I know you're stronger than I, so don't pull so hard!" the mother complained.

Giggling the girl kept tugging hard.

"You're so naughty!" scolded her mother giving a sudden jerk so that her daughter unintentionally let go of her end. Her mother began to fall backwards. Immediately the girl darted forward, catching and steadying her mother, laughing loudly. At this her mother had to join in. Suddenly her mother hushed her, pointing

to a window. The girl tiptoed towards it but by mistake banged against a tile on the window-sill. She rushed back and shouted: "Why don't you come out into the sun? You'll fade away..."

At this moment, my aunt seeing me standing in the shade of the door brought me some tea, so I invited the girl to join me. She agreed, but her mother scolded her.

"Why not? And I'll call her 'sister' into the bargain," she said defiantly.

"My niece is a good student at an agricultural college," my aunt remarked. "You'd better call her teacher!"

I wondered what the girl had been looking at just then.

"At my mother's pet," she replied.

My aunt told me the girl's name was Crescent and that inside the room was her sister called Moon, who was a member of the brigade's research group. As she was busy with an experiment, no one was supposed to disturb her.

"She's the family favourite. We all have to humour her," Crescent pouted.

"What about you?" I teased.

"Me? Oh, nobody loves me. I sometimes wonder if I have a mother!"

We all burst out laughing, Crescent loudest of all.

Noticing my string bag, she peered into it and fished out two books. "What are these?"

"English books," I replied.

"Can you understand them?"

"Of course," my aunt butted in. "She can study them for hours at a time and never feel tired."

She told me that her sister also had some English books, though not such thick ones. She liked listening to her sister reading, but she wasn't allowed to study with her.

To please her, I read my book to her. However, before half a page was finished, she ran away to the threshing ground having caught sight of a youngster trailing a stone roller to crush reeds. She jumped on to the stone roller giggling.

In the evening, while heating some Chinese herbal medicine

and reading, I heard a noise at the door. I thought it was the wind and took no notice, until there were two more raps.

"Aren't you getting ready for bed yet, Teacher Lu?" a voice asked.

"Who's there?" I asked. Opening the door I found a shy girl fidgeting with her pigtailed and leaning against the doorframe.

"I'm Moon. I live in the room opposite yours. I'm sorry to have disturbed you so late."

I was delighted to meet a new friend and so I welcomed her in to sit down on my bed. "You're not at all like your sister," I remarked, referring to Crescent.

"We are all different," she smiled. "She told me about you and said you'd brought some English books with you. How long will you stay here?"

"About ten days."

"Why not longer?" Smelling the medicine, she inquired: "Are you ill?"

I told her that I had come here to convalesce after some stomach trouble.

She frowned and said: "I'll write to my classmate, Shengwen, tomorrow. He's now a barefoot doctor. He'll know the remedy. I came tonight to ask you to help me, but since you're ill..." She broke off, stirring the medicine with a chopstick.

"Are you learning English?"

She stopped stirring and asked: "How do you know?"

"Crescent told me."

She giggled. "I'm a peasant and I didn't think there was any need to learn English, but after trying to do some research work, I realized its importance. I taught myself, learning a few words."

"Can I help you?" I asked.

She was delighted. So I began to teach her. Then she took out from her pocket a slip of paper on which were written the English words wheat, oats, blossom and pollination. She had wanted to start with these words, so I taught her to read them and then she wrote them in her book. My medicine was ready just as she finished her last word, and so she quickly picked up

the pot, forgetting it was hot. Putting it down on the table, she blew on her burnt finger. I didn't know what to do, but she plucked a hair from her head and threaded it through the blister with a needle.

"It doesn't matter. The blister will dry now. Did I write pollination correctly?"

Her handwriting was clear and smooth.

Before she left, she asked me to promise to teach her two hours every evening and test her every other day. She said she'd help me with heating my medicine.

From the next day on, I heard her reading aloud in her room early in the morning, while I was still in my bed. She quickly made progress and could repeat every word she had learned. At ten o'clock at night, Crescent would return from her work with a construction team, but although it was late, she never failed to drop in. As soon as she entered, my room was filled with laughter. I soon became familiar with her colleagues. Li Sanhu was a dare-devil, who liked to climb the highest trees or dive into rivers and stay underwater for a long time. Sometimes he carried the logs for the team or went into the rivers to scoop mud. It was typical of him to take the hard jobs. The other boy, Zhang Yong, was shy of girls and so they called him "feudal". Once he and Crescent were carrying a heavy stone with a rope and a shoulder-pole. He stealthily moved the rope nearer him, and so Crescent argued that he looked down on women. He felt so wronged that he started to cry. Then there was a girl called Han Fanger, who had a sharp tongue. Crescent alone feared her, because Han had called her "cackling hen" in public. Crescent's nickname became the joke of the whole team.

Soon Crescent's laughing and joking drove Moon back to her own room.

"You've gone crackers, Crescent," her mother scolded her from the next room. "You're always giggling and laughing!"

"Is it wrong to laugh?" she asked me.

"When I was your age," her mother continued, "I was busy all day long. I didn't..."



"There was nothing for you to laugh about as a child. But I can laugh and I'm happy, so why be jealous?"

"What nonsense!" her mother retorted. "You're not a baby any more. You're a girl in your teens..."

"So I can't laugh because I'm in my teens?"

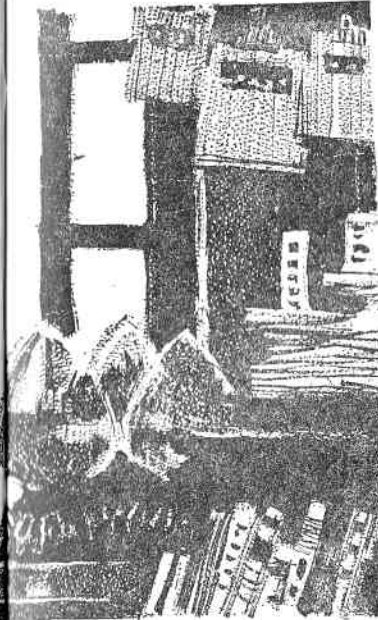
Her mother coughed before replying: "I mean you should learn to be more like your sister."

"No! Never! She has to study English, but I don't need to. Anyway, I can't concentrate. Didn't you call me a monkey?"

"At least you could help your sister a bit," I suggested.

After a pause Crescent replied: "Yes, you're right. But how?"

I was going to give her some suggestions, but when I came back from the kitchen with some water, I found her fast asleep on my bed. So I went to see Moon. Her small room was chock-full of jars, cases, and bags of grain seeds of all descriptions. Along her walls were graphs, tables, weather charts and notebooks.



Her bed was squeezed into a corner of the wall. She was inspecting some wheat seeds through a magnifying glass. Stuck on the window was a cuckoo flying across a field of wheat, signifying a bumper harvest.

"Have you produced any new strains?" I asked her.

"Have a look at this, Lu!" she answered excitedly. "You give it a name."

In her palm was a wheat seed, slightly greenish and twice as long as normal. It was a hybrid strain. It had taken her three years of experimentation to produce it. I was delighted at her success. From its weight, I judged that it would produce more flour than our daily ration. I wondered why she had devoted her energies to her research.

"Why not call it 'Successful Wheat'?" I suggested.

"No," she smiled. "Success is a long way off still and this seed has some defects. I want to improve it. What if I call it 'Better Wheat'?"

I agreed. I was curious to know what she would do next. She said that her group intended to develop a new hybrid from it. If they succeeded they would call this one "Successful Wheat". In the past few days she had received various high-yielding strains from various places and planned to plant them in different plots so as to compare them. They also wanted to collect some seeds from a brigade behind a mountain, but they hadn't anyone to spare to go there.

"Why not let Crescent help you?" I suggested.

"No, she's too irresponsible."

"I could go with her. I'd like to know why they're just beginning to harvest their crop while you've already finished."

So the next morning Crescent and I crossed the river and found the peasants behind the mountain busy harvesting. I asked her why there was this discrepancy in the harvesting times.

She answered: "Why do I like to laugh?"

I was puzzled by her ridiculous answer.

"You should ask my sister about that," she laughed. "I can tell you about building dykes, ploughing fields, breaking stones or dynamiting mountains."

With the permission of the brigade leadership, we went to the wheat fields to select some seeds. We picked five tall stalks with long, full ears and seeds. The sun was setting as we returned home. Crescent, fidgeting with the ears of wheat, declared that her sister would not call her an idiot who laughed all day long any more.

"Does she love you?" I asked bluntly.

"Sometimes," she replied. "But I think she loves science more."

"Why?"

"Because of her ideals."

"What do you mean?"

"Dazhai is the model advanced brigade in agriculture, and our brigade is learning from it and hopes to become a Dazhai type brigade within two years. The research group has to make the first contribution and they promised to produce four innovations within the next two years."

What a fine project! I looked up at the clear blue sky, and then at the piles of wheat stacked on the threshing grounds either side of the road. The brigade members were weighing the wheat on the scales, and one was chanting out the weight.

As we reached the bridge, Crescent told me to go across, while she took off her shoes and waded into the river. She ran away giggling and splashing about in the water, her pink blouse trailing behind her like a lotus flower. I warned her to take care, but she went faster until suddenly she tripped and plunged into the water. She rose and then went down again, trying to retrieve the wheat ears that had been swept away by the current. Afraid lest something should happen to her, I told her not to bother about



them, but she paid no attention to me. At last she had found only one.

Climbing out of the water she plonked herself down on the bank unhappily and began to cry. I tried to console her with the fact that at least she had found one, and that it was useless to weep over the lost ones. She stopped crying, and then suggested I rest while she ran back to the river and groped about in the water returning with five crabs.

"Well, I'm not like my sister," she giggled, "but I'll make up for the lost wheat ears with these crabs. That should be all right, don't you think?"

That evening, after I had gone to bed, I heard the sound of sobbing. Dressing, I went outside and found the courtyard deserted. But at the spot where I had first seen Crescent and her mother folding the cloth, I found Crescent weeping under the tree. Her shoulders heaved. Moon had given her a telling off for losing the wheat seeds and thrown away the crabs in a rage.

"She's always blamed me for being irresponsible and now she won't let me forget it," complained Crescent.

"You've no idea how much she wanted these wheat strains."

"I don't understand. Why are the seeds so precious? If we don't plant them this year, we can do it next year."

"But that wastes time. The earlier these experiments are carried out, the sooner the new strain can be used, and that will mean more grain."

Realizing how important the work was, she snuggled up to me and confided, "Now I promise I won't laugh any more. Wait and see!"

"Don't be so silly!" I had to laugh. "Why not laugh? You think your sister wants you to scowl all day long? No. She just wants you to be more responsible."

"I'm sorry I misjudged her."

Hugging her, I felt her innocence and heart of gold.

"Do you think I'm an idiot?"

"Of course not!" I replied.

"Do you think I can learn to concentrate for hours on end like my sister?"

"Naturally."

"Will you teach me to survey? Our brigade is going to transform its fields and wants me to help. But I'm afraid..."

I knew nothing about field measurements and surveying, but I promised to buy some books for her about it, when I returned to the town. Although she still wept, she cheered up a little. Then I heard footsteps. Crescent said it was Moon. Soon we heard her repeating to herself some English words.

Moon told us that the brigade office had asked her to attend a conference on science and technology at the provincial capital and that she would set off the next morning.

After sunrise, we saw Moon off at the bus station. Each day after that, Crescent rose early. I often saw her through my window standing under a vine near a well reciting mathematical formulas. Others in the courtyard found her sweeping the yard as they rose. After work in the evenings she came to my room to ask help with her problems. She was cleverer than Moon. When she had solved a problem, she would explain her solution. She always left happy and satisfied.

On the day that I had to return to my college, my aunt and Crescent's mother went with me as far as the entrance of the village. Crescent was nowhere to be seen, and her mother explained that she had already gone to work and that someone had been sent to fetch her. I felt sad leaving for the station. As I reached it, I saw Crescent running towards me, drenched in perspiration.

"If only you could stay here for ever," she panted, "you'd encourage me to study harder and make greater progress."

"I'll be back as soon as I have my holidays. The moment I reach town, I'll post those text-books to you."

Suddenly I remembered. I took the English text-books from my string bag and asked Crescent to give them to Moon.

"Oh, thank you so much. Next year we'll show you our 'Successful Wheat'."

In town I bumped into Moon on a tram. She was holding an English-Chinese book and said that she had learnt much from the

conference. Their experiences would help in her research which she now hoped to accelerate.

"When do you think you'll succeed?" I asked.

"If not in one, then certainly in two years." Then she added in English: "I'm sure to be successful, despite the difficulties that lie ahead."

Illustrated by Shen Yaoyi



Jun Qing

Colourful Autumn

The weather suddenly grew chilly just after the autumnal equinox. Early in the morning, as I strolled along the shore it seemed to me that the sea had become bluer, the sky even higher. Turning round to look at Gumo Ridge it struck me as the quintessence of autumn.

Lovely autumn!

I can never understand why most ancient poets describe autumn as so sombre and desolate. Verdant spring with its bright flowers is certainly beautiful, but to me fruitful autumn is still more enchanting.

Autumn is a scene of abundance.

Autumn is a riot of colours.

Look at that little persimmon orchard in the west valley. It has the dazzling red of a sheet of flame. Even the hues of maple trees, praised by countless poets and artists past and present, pale by comparison with these persimmons.

Then there are the famed russet apples, enchantingly bright and vivid, and others which gleam like pure gold. The hill haws are

dotted with cornelian berries. The oval, transparent green grapes look as though carved of jade or crystal, while the round "Rosy Grapes" are like strings of purple beads. . . .

Yes, autumn is bewitching!

I love these colours because they symbolize mellowness, abundance, strength and happiness.

This has been a mild year in the Jiaodong Peninsula* and there has been plenty of rain. At the start of spring, the wheat promised a good harvest, and sure enough, in June when I travelled by train across the Changwei Plain, I saw seas of golden wheat on each side of the track. Some already reaped was piled high on the threshing grounds. The sight gladdened my heart and I wrote to tell my friends so that they could share my joy.

Three months later I came back again by train. I saw crowds of people busy gathering in their good harvest. The golden millet had been reaped and all that remained in the fields was flame bright sorghum. Stalks and yellow corn-cobs were stacked like little hills on threshing grounds or beside the villages. When the train reached Laiyang Station, the platforms were piled with the famous Laiyang pears.

At Yantai, I visited Happiness People's Commune, known far and wide for its apples. They had just ripened. As soon as I entered an orchard I was struck by their fragrance. I was told that sixty years ago the place had been an arid sandy flat. Apple trees had been introduced here only thirty or forty years before, and it was not until after Liberation, particularly in the last few years that they had begun to be planted on a large scale. Now the luxuriant branches were bent with fruit! The door of the production brigade office was virtually blocked by hills of apples which girls were busily packing. Crate after crate was loaded on to the truck which would take them to various docks and railway stations. Soon this delicious fruit would reach our major cities and some foreign parts, enabling our friends to share our happiness over the harvest.

* The east part of Shandong Province.

Even more attractive were the autumn tints I found on the outskirts of Weihai the day before yesterday. Apart from apple orchards, there were vineyards everywhere. All ninety houses of the little mountainous village there were in the shade of grapevines. The village street was flanked with trellises covered by green vines, so that it looked like a long green corridor full of clusters of crystal grapes, light green, purple or cream-coloured. Strolling there you felt as if you were in a world of amber and pearl.

There were even grapes along the stream which flowed through the village. Girls washed their laundry under trellises, their figures reflected beside the iridescent grapes in the limpid water. . . .

Each courtyard had a grape trellis. The local people told me that a cutting planted this year would next year grow into a big vine covering the courtyard with green. In summer they ate out in the cool of the trellises, and the women folk did all their sewing there too.

The harvest of grapes was extremely good this year. The average yield of each vine was over a thousand pounds, and there was one that produced more than two thousand six hundred. Yet amid this profusion of grapes within easy reach, the villagers picked not a single one for themselves. Even children of seven or eight took great care of this collective property. This fine spirit of theirs was what impressed me most.

There is a peasant saying: "There's no autumn rain without spring wind."

This is not simply folklore but a truth applying to human life as well.

It is true that we went through hard times two years ago. However, things have been improving rapidly. When I travelled across Changwei Plain by train last March, I saw crowd after crowd of people busy working in the fields along the railway track. It was cold then and ice was floating in the River Wei. Wind roared across the land day and night. In the train, an old man stared out of the window and said to himself:

"All right, wind! Roar as hard as you like. The stronger you

blow now, the more rain we will get in autumn. Come on! You'll give us a good harvest and bring us a good life."

He was turning sixty, his hair and beard all white. But he looked hale and hearty. Seeing me looking at him, he said with a smile:

"'There's no autumn rain without spring wind.' Have you ever heard this saying?"

I nodded.

"But do you know where the spring wind comes from?"

I shook my head.

He pointed north with a cryptic laugh: "Over there, Beijing."

"What? Did you say Beijing?" I was puzzled.

"Yes, Beijing," the old man nodded, then repeated with a smile: "From Beijing, you know?"

Oh yes! I understood.

By spring wind, he meant the Party's call to concentrate on agriculture.

"An apt metaphor!" I could not help nodding.

"All my experience has taught me this: Whatever difficulties come your way, just act upon the Party's instructions and you'll win through. Right?"

Absolutely right. This is not just one old man's experience, but the experience of all our people, a truth the Chinese people have figured out through long years of revolutionary struggle.

If not for the strong spring wind, how could we have had such a good harvest?

I spent National Day at Weihai. Though it was only a small town by the East Sea, the celebration was grand and lively. From early morning, people filled the clean streets and flocked to the square. Among them were fishermen, peasants from orchards deep in the mountains, cadres, workers and students.

That evening, I made another discovery in the workers' club in the centre of the town, where a newly-formed amateur local opera company put on an excellent performance. Most of the actors and actresses were workers and middle-school students. I was elated to see the rapid development of the people's cultural life.

In this fine harvest season, I could not stay indoors but keep strolling over the hillsides and through the fields, feasting my eyes on the dazzling colours there.

Rich, intoxicating autumn! What scene to gladden men's hearts!

One ancient poet wrote of autumn: "Colours fade amid gathering mist and drifting clouds; bleak and chilly are the desolate hills and streams. . . . Rich reds wither, glossy black is sprinkled with white." But I see nothing of this desolation. All around me are abundant harvests.

And now, suddenly, I realize why that poem of old painted such a gloomy picture of autumn. It was not autumn itself that he was depicting but the spirit of the age in which he lived.

I love autumn.

I love autumn in China today.

Weihai

1962

Postscript to "The Grave"*

When I heard that my collection of essays was already half printed, I wrote a few lines of notes and posted them to Beijing. I wrote whatever occurred to me, then mailed it, and though that was less than twenty days ago I no longer remember clearly what I said. Tonight all around is still: a bonfire is flickering at the foot of the hill behind my house, and from time to time gongs and drums sound from South Putuo Monastery** where they are still performing marionette shows. Each time they fall silent all seems stiller than ever. Of course the electric light is bright, but somehow a faint grief suddenly assails me and I rather regret having my essays published. I marvel at this regret, for it is a sentiment rarely felt by me; and even now I have no clear idea of the true meaning of repentance. However, this mood soon passes and of course my essays are still being published; but to dispel my present gloom I nevertheless would like to say a few words.

* A collection of twenty-three essays written between 1907 and 1925, published in March 1927 by the Weiming Press in Beijing.

** Near Xiamen University in Fujian where Lu Xun had gone to teach in August 1926.

寫在「墳」後面

在聽到我的雜文已經印成一半的頃息的時候，我
 曾經寫了幾行題記，寄往北京去。當時想到便寫，寫
 完便寄，到現在還不滿二十天，早已記不清說了些甚
 麼了。今夜周圍是這麼寂靜，屋後面的山脚下騰起野
 燒的微光，南普陀寺還在做牽絲傀儡戲，時時傳來鐘
 鼓聲，每一回隔中，就更加顯得寂靜。雷聲自然是揮
 灑着，但不知怎地忽有淡淡悲哀未襲擊我的心，我

Lu Xun's manuscript

I remember having said: These essays are simply a few traces of my life. If my past can also count as a life, then I may be said to have done some work. But I have no gushing fountain of ideas, no great, magnificent writings; neither have I any theory to expound nor desire to start some movement. But I have tasted disappointments which, whether small or great, are somewhat bitter. So for some years when people have asked me to write, provided our ideas were not too divergent and my strength was up to it, I always made the effort to write a few words to give them some infinitesimal satisfaction. Life is full of hardships, yet sometimes it is very easy for people to take comfort; why, then, begrudge a little ink and make them taste more of the sorrow of loneliness? So apart from stories and random thoughts, as time went by I also wrote a dozen or so essays both long and short. Some of them, naturally, were written for money; but now all are lumped together. This is how I have used part of my life and the sort of work I have done; but even so I am still not clear just what I have been doing. It is like a workman digging away without knowing whether he is building a terrace or digging a pit. All he knows is that if this is to be a terrace it will simply serve for him to fall off or to show that he is moribund, while if it is to be a pit it will of course simply serve as his grave. In short: everything passes away, passing with the light. Whether in time past, now or in time to come, everything without exception must pass away. . . . This is all, but I am quite content with it.

However, this is probably just talk. While I still have breath in my body I sometimes like to collect and preserve vestiges of the past, as long as they are my own; for though aware that they are not worth a cent I cannot have no feeling at all for them. And calling this collection of essays *The Grave* is after all an ingenious means of glossing over this. When Liu Ling* was roaring drunk he made someone follow him with a spade, saying, "Just bury me when I die." Yet his show of carelessness could actually only deceive honest simpletons.

* A scholar of the Jin Dynasty (c. 210-270) known for his heavy drinking and disregard of conventions.

So this book's publication is the same sort of thing as far as I am concerned. As regards others, I remember saying: I still hope those readers partial to my writing will gain a little pleasure from it while those creatures who detest it will feel like throwing up — I know I am not magnanimous, and it would delight me to have them throw up because of my writing. This is all there is to it. If forced to touch on my work's merits, then perhaps my accounts of the few poets I introduced are worth glancing through* and the last essay *On Fair Play* may be worth considering too; for though it was not written with my blood, it was written after witnessing the shedding of blood by some of my own generation and some younger than myself.

Readers partial to my work sometimes comment that I write the truth. Actually this excessive praise is due to their partiality. Of course I do not want to cheat people too much, but at the same time I never express all that is in my heart, usually settling for just what seems enough to pass muster. It is true that I frequently dissect other people, but less often than I dissect myself — even more ruthlessly. Each such analysis strikes those addicted to warmth as already too harsh and cruel; so heaven knows what the result would be if I were really to bare my heart to them. This has also sometimes struck me as a means to drive bystanders away; for then if they did not spurn me, even if they were poisonous fiends they would be my friends, indeed my truest friends. Failing this, I would be content to remain alone. I have not yet done this, however, still lacking the courage because I still want to live on in this society. Another minor reason, which I have already announced time and again, is that I want to make those so-called respectable gentlemen uncomfortable for a little longer. That is why I have deliberately kept on some pieces of armour and continue standing here, to add a blemish to this world of theirs; nor will I desist till I am tired and want to take off my armour.

If there is talk of acting as a guide, that is even more difficult

* Referring to his early essay on some patriotic and rebellious poets of 19th-century Europe.

as I am still not clear myself what direction to take. China doubtless has quite a few "elders" and "teachers" for the youth, but I am not one of them, nor do I believe in them. The one goal I know of definitely is the grave. But this is something which everybody knows, and no guide to it is required. The problem is the path from here to there. Of course there are more paths than one, but I am uncertain which is the best, though from time to time I go on searching for it. In the course of my search, I fear my unripe fruit may have poisoned those partial to it, while those creatures who detest me — like those so-called respectable gentlemen — will live to a ripe old age. This is why I often speak ambiguously or haltingly, suspecting that my best gift to those readers partial to me may be "nothingness". To begin with, a thousand copies were printed of the first editions of my writings and translations, then this was increased by five hundred, while recently each edition has run to from two to four thousand copies. Naturally each increase pleases me as it brings me in more income, but with the concomitant anxiety that this might be harming more readers; hence I tend to grow more cautious, more hesitant about writing. Some people imagine that I write at random, frankly expressing my feelings; actually this is not entirely the case, for I have quite a few scruples. I have long known that I am not a fighter, neither can I be considered a forerunner since I have so many scruples and memories. I still remember how, three or four years ago, a student came to buy one of my books and put in my hand money taken from his pocket, still warm from his body. That warmth left its mark on my heart so that even today when I want to write something I still fear that it may poison or injure young people of his kind, and hesitate to take up my pen. I doubt whether there will ever be any return to those days when I could speak without reservations. But occasionally it occurs to me that, if there were, I should be living up to those young people's expectations. Hitherto, though, I have not made up my mind to do this.

This is really all I have to say today, but it can be counted as relatively truthful. In addition, here are a few extra observations.

I remember when the use of the vernacular was first advocated, it was attacked fiercely from all sides. When later its spread became an irresistible trend some people made a volte-face and took the credit themselves, giving it the fine title "The New Cultural Movement". Then certain others proposed using the vernacular for popularization; yet others claimed that to write well in the vernacular one must still study the classics. By this time the first category had made another volte-face and started jeering at the "new culture". The two other categories, forced against their will to compromise, were only hoping to preserve the corpse a few days longer. There are still many people of this sort today, whom I have attacked in my miscellaneous essays.

Recently I read a periodical published in Shanghai which also alleged that to write the vernacular well one must first make a good study of the classics, and one name cited by way of example was mine. This really made my blood run cold. I will refrain from commenting on the others, but in my own case I have indeed read a good many old books, and for teaching purposes even now I still read them. Being steeped in the classics has left its mark on my vernacular writings in which, inevitably, old phrases and old syntactic forms often crop up. Yet it galls me to be unable to shake off these old ghosts on my back, and I constantly feel them a stifling burden. Even my outlook must surely have been poisoned to a certain extent by Zhuang Zhou and Han Fei,* for sometimes I am rather laissez-faire and sometimes rather harsh. The works of Confucius and Mencius,** the first which I read and with which I am most familiar, appear on the other hand to have had less effect on me. Most likely because of my indolence I often excuse myself in the belief that while everything is in a state of flux there must be many intermediate creatures. Plants and animals, invertebrates and vertebrates all have intermediate things between them; so that we can even say that all living things

* Zhuang Zhou (c. 369-289 BC) and Han Fei (c. 280-233 BC) were well-known ancient Chinese philosophers. The former advocated a liberal, laissez-faire attitude, while the latter advocated the rule by law.

** Confucius (c. 551-479 BC) and Mencius (c. 372-289 BC) were the chief representatives of the Confucian School.

in the evolutionary chain are intermediates. At a time when a start is made in reforming writing, it is natural, inevitable and necessary to have a few writers who are neither fish nor fowl. Their task, after an initial awakening, is to utter new cries; and because they come from the old camp and have a clearer idea of the situation, when they turn against their own side it is easy to deal the strong foe a mortal blow. However, they too should fade away with the light and gradually disappear; for at most they are single planks or stones in a bridge, not the future goal or model. Those who succeed them should be different, yet unless they are sages, divinely endowed, they will be unable to rid themselves completely of old habits; nevertheless they should show a newer spirit. Regarding language, they need no longer look for sustenance in old books but should take the living tongue as their source, bringing their writing closer to the spoken language and infusing it with fresh vigour. As to how to remedy the poverty of the people's present language and enrich it, that is another very important problem, and we may have to absorb material from old literature for present-day use; but as this lies outside the scope of what I want to say now we need not discuss it here.

If I tried very hard, I could doubtless pick up many colloquial expressions to improve my writing. However, since I am lazy and busy too, I have not yet done that. I often suspect that this may have not a little to do with studying old books, because I feel that I often have the same detestable ideas found in the ancients' books, and I have no faith in my ability to exert myself all of a sudden. I keep cursing these ideas of mine and hope they will not reappear among young people in future. Last year when I urged young people to read fewer books, or even to read no Chinese books at all, this was honest advice which I learned through bitter experience; I certainly did not say it for fun as a joke, or in a fit of anger. The ancients held that a man who does not study will turn out a fool, and naturally that is right too. However, the world is made by fools and wise men are quite unable to prop it up, especially those wise men in China. Now, leaving ideas aside to speak of language, many young

writers to embellish their work are pulling out colourful but abstruse phrases from classical prose or poetry — like the handkerchiefs produced by conjurers. I do not know whether this is connected with the exhortations to read classical works, but it is obvious that we are returning to the past and that the new literature is trying to commit suicide.

Unfortunately my hotchpotch of essays written in classical Chinese as well as in the vernacular happens to be coming out at this time, and it may further poison readers' minds. But I personally cannot yet steel myself to have it destroyed, as I still want for the time being to see traces of my past life there. I can only hope that readers partial to my writings will consider it merely as a sort of memento, knowing that nothing but a once living corpse lies buried in this small grave-mound. After a certain lapse of time this too will turn to dust, even the memory of it vanishing from the world of men, and that will be the end of my work. This morning, while reading some old books again, I remembered a few lines by Lu Ji mourning Cao Cao's death.* Let me quote them by way of conclusion:

Since following ancient ways bequeathed only a burden,
He believed in simplified rites and frugal burial.
What use are those robes and insignia?
They simply make later princes cast aspersions.
But, alas, he loved these relics,
For even such a wise man could not forget them.
Stirred by reading his testament
I offer these verses to express my sorrow.

The night of November 11, 1926

Lu Xun

* Lu Ji (261-303) a Jin-dynasty poet wrote these lines after reading Cao Cao's *Last Instructions*. Cao Cao was the famous statesman at the end of the Han Dynasty who founded the Wei Dynasty. He asked not to have a sumptuous traditional funeral, although he still set store by robes, insignia and music. See article on Lu Xun's essays on p. 94.

A Correspondence on Themes for Short Stories*

The Letter Received

Dear Mr L.S.,

We have long held ourselves in check from troubling you in this presumptuous way, but we feel that you whom we take as our teacher are unlikely to ignore a request from young enthusiasts. So after thinking it over several times we are finally making so bold as to express to you our hesitation and doubts about literature — especially short stories.

We have written quite a few short stories, choosing as our themes: first, young people of petty-bourgeois origin with whom we are familiar, whose common weaknesses revealed or latent in the present period we express by means of satire; secondly, characters from the lower classes with whom we are familiar, characters outside the mainstream of this age, whose unconscious urge to revolt and strong instinct for survival, ground down as they are by life, we try to depict. But can works with such contents be considered as making any contribution to the present period? From the start we had doubts about this, and when we took up our pens

* First published in January 1932 in the third number of *The Crossroads*, this was later included in the collection *In Two Minds*.

we hesitated again. We must ask your advice on this, sir, as we do not want our attempts at writing to be wasted and have no significance in the present age.

We have decided, in this period, to devote our energies to meaningful writing and thereby make our rightful contribution, unlike those men of letters described by you who, after making a slight reputation, turn aside to other pursuits. So now, sir, if you are willing to give us your instructions this will influence our whole lives. Though we have read quite a few works by proletarian writers, we have never liked to make fictitious characters turn revolutionary overnight but would prefer to take a few models with which we are familiar and depict them truthfully. Whether this inclination is correct or not, we are not absolutely certain. So after thinking it over again and again, we can only presume to approach you and trouble you, sir.

With best wishes,

Ts-c. Y. and Y-f. T.

November 29

The Reply

Dear Mr Y. and Mr T.,*

Before I could answer your letter I caught flu and my head was too heavy, my eyes too swollen, to write even a word. The last couple of days I have recovered and am now able to write you a reply. This delay of a month, when we are all in Shanghai, makes me feel most apologetic.

You asked what material should be used for writing short stories. But your stand, according to your letter, is that of the petty-bourgeoisie. If a man is a proletarian engaged in the struggle, provided that what he writes can become a work of art, then

* Y. and T. were the writers Sha Ding and Ai Wu.

no matter what events he describes or what material he uses, it will certainly make a significant contribution to the present as well as the future. Why? Because the writer himself is a fighter.

However, neither of you belong to that class, hence your doubts before writing as described in your letter. I think your work still has meaning for the present period, but if your inclination never changed, that would be inappropriate.

In general, the literary works of other classes have nothing to do with the proletariat engaged in struggle. If a petty-bourgeois is not actually on the same side as the proletariat, then his hatred or satirization of his own class strikes the workers as just the same as some relatively intelligent young gentleman inveighing against his worthless younger brother — it is a family affair which can be ignored, not affecting others for better or for worse. Thus the French writer Gautier,* who detested the bourgeoisie, was still a bona-fide bourgeois writer. When such writers portray low-class characters (I do not believe that they can remain “outside the mainstream of their age”), what they consider objectivity is actually looking down coldly from above, while their vaunted sympathy is also simply specious charity, of no help to the proletariat. And it is hard to say how they would turn out to be later. Take another Frenchman, Baudelaire. At the start of the Paris Commune he was deeply stirred and supported it, but once it grew powerful and seemed to him to threaten his own life, he turned reactionary. However, in present-day China, I believe both themes you mentioned still have some *raison d'être*. As regards the petty-bourgeoisie, other classes cannot understand it so well; when you attack it and tear off its mask, you should be able to deal more powerful blows than those unfamiliar with it. As for the lower classes, as life is constantly changing, future writers may be too late to see such situations; so when you jot down the passing scene, at least this will serve as a record of this period. Hence such writing has meaning for both the present and the future. But even if you are “familiar” with something, that does not necessarily mean that what you describe is “correct”; and it is the task of the critic with

*Theophile Gautier (1811-1872), the poet and novelist.

a correct viewpoint to point out what is significant, so that its significance will be brought out more clearly and amplified.

So I think you should both start writing on whatever themes you can now write about. Only be strict in your choice of material and probe deeply, instead of padding out some trifling, meaningless incident into a story, for the pleasure of being a prolific writer. If you do that, I suspect that after a time you will feel yourselves written out; for although remnants of the characters you describe may still remain several decades from now, a different type of writer with a different viewpoint will be depicting them then. However, since both of you are young and progressive, resolved to make some contribution to our times, by then you are bound by degrees to have overcome your old way of life and thinking and to see a new way.

To sum up, my idea is that you should write whatever you can at present. There is no need to follow the fashion, and still less of course to create a revolutionary hero by a sudden change and call this “revolutionary literature”. At the same time, however, you must not rest content with this and make no improvement, so that you sink into decline, thus destroying any contribution you might have made to your age.

With best regards,

L. S.
December 25

Notes After Reading

Gorky marvels at Balzac's skill in handling dialogue, for without any description of his characters' appearance he conjures them up before the readers by their conversation. (See "My Literary Apprenticeship" in the August number of *Literature*.)

Novelists of this calibre have not yet appeared in China, though there are passages in *Outlaws of the Marshes** and *A Dream of Red Mansions*** which enable readers to visualize the characters from their talk. Actually there is nothing miraculous about this, as anyone who rents a small room in a Shanghai side-street knows from his own experience. You may never have set eyes on your neighbours, but if you are separated by a flimsy partition only, you can hear practically everything they and their visitors say, especially if they talk loudly, and as time goes by you know who live there and have a fair idea of what they are like.

If you cut out all extraneous matter and simply select what is distinctive in each one's conversation, I am sure others could guess their character from their talk. I am not saying, mind you, that this would make you the Balzac of China.

When a writer builds up a character through dialogue, he almost certainly has his own mental picture of the man, which he passes on to his readers till they form a similar picture in their minds.

* *Sbui Hu*, famous fourteenth-century Chinese novel describing a peasant revolt at the end of the Northern Song Dynasty.

** *Hong Lou Meng*, a famous eighteenth-century Chinese novel describing love and intrigue in a declining noble family. Lin Daiyu, the chief heroine, is a delicate, ultra-sensitive girl.

But the readers' picture may not be the same as the author's. A thin pale old man whom Balzac imagines with a small goatee may become a sturdy, heavily bearded fellow to Gorky. There is bound to be a general similarity, however, in character, speech and behaviour, just as when a French work is translated into Russian. Otherwise literature would have no universal qualities.

But though literature has its universal qualities, it varies with the understanding of the readers; and if they lack understanding of the situations described, it loses its effectiveness. For instance if we read *A Dream of Red Mansions* and want to form a picture from the text of Lin Daiyu, we must first erase the impression made on us by the photograph of Dr. Mei Lanfang* in the opera *Lin Daiyu Buries the Flowers*. If we then imagine another Lin Daiyu, she will probably be a slim and solitary modern young woman with bobbed hair and a gown of Indian silk, or some other type — I cannot determine which. But she is bound to be quite different from the pictures published between thirty and forty years ago in *Illustrations for "A Dream of Red Mansions"*. The heroine pictured there was the Lin Daiyu in the heart of readers at that time.

Literature has its limitations as well as its universal qualities. And some relatively lasting works change according to the readers' experience of life. The Eskimoes in the Polar regions and the Negroes in the heart of Africa cannot, I am certain, understand the "Lin Daiyu type". And the citizens of a healthy and rational society will not be able to understand her either. They will probably feel further removed from her in time than we do when we hear of the burning of the books by the First Emperor of Qin** or Huang Chao's massacres***. Anything subject to change is not everlasting. Only dreamers, talking in their sleep, can claim that literature alone is immortal.

August 6

* Mei Lanfang (1894-1961) was a famous Beijing opera artist.

** The First Emperor of the Qin Dynasty (259-210 BC) had burned books by Confucians and other schools after uniting China.

*** Huang Chao (?-884) was the well-known leader of a peasant revolt at the end of the Tang Dynasty.

Yang Xianyi

On Three of Lu Xun's Prose Writings

In this issue, we have published three prose writings by Lu Xun. The first is a postscript to an earlier collection of prose writings entitled *The Grave*, which contains twenty-three articles written between 1907 and 1925. Of these, nineteen are miscellaneous essays written in the vernacular between 1918 and 1925. The other four articles were written in the classical language between 1907 and 1908. Thus Lu Xun himself described it as a "hotchpotch of essays written in classical Chinese as well as in the vernacular".

This postscript was written in November 1926, after Lu Xun had just left Beijing to teach at Xiamen University in Fujian. On 18th March of that year, the warlord government in Beijing had suppressed and massacred young patriotic students. Since Lu Xun supported the students and was prominent in the struggles, he was so persecuted by the despotic government that he had to flee south. He remained only a few months at Xiamen University, resigning at the end of that year. In January 1927, he went to teach at the Sun Yat Sen University in Guangzhou. There he also remained only a few months because of the change in the political situation. Guangzhou was the revolutionary centre from where the Guomindang and Chinese Communists joined forces to launch the Northern Expedition against the northern warlords. In April 1927, however,

Jiang Jieshi (Chiang Kai-shek) sabotaged the revolution and started a reign of terror, massacring many Communists and other progressives. Some of the students at Sun Yat Sen University were arrested and killed. In indignation, Lu Xun resigned and went to Shanghai in October 1927. He remained there for the rest of his life.

When Lu Xun wrote this postscript, he had just witnessed the cruel suppression of young students by the northern warlord government. This showed him clearly the savagery of those in power and the treachery and hypocrisy of the so-called gentlemen scholars who supported the reactionary government. This event demonstrated vividly the existence of the two camps. Xiamen University where he lived was like a stagnant pool without any revolutionary struggle. Lu Xun therefore felt depressed and expressed his sorrow and indignation in this article. At the end of this essay, he quoted some lines written by Lu Ji, a Jin-dynasty poet, in mourning for Cao Cao, the outstanding Han-dynasty statesman and strategist, who succeeded in uniting north China and in creating the Wei Dynasty. Though a great man, in his will he showed that he still cared for his clothes, insignia and singing girls at his funeral. Lu Xun used this to compare his own concern for his past writings. Although Lu Xun was very depressed at this time, yet his fighting spirit was never weakened by the cruel persecution of the reactionary government or the slanders of those gentlemen scholars. As he described in one of his short stories, he was like a red camellia tree with its blossoms ablaze in the winter snow, the harshness of the winter only making it bloom more fiercely.

Lu Xun was always a revolutionary fighter. Literature must serve the needs of the revolution and bow before the requirements of the struggle. This was his firm and unshakable conviction. From his youth he had vowed to give his life for China. As a student in Japan, he had given up his medical studies to dedicate himself to literature so that he might awaken the masses. He was opposed to those writers who only wrote to vaunt their literary talents and dreamt of immortal fame. He was also against those who wrote for no serious purpose, but simply to air their views.

Lu Xun believed that literature must serve the revolution, and so he said modestly that all he had written was on the orders of others. It was for this reason that he never tried to write a long novel or concentrated on poetry. Instead he expended his creative energies on writing miscellaneous essays, which he felt were a weapon like a dagger or spear, which in close combat with the enemy could deal a swift mortal blow. He mentioned in his postscript that his purpose was to give some pleasure to those who liked his writings and nauseate those who detested them.

Lu Xun understood that writing was a serious revolutionary task, and that a writer should not write as he pleased, ignoring his responsibility to his readers. Since literature was a weapon, then it must be handled with care like a dagger or spear so that it would not harm one's supporters. Lu Xun abhorred those gentlemen scholars who, claiming to teach young people, led them astray to destruction and death. In this postscript he wrote: "In the course of my search, I fear my unripe fruit may have poisoned those partial to it, while those creatures who detest me — like those so-called respectable gentlemen — will live to a ripe old age . . . even today when I want to write something I still fear that it may poison or injure young people of his kind, and hesitate to take up my pen." Lu Xun's remarks do not mean he had no direction. Rather it shows the serious attitude of this revolutionary fighter.

Because his enemies were afraid of his essays, they slandered him as a jack-of-all-trades who could only produce polemics but no great literature, no immortal masterpiece. Other well-intentioned friends feared that he was unable to concentrate his energies on writing great novels. Lu Xun, however, scorned those who attacked him and rejected the advice of those friends. He remained seeing soberly and clearly the militant nature of progressive literature and the duty of a revolutionary writer. Thus he modestly wrote in this essay: "But I have no gushing fountain of ideas, no great, magnificent writings; neither have I any theory to expound nor desire to start some movement." He stated later: "While everything is in a state of flux, there must be many intermediate creatures. . . . At a time when a start is made in reforming writing, it is natural, inevitable and necessary to have a

few writers who are neither fish nor fowl. Their task, after an initial awakening, is to utter new cries; and because they come from the old camp and have a clearer idea of the situation, when they turn against their own side it is easy to deal the strong foe a mortal blow. However, they too should fade away with the light and gradually disappear; for at most they are single planks or stones in a bridge, not the future goal or model. Those who succeed them should be different. . . . they should show a newer spirit." As a writer in an age of great revolutionary changes, Lu Xun thought only about how to make his work serve the revolution better. He was prepared to be that single plank or stone and he never concerned himself with writing for immortality. The year before he wrote this essay, he had written a prose poem entitled *Dead Fire*, which expressed this idea. The subject of this prose poem found himself in a valley of ice where he found the dead fire. When his warmth touched the dead fire, it revived and began burning again. Finally the subject and the dead fire leapt up and left the valley, whereupon they were crushed by the wheels of a cart. At the end of the poem, Lu Xun wrote: ". . . And I laughed with delight as I spoke, as if pleased that this had happened." So Lu Xun tried to show that he cared nothing for immortal fame. As a fighter, his task was to nurture the fires of revolution. In this, I believe, lies his true greatness.

The second essay entitled *A Correspondence on Themes for Short Stories* was written in December 1932, after Lu Xun had settled in Shanghai. The two young writers, Sha Ding and Ai Wu, are now well-known writers of short stories. They had then just begun to write and realized that literature was a revolutionary task. They wished to embark on this serious work, hoping that their writings could make a useful contribution to their times. They were aware, however, that the themes they could use were limited since they were both petty-bourgeois intellectuals. They could therefore only portray the weaknesses, revealed or latent, of their class or the unconscious will to revolt and the strong instinct for survival of the oppressed masses. They were as yet unfamiliar with the proletariat who were engaged in the struggle. Lacking experience, they did not wish to create fictitious characters who turned revolu-

tionary overnight, and, as was fashionable in those days, claim they had created revolutionary or proletarian literature. On receiving their letter, Lu Xun saw that they were serious in wishing through their writings to make some contribution to the revolutionary period. He therefore warmly encouraged them and gave them some important advice. He pointed out in his reply that if a man "is a proletarian engaged in the struggle, provided that what he writes can become a work of art, then no matter what events he describes or what material he uses, it will certainly make a significant contribution to the present as well as the future." Of course the choice of themes is very important. Today we exhort our writers to choose revolutionary themes and portray revolutionary heroes. The theme, however, does not decide everything. What is of prime importance is that the writer himself should be a revolutionary engaged in the struggle. Without strong class feelings and a correct world outlook, a writer with a significant theme cannot produce a work which will inspire the people and his heroic characters will not be true to life.

Lu Xun further pointed out: "The literary works of other classes have nothing to do with the proletariat engaged in the struggle." By this he meant that the petty-bourgeois writers and writers of other classes were limited in their understanding by their class prejudice and could not truthfully reflect the objective reality. He later added: "However, in present-day China, I believe both themes you mentioned still have some *raison d'être*. As regards the petty-bourgeoisie, other classes cannot understand it so well; when you attack it and tear off its mask, you should be able to deal more powerful blows than those unfamiliar with it. As for the lower classes, as life is constantly changing, future writers may be too late to see such situations; so when you jot down the passing scene, at least this will serve as a record of this period. Hence such writings have meaning for both the present and the future. But if you are 'familiar' with something, that does not necessarily mean that what you describe is 'correct' and it is the task of the critic with a correct viewpoint to point out what is significant, so that its significance will be brought out more clearly and amplified." Here Lu Xun raised the important question about

a united front in literature and the allied forces of proletarian literature. Whether in Lu Xun's time or in our present period after Liberation, we cannot demand that all our writers create a hundred-per-cent proletarian literature. Many of our writers still have a problem in remoulding their outlook. Lu Xun felt that all young progressive writers should write whatever they could and he was against self-styled "proletarian literature" with fictitious characters suddenly transformed into revolutionary heroes. He pointed out, however, that petty-bourgeois writers should not remain content with this, and make no further progress, otherwise they would destroy whatever contribution they had made. Since at that time, the two young writers were in Shanghai, in a Guomindang controlled area, they were unable to have contact with the masses and the proletariat engaged in the struggle. When Lu Xun advised them to write on whatever themes they could, he did not suggest they remain closeted apart from the people. If Lu Xun had been in Yanan or alive in China today, he would have urged young writers to go among the masses to remould their world outlook and produce better works. At the end of this letter, he wrote: "Since both of you are young and progressive, resolved to make some contribution to our times, by then you are bound by degrees to have overcome your old way of life and thinking and to see a new way." Here he warmly encourages these young writers and shows what he expects from them.

The last piece, *Notes After Reading*, was written in 1934. In this, Lu Xun discussed whether literature has universal and eternal qualities. He felt such qualities could only be relative, not absolute. He argued: "Literature has its limitations as well as its universal qualities. And some relatively lasting works change according to the readers' experience of life. . . . Anything subject to change is not everlasting. Only dreamers, talking in their sleep, can claim that literature alone is immortal." In this essay, Lu Xun took Lin Daiyu, the chief character in the famous 18th-century Chinese classical novel, *A Dream of Red Mansions*, as an example. Through the tragedy of its main heroine, Lin Daiyu, a young girl from an official family, the novel depicts the decline and collapse of a wealthy, noble family in the late feudal period. Its author,

Cao Xueqin lived in the early part of the 18th century, and the family and characters he described are typical of that particular period and society. Mei Lanfang, a famous Beijing opera artist, had at the beginning of this century produced a Beijing opera entitled *Lin Daiyu Buries the Flowers*, playing the part of the heroine himself. Since the author of the novel and Mei Lanfang were of different epochs, their ideas about the heroine were naturally different. In 1881, a book of lithographs was produced in Shanghai illustrating this novel. Again the artist's portrayal of Lin Daiyu would be different from the author's. Lu Xun also cited two other examples: the burning of books by the first Qin emperor and the massacres carried out by Huang Chao. This showed that people in other periods of history cannot completely understand the behaviour of certain historical personages. It was the first Qin emperor who united China for the first time more than two thousand years ago. Disliking the Confucian scholars and alchemists who spread rumours about him, he ordered their books to be burnt. Huang Chao, a famous peasant leader at the end of the Tang Dynasty, captured Changan, the capital, and is said to have massacred many officials and upper-class people. Today, living in different circumstances, it is hard to understand the psychology of such people. Lu Xun used these examples to show that everything changes as society changes such as ideals of beauty and moral standards. Thus in this sense there is no "eternal" or "everlasting" literature, and Lu Xun wrote this essay to debunk those who claimed to produce immortal literary masterpieces.

Lu Xun was a great modern thinker. Although he did not leave a comprehensive and systematic dissertation on literary theory, in his essays and letters he expressed many penetrating and brilliant ideas about literature. In these three articles he discussed the militant task of a writer, the effect of literature on society, the required stand of a revolutionary writer, the choice of themes, the united front for progressive and proletarian literature, the remoulding of a writer's world outlook and the universal and everlasting qualities of literature. All these ideas are useful guides for our writers today.



Sheltering from Rain

Paintings by Li Kuchan



Lotus at Dawn



Eagle



Fledglings



Canna and Birds



Narcissus



Egret



Plum Blossom

Fan Zeng

Li Kuchan, Painter of Flowers and Birds

The two main schools of traditional Chinese painting are the *gong-bi-hua* (painting with meticulous detail) and the *xie-yi-hua* (painting in the impressionistic manner). Artists of both schools, however, emphasize that the painting itself must express both the form and spirit of the subject and convey the artist's personal feelings. Li Kuchan is a follower of the *xie-yi-hua* school and excels in painting flowers and birds.

He was born Li Ying, of a poor peasant family in Shandong Province in 1898. His childhood was poor and he often went hungry. Loving nature, he drew on the ground with a stick or a piece of broken tile and he caught birds or insects to observe them carefully. He spent his spare time trying to sketch them. If he visited a temple or met some folk artists painting gods, demons or scenes from operas, he was enchanted and memorized every detail.

Since he was poor, it was difficult for him to study art. In 1919, he went to Beijing, where he managed to join a group of poor



Li Kuchan

students studying part-time at a school attached to Beijing University and working part-time. Later he was able to enter the National School of Fine Arts and studied Western painting. In the evenings he pulled rickshaws to earn money for his food and school fees. Sometimes he could only afford to eat a coarse flour gruel, and he collected old pencil stubs thrown away by other students for his sketches.

He was fortunate that through some amateur artists attached to Beijing University he came in contact with the famous artist, Xu Beihong (1895-1953), who helped him in his studies. In 1923, he became a student of another famous artist, Qi Baishi (1864-1957), who was a master of the impressionistic school. Recognizing Li

Kuchan's talents, Qi Baishi not only refused to take fees from him, but even helped him with expenses, placing high hopes in him.

In 1925, after graduating from art college, Li Kuchan became an art teacher, first at the Hangzhou Art College and then at the Central Academy of Fine Arts in Beijing. He remained a teacher for fifty years.

During his youth, Li Kuchan had witnessed and taken part in the various movements against feudal warlords and imperialist aggressors prompted by a sense of patriotism and justice. Because of his revolutionary sympathies, he was imprisoned, beaten and tortured. After he was released, he made a seal for his paintings on which he inscribed: "On being released alive from prison". After this, his paintings of flowers and birds gained a new depth. They were no longer merely his observations, but reflected his thoughts and feelings about society. On one of his paintings he inscribed: "There are still people starved to death on the road," showing his hatred for the reactionary regime of the time.

The victory of the Chinese revolution gave him a new inspiration. After the founding of the People's Republic in 1949, Chairman Mao wrote a letter to Xu Beihong, then president of the Central Academy of Fine Arts, asking him to show concern for Li Kuchan and help him in his work. Since then, Li Kuchan has worked with an even greater energy and explored new areas in his art.

Li Kuchan not only learnt from the two great modern masters, Xu Beihong and Qi Baishi, but also from traditional Chinese painting. He made a careful study of the history of the *xie-yi-hua* school in order to make his contribution to the development of this school. He spent days studying some ancient paintings and stated that an artist must "enter and emerge from an ancient painting seven times"; that he must absorb it into his being and then transform it into something new. Qi Baishi once wrote of Li Kuchan's paintings: "I have as many as a thousand pupils. Most learn my technique, but Li Ying has touched my heart." This shows Li Kuchan's originality.

Believing that an artist must study nature, Li Kuchan made countless sketches, to capture fleeting impressions swiftly and accurately. He said: "Sketching trains the hand and

eyes and makes the hand co-ordinate with the mind. Each stroke should be firm, accurate and bold." When he taught at Hangzhou Art College, he concealed himself among the reeds at the West Lake so as to observe the birds and the lotus flowers at dawn and at dusk. At home, he would try to recapture these scenes in his paintings. He has a special feeling for birds and flowers. He can paint accurately and quickly from memory. Each stroke is correct and vigorous.

Li Kuchan's style is the result of his tortuous path in life and dedicated study of traditional art. His early works showed his vigour and accuracy; those of his later years have a greater freedom and depth. His style is unique though he has sometimes been compared to his contemporary, Pan Tianshou, an artist who also excelled in painting flowers and birds and who unfortunately died in 1971 because of persecution by the "gang of four". While they are both masters of the impressionistic school, their art is quite different. Pan Tianshou's paintings have an eccentric quality, while Li Kuchan's have a grandeur and depth.

The birds Li Kuchan excels in painting are the eagle, egret, cormorant, quail, mynah and others; the plants are the plantain, bamboo, lotus, chrysanthemum and winter plum. He tries not only to paint nature accurately, but also to create new images. Since 1977 Li Kuchan has painted many eagles, one of which was reproduced in *Chinese Literature* No. 3, 1978. On the painting is inscribed: "With proud eyes the eagle waits for the chance to strike." Perched on a high cliff, the eagle gazes at the sky about to fly.

Li Kuchan has followed especially the tradition of the famous 17th century Ming flower-and-bird artist, Zhu Da (Ba-da-shan-ren), and further developed it. In Zhu Da's paintings the birds have an air of aloofness, showing the artist's escapist attitude to life. Li Kuchan's birds, however, are always innocent and friendly.

He is particularly skilled at capturing the sudden movements of birds such as when they seek food, play with each other or seek a mate. He often paints the body of the bird first, before the head and neck, to which he pays great attention. In one painting, a

cock is craning its neck to find something to eat beside a large rock. Li Kuchan manages to convey the bird's desire for food.

His paintings in their composition break past conventions. Grandeur is often present in his art, suggested by backgrounds of high mountains, deep valleys or vast lakes. The paintings done in his latter years have an even greater boldness and variety.

In traditional Chinese ink painting, the ink shows the different shades of colour. Most painters employ thick, dry and light ink. Li Kuchan, however, shows a greater variety than others. He uses mainly ink in his paintings and sometimes light colours, though rarely strong ones. Thus his paintings have a certain mellowness, offsetting the vigorous brush strokes.

Not only a master of the impressionistic school, Li Kuchan is a very fine and bold calligrapher. Recently for an exhibition held in Beijing commemorating the poems written during the Tien An Men Incident in 1976, he wrote a scroll with these words: "Indomitable courage, magnificent spirit!" His calligraphy was widely acclaimed.

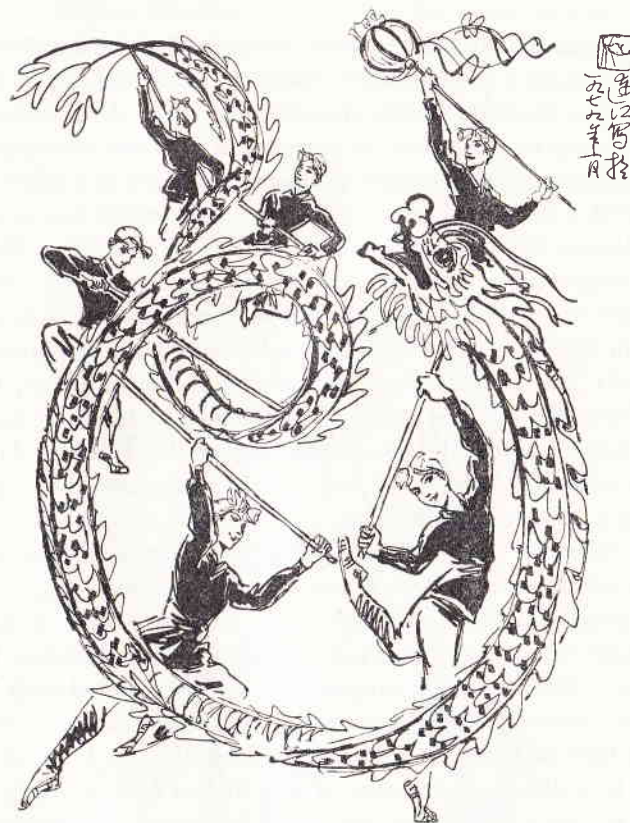
While the "gang of four" was in power, Li Kuchan in sorrow and indignation refused to paint except for his best friends and family. After the downfall of the gang, he immediately produced a magnificent painting of a red plum tree in blossom welcoming the sun. This expressed the joy of this eighty-year-old artist and his faith in the Party, the government and in the future of China.

Liu Enbo

Dragon-Dance

The dragon-dance is a folk dance of Han origin popular throughout China. The dragon is a mythological creature symbolizing good fortune and power. In the past it was thought it could summon the rain, avert disasters and cure diseases.

In different parts of China there are a variety of stories about the origin of the dragon-dance. One story tells of how the Dragon King fell ill and was unable to find a doctor in the sea who could cure him. He therefore changed into an old man and entered the world of men where he consulted many doctors. None was able to diagnose what ailed him, until at last he saw a noted doctor. Feeling his pulse the doctor found it was quite different from a human being's. The Dragon King was forced to admit his identity and told the doctor that his waist was sore and itched all the time. The doctor said he could only diagnose his illness if he changed back into a dragon. A dragon seldom liked mortals to see him in his real form, but the Dragon King had no choice but to comply. On an appointed day, the doctor went to the seaside to meet the Dragon King who appeared from the water. On examining his patient, the doctor found a centipede burrowed beneath a scale at the dragon's waist. The insect was removed and the Dragon King recovered after some medicinal



Dragon-Dance

powder had been applied to the sore area. To express his gratitude, the Dragon King told the doctor to make a model dragon and wave it around each year so that the weather would be fair, disasters would be averted and diseases cured.

Dragon-dances have been popular since ancient times. Everywhere its head is similar, but the tails vary in different places. This is because the Dragon King is said to have dived into the sea the moment he finished speaking, so that the doctor barely saw his tail.

Thus his tail is modelled on that of a fish, either forked or fan-shaped.

These legends reflect the people's desire for happiness and prosperity. In the past, some peasants made straw dragons and danced with them in the paddy-fields after the planting of the rice shoots, believing they would get rid of insects and help the rice to grow well. In some areas, dragon-dances were performed after the building of a new house, to show that the house would last as long as the dragon, and that the family would enjoy a prosperous life.

The dragon-dance became loved by the people and was always performed at the Spring Festival and at temple fairs. A famous poet, Xin Qiji (1140-1207), once depicted vividly a dragon-dance he witnessed: The lanterns shone as gaily as spring blossoms; fireworks burst like dazzling stars. Accompanied by beautiful music, dragon lanterns and fish-lanterns were performing a joyous dance.

After years of refinement by its folk-artist performers, the dragon-dance had become a work of art and had been enriched in many ways. There are several kinds of dragon-dances, but the most popular are the dragon-lantern and the cloth-dragon ones.

The dragon-lantern from head to tail consists of three or some dozen tubes of bamboo splints covered with paper and painted like a dragon. Each section is joined to the next by coloured cloth and a lighted candle can be placed in it. A wooden handle is fixed to each tube so that the performer can hold it. In front of the dragon is a dancer who carries a large ribbon ball to entice the dragon to dance. The rich and colourful movements consist of rolling, tail-wagging and many others. The dragon-lantern dance is lively and enchanting and is often performed on festival nights. In some areas firecrackers and fireworks are set off so that the dragon swims and rolls among the sparks to the accompaniment of drums and gongs. Thus a lively festive atmosphere is created.

The cloth-dragon differs slightly from the dragon-lantern. Made of colourful cloth or silk, each section is joined to the other by the same material. It is performed in the daytime, and there are always two dragons playing together. The cloth-dragon is light and easily manoeuvred, so that it can be performed even on benches.

Other dragon-dances are performed with the straw-dragon, the flowered-dragon, the bench-dragon and the paper-dragon. These are common to certain areas. In south China, for example, the straw-dragon dance is performed. The dragon is made of straw, green cane or willow twigs. Burning incense is attached all over the dragon so that it looks very beautiful, especially when the dance is performed at night. In Zhejiang Province, the flowered-dragon

Dragon-Dance



is common. It is made up of various kinds of flower lanterns held by seventeen performers, each holding the handle of a lantern. They sing while dancing and their chanting and movements are beautiful and graceful. The bench-dragon dance is most popular in Yunnan, Hunan and Henan Provinces. The model dragon is made from a bench, coloured silk or straw. It is performed by two dancers, each of whom holds the front and back legs of the bench. In Hunan Province, the paper-dragon dance is most prevalent. The dragon is made from a strip of paper about a dozen metres long and a decimetre wide, which is attached to a short stick. The solo performer twirls the stick so that the paper whirls and curves around him.

Dragon-dances are a widespread and popular national cultural tradition. They are performed in the streets, the threshing grounds and even in courtyard homes, where the audience sings their appreciation during the performance to the host who then gives an eulogy to express his thanks. Young, middle-aged men, women and children can take part. There is a saying: "Children perform as straw-dragons, young people as little dragons and adults as large dragons."

Since the founding of the People's Republic in 1949, this traditional folk dance has been improved by artists following the policy of refining the old to encourage the new. Now the dragon-dance is also performed on the stage and the lighting, gauze curtain and other effects have enhanced the artistic impression.

Sketches by Hu Lianjiang

Gong Hede

Chinese Opera Facial Designs

Facial make-up is a special art in traditional Chinese opera. The main types of roles are *sheng* (gentleman), *dan* (lady), *jing* (ruffian, warrior or treacherous characters) and *chou* (clown or rogue). For the *sheng* and *dan* roles the make-up is plain or *sumian*, whereas for the *jing* and *chou* roles it is elaborate and colourful to express the character and physiognomy of the role. This more elaborate make-up is called *huamian*, and it is from this that the art is derived.

Before the advent of traditional Chinese opera, songs, dances and farces had been performed for centuries with facial make-up or masks. According to the records, masks were used for singing and dancing in religious rites as early as the 5th century B.C. Later these were adopted by traditional drama. Facial designs, however, were not derived from masks, though there were some influences. Rather it was a development of facial make-up.

Make-up was first used in the Tang Dynasty (618-907) and, during the Song (960-1279) and Jin (1115-1234) Dynasties, it was mainly divided into the plain make-up of the *sheng* and *dan* roles and the colourful one of the *chou* role, with a white patch in the middle of the face and two around the eyes. This was the earliest form of facial design.



The white face

The *Jing* facial designs are richer; they have developed from crude and simple designs into elaborate and fine ones. They developed as the plots, characterization and acting techniques improved. In the Yuan Dynasty (1271-1368) many tough, courageous positive roles were created, which gave rise to the facial make-up of positive characters. Early 15th-century murals show these early designs were still rather simple. It was only in the 17th and 18th centuries, when the *jing* roles were fully developed, that their facial make-up was improved and enriched. During the middle of the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644) struggles within the feudal ruling class increased, and this was reflected in the operas. Corrupt nobles, eunuchs and powerful officials began to appear on stage, further developing the *jing* roles. In the middle Qing Dynasty (1644-1911), *jing* roles were both positive and negative characters, with their faces painted red, black and white. Beijing opera



The three-patched
face

reached its zenith in the 19th century and the art of facial make-up was raised to a higher level. Facial designs of other local operas also improved.

It was the folk artists who developed the art of facial designs, carefully observing the facial contours and acting techniques as well as applying their experiences and imagination. These improvements were approved of and encouraged by the people. As Lu Xun said: "Facial designs were discussed and evolved after a gradual process of mutual participation by the actors and the audience."

Beijing opera facial designs have been divided into the following types. The simplest is the single-colour face, in which only one colour is applied, either red, black or white. The eyes and eyebrows are outlined in black paint, or in the case of a black face in white paint. Positive characters wear this. On a white face,

lines are also drawn to show expressions and these are extremely important. They are drawn according to the contours and for decorative effect. A flying bat, for example, is drawn between the brows to indicate frowning wrinkles. This design is used for rich, treacherous nobles.

Most common of all designs is the three-patched face. The brows, eyes and nose are exaggerated in black to achieve the effect of bushy eyebrows and highlight the eyes. In another design the eyes slant downwards. Some designs can be elaborate and colourful. All these are used for positive and negative characters, or those with shortcomings.

Another type of facial design is the cross face and the sixty per-cent face. For the cross face, a black cross is painted on the face. The eyes form the horizontal line while the vertical one is drawn from the top of the forehead to the tip of the nose. The cheeks



The cross face

are painted pink. If the cheeks are painted black, red or purple so that the coloured patches make up sixty per-cent of the whole face as compared to forty per-cent of the white forehead, then it is given the name the sixty per-cent facial design. The brows are drawn like two fighting moths. Such a design is used for vigorous old men.

The colourful face design is the most elaborate. Sometimes colours such as blue or green dominate and when a red beard is added, the effect is one of fierceness.

In a crooked face design, the pattern is unsymmetrical to express the unpleasant nature of the character. Animal patterns are drawn on the face which have a mythological significance. There are also special facial designs for eunuchs, monks and others.

Great skill is required to create these highly decorative facial designs. As well as exaggerating the facial characteristics of the



The butterfly face



The monk face

person, a good facial design should also express his character through the colours and lines. A black face represents different characters with its various patterns. In *Lord Bao Apologizes*, a Jilin opera described in this issue of our magazine, Bao Zheng is a just and impartial official who corrects wrong judicial verdicts. His knitted brows express his anxiety over the numerous wrong verdicts he had to deal with. The new moon on his forehead is open to several interpretations. One is that it represents a scar from a horse's hoof, which he received when he was a boy shepherd. Another is that he is the ray of light in a dark age, for just officials were rare. The representation of characters owes much to the rich imagination of the people and the attitudes of the actors and audience to the roles. *Monkey Creates Havoc in Heaven* is a mythological opera based on the well-known Chinese classic, *Pilgrimage to the West*, in which the Monkey King chal-



The "unparalleled" face

leges the King of Heaven. He is a symbol of those who rebelled against feudalism. The role is an acrobatic one and the facial design represents a monkey and shows his intelligence and optimism. The facial make-up of the gods and heavenly generals shows their cruelty and foolishness. This expresses how people in ancient times ridiculed and hated their oppressors.

Yan Zhenfen

A Local Opera from Northeast China

Jilin opera, from Jilin Province in northeast China, is a new kind of opera derived from a simple duet folk act popular for the past two hundred years among the people in the three northeastern provinces of Heilongjiang, Liaoning and Jilin. Before Liberation, Jilin had no local opera and this duet was performed by a man and a woman dancing, singing, reciting and miming. In 1959, Jilin opera was developed on the basis of this local duet act, using its most representative melodies and adapting some of its popular tunes as theme songs for operas. The *ban* fiddle and *suona*, which were commonly used for the duet, with the addition of the classical *zheng* and other national instruments provide the musical accompaniment. As well as the five main forms of the duet act, such as singing, dancing, mime, recitation and hand motions with a fluttering handkerchief, fan or silk sash, Jilin opera also borrows from other opera forms. A speciality of Jilin opera is the artist's hand motions, and particularly attractive are the dance movements with a colourful handkerchief adapted from the original duet. In the twenty years since its creation, the Jilin opera repertoire consists of operas using both historical and modern

themes. Of these *Lord Bao Apologizes* and *Yan Qing Sells Thread* are the best known.

Lord Bao Apologizes tells the story of Bao Zheng, the Song-Dynasty (960-1279) honest official, who was much loved by the people. Sent by his emperor to take grain to relieve the refugees in Chenzhou, on passing through Shaxian County a group of peasants stopped his sedan-chair to complain about the local magistrate, Bao Mian, a tyrant who accepted bribes and who abused his office, forcing people to commit suicide and oppressing others. His corruption even extended to appropriating the grain sent by the government to relieve the refugees, so that they died of hunger. Although Bao Mian was the son of Lord Bao's own brother, Lord Bao investigated and proved the charges brought by the people were correct and so had his nephew executed.

Before continuing his journey, Lord Bao went to inform his sister-in-law, Wang Fengying, the mother of Bao Mian, about her son's corruption and execution. Heart-broken, Wang accused Lord Bao as an ungrateful brute, who had forgotten all her past kindness to him. Lord Bao had been orphaned as a young child and Wang had raised him. Wang, a widow with only one son, Bao Mian, was grief-stricken; she spoke of the past, demanding how Lord Bao could be so callous and ruthless as to condemn and execute her son.

He listened calmly to her accusations and then laid before her the evidence against her son, case by case, until at last she realized the truth about her son. As a mother, however, she found it hard to forgive her brother-in-law. With the utmost patience and tact, Lord Bao explained that he had no alternative and begged her forgiveness. Finally he removed his black gauze hat, symbolizing his official status, unsheathed his sword and knelt before Wang. He told her that he would willingly die if she found it impossible to forgive him, but at that moment because he must fulfil his mission to take grain to the thousands of starving refugees in Chenzhou, he must ask for time until his mission was finished. Then he promised to return and accept her punishment. Wang, touched by

his uprightness and dedication, dried her tears and kneeling beside him, she criticized herself for not having been strict with her son and prevented his corruption. Ordering her servants to bring wine, she filled Lord Bao's cup and wished him a safe journey to Chenzhou.

This opera portrays Lord Bao as an honest and dedicated official, who loves his sister-in-law deeply. The contradictions between him and Wang, between his duty and personal feelings, add a dramatic note to the opera. There are several highlights, such as the powerful and melodious long solo Lord Bao sings when he returns to face Wang after executing her son; or when Wang sings on learning of Bao Mian's death in which she expresses her grief and desolation. Such moving passages express well the emotions and temperaments of the characters.

Yan Qing Sells Tbread is an opera which emphasizes acting techniques. Based on an anecdote from the Chinese classical novel, *Outlaws of the Marshes*, it tells of the travels of Yan Qing and Shi Qian, two brave fighters from a peasant insurgent army at Liangshan during the Song Dynasty. They are travelling to Shenzhou disguised as a pedlar and a beggar to persuade a young woman fighter, Ren Xiuying and her brother to join the insurgent forces at Liangshan. Her late teacher, Iron Arhat, once fought a duel with Yan Qing. At that time Iron Arhat was getting old and had found it hard to defeat Yan Qing. He had, therefore, accepted the suggestion of the wicked prefect of Shenzhou to catch Yan Qing unawares with an arrow. Yan Qing, however, caught the arrow before it struck him, but was reluctant to use it against the older man. While he was holding it, the prefect stopped the contest on the grounds that Yan Qing had broken the rules by using an arrow. Three years later, when Iron Arhat died, the wicked prefect tricked Ren Xiuying and her brother into believing that Yan was to blame so that they hated the heroes of Liangshan. At the prefect's instigation, they printed invitations to invite local fighters to a display of the martial arts planning to oppose the insurgents at Liangshan.

The opera starts with the arrival of Yan Qing and Shi Qian in Shenzhou. Shi, confident of his martial skills, slipped into Ren's house without Yan's approval, in an attempt to steal the invitations. Ren, prepared for this, had hidden the invitations in her pockets, while placing an empty box on the table. Arriving at Ren's home, Shi only secured the empty box, thinking the invitations were inside. Yan Qing, meanwhile, dressed as a pedlar selling needles and thread, cried his wares outside Ren's house. Meeting Ren, in a very clever way, he made her understand what really happened between him and Iron Arhat. Showing her the arrow which he had kept with her former teacher's mark on it, he convinced her of the truth and persuaded her and her brother to help the heroes of Liangshan. Together they captured the city of Shenzhou. The opera ends on a comical note, with Ren telling Shi Qian he only stole an empty box.

This opera presents a dramatic story in the form of a comedy. It pays tribute to the insurgent heroes, who weakened the enemy and strengthened their own forces. There are certain features which are peculiar to this opera. The artist playing the role of Shi Qian, for example, adapts the Beijing opera acrobatic dance movements in the scene where he attempts to steal the invitations. On entering the room, he nimbly hides under the table. Then he hops on to it but quickly jumps down again to hide from a maid, until finally he makes his getaway through the window with the box. Also outstanding are Yan Qing's pedlar's dance and Ren Xiuying's sword dance. The dances are carefully integrated into the plot. The intricate hand movements, characteristic of Jilin opera, are cleverly introduced. For example, when Shi Qian is about to steal the box, he first lifts the cloth covering it and lightly tosses it towards the audience. The cloth swirls overhead in the air before he catches it again. Such a gesture denotes his elation at having succeeded in getting the invitations.

Jilin opera therefore has a vivid local flavour and is a good vehicle for presenting historical and modern themes. During the period when the "gang of four" controlled culture, Jilin opera like

everything else was suppressed, its troupes disbanded and its artists compelled to change their profession. Since the downfall of the "gang of four", however, this local opera has flourished again.



A New-Year Gathering of Writers and Artists

On January 2, this year, the All-China Federation of Literary and Art Circles sponsored a New-Year gathering in Beijing, with more than 300 noted Chinese writers, poets and artists attending it. At the gathering, the newly-appointed director of the Propaganda Department of the Party Central Committee, Hu Yaobang, urged writers and artists to be "the people's singers" and to develop their talents so as to supply the people with the best possible mental food. He said, the Party's close relations with literary and art circles were damaged by Lin Biao and the "gang of four" who did their utmost to persecute our writers and artists. He stressed the need to restore the Party's traditional close relations with literary and art circles.

The Minister of Culture Huang Zhen also spoke. He said: "Emphasis should be placed on the 'blossoming' of all arts. In carrying out the principle of letting a hundred flowers blossom and a hundred schools of thought contend, writers and artists must be given complete freedom to publish, criticize, discuss, and comment on literary and art works."

"When All Sounds Are Hushed" Acclaimed

The play *When All Sounds Are Hushed* has been highly praised by people in literary and art circles as well as the audiences since

its staging in Beijing at the end of last year. The editorial boards of *Wenyi Bao* (Literary Gazette) and *Renmin Xiju* (People's Drama) and the China Federation of Dramatists sponsored a forum, at which the play was praised for its political message. The play was described as a truthful description of the heroic struggle of the revolutionary masses against the "gang of four".

The poet He Jingzhi, author of the modern opera *The White-Haired Girl*, said the play was "an important work in the history of Chinese literature and art". He continued: "Literary and art works must raise important social questions which concern millions of people and answer them correctly according to the will of the people. *When All Sounds Are Hushed* has done just this. It reflects the spirit of our times and arouses a strong response from the audience."

Wu Xue, a well-known director, said: "*When All Sounds Are Hushed* is unprecedented in dealing with this very topical theme." The literary critic, Chen Huangmei, said that the play was successful in portraying "real people in real situations. . . . It is a good portrayal of the 'militant generation' like Ouyang Ping who distributes poems from Tien An Men Square and does his best to expose the 'gang of four'. In the past ten years, because of the influence of the gang, some young people became decadent and committed crimes, and some were painfully disappointed, but many who saw clearly were courageous in the battle like Ouyang Ping."

This play was first staged by workers in Shanghai in September last year. Now more than twenty drama groups in Beijing are performing it.

The Tibetan Epic "Geser" Republished

Geser, the well-known Tibetan epic, was republished recently. With more than 1,500,000 lines, it was sung or recited by artists in Xizang (Tibet) for the last 800 years. Later it was written down in Tibetan and became popular among the Tibetans in Xizang, Qinghai, Sichuan, Yunnan and Gansu and among the Mongolians in Nei Monggol (Inner Mongolia) Autonomous Region. It was regarded as a treasure of world literature.

With King Geser as its main character, this long narrative poem describes the life and struggle of the ancient Tibetan people. It is the source of many later Tibetan folk tales, paintings and music.

After Liberation in 1949, the folk literature research group of the Qinghai Federation of Writers and Artists collected 35 versions of this epic and published part of it in Tibetan and Han. During the period when Lin Biao and the "gang of four" were in power, this epic was regarded as "feudal" and many valuable manuscripts were burned or scattered. After the downfall of the gang, the Qinghai Provincial Party Committee decided that this magnificent poem must be acclaimed once more. They established a special research group to collect materials about it and to publish it in Tibetan and Han.

An Eight-Year Plan for Research in Foreign Literature

A conference was recently held in Guangzhou by the Foreign Literature Institute of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences to plan research in foreign literature. Zhou Yang, the vice-president of the academy and a noted literary critic, urged more people to study and translate foreign literature. An eight-year plan for literary research was drafted and approved by the Chinese Society for Foreign Literature.

The conference was attended by more than 140 noted translators and critics of foreign literature including Cao Jinghua, Feng Zhi and Zhu Guangqian.

More Films Being Shown

A number of films, both Chinese and foreign, are now showing in all parts of China. Among the Chinese films are some new features as well as those condemned by the "gang of four".

Among the new feature films are *The Story of the Revolutionary Wei Bachun* (part one), *The Road Through Storms*, *Not*

One Person's Story Alone and *Storm and Stress*. Old films which had been banned and are now being re-shown include *Threshold of Spring*, *Strong Adverse Wind*, *Waves of the Hong River* and *Ashma*.

Among the foreign films are *Notre Dame de Paris*, a French-Italian joint production, Chaplin's *Modern Times*, *Carve Her Name with Pride*, a British production, and *Vagabond*, an Indian film.

Anthology of American Short Stories Published

A *Selection of American Short Stories* by more than 20 noted writers was recently published in China by the People's Literature Publishing House.

Among these are *The Devil and Tom Walker* by Washington Irving, *Phantom of Gold* by Theodore Dreiser, *The Killers* by Ernest Hemingway, *Running for Governor* by Mark Twain and *What Life Means to Me* by Jack London. *Of the Coming of John*, by the famous black American scholar W. E. B. Du Bois, is also included, as is *Endicott and Red Cross* by Nathaniel Hawthorne, the 19th-century writer. This story depicts the militant spirit of the American people.

Yugoslavian College Students' Choir Visits China

The Yugoslavian College Students' Choir, which was founded by college students and young workers in memory of the outstanding Croatian poet and revolutionary Ivan Goran Kavocic, toured China recently and gave some concerts in Beijing. Their programme included traditional European folk-songs and historical revolutionary ones.

Noted French Conductor Conducts in Beijing

The noted French conductor, Serge Baudo, conducted the Chinese Central Philharmonic Society in Beijing recently. The programme

consisted of Debussy's *Le Prélude à l'après-midi d'un Faune*, Schubert's *Unfinished Symphony No. 8* and Beethoven's *Symphony No. 7 in A Major*. Serge Baudo demonstrated his superb art of conducting and his fine co-operation with the orchestra. The performance was a great success.



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Picking up Feathers (wood-block print)

by **Wu Fan**



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