

UNIVERSAL  
LIBRARY

**OU\_158223**

UNIVERSAL  
LIBRARY



**OSMANIA UNIVERSITY LIBRARY**

Call No. 822.91 / 276 L      Accession No. G10903

Author Kim Tai-yi

Title Lilacs over grow 1962

This book should be returned on or before the date last marked below.



THE  
LILACS  
OVERGROW

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

*Novels*

THE EAVESDROPPER

THE GOLDEN COIN

WAR TIDE

*Nonfiction (Coauthor)*

DAWN OVER CHUNGKING

OUR FAMILY

*Translation*

THE GIRL REBEL



THE  
LILACS  
OVERGROW

*by Lin Tai-yi*



THE WORLD PUBLISHING COMPANY

CLEVELAND AND NEW YORK

PUBLISHED BY *The World Publishing Company*

2231 West 110th Street, Cleveland 2, Ohio

Published simultaneously in Canada by

Nelson, Foster & Scott Ltd.

Library of Congress Catalog Card Number · 60-11459

FIRST EDITION

The quotation from "The Waste Land" from *Collected Poems 1909-1935* by T. S. Eliot, copyright, 1936, by Harcourt, Brace and Company, Inc., is reprinted with their permission and that of the author and Faber and Faber, London.

The lines from *Lyrics from the Chinese*, translated by Helen Waddell, are reprinted by permission of the author and Constable and Company, London.

HC860

Copyright © 1960 by Lin Tai-yi.

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced in any form without written permission from the publisher, except for brief passages included in a review appearing in a newspaper or magazine. Printed in the United States of America.

*For My Parents*



**All the characters in this book are  
fictitious and are not intended to bear any  
resemblance to any actual person.**



April is the cruellest month, breeding  
Lilacs out of the dead land, mixing  
Memory with desire, stirring  
Dull roots with spring rain.

*The Wasteland*, T. S. ELIOT



THE  
LILACS  
OVERGROW





## I

EARLY in the morning one summer's day, Ah Yee stood on the second-story veranda of the Kim family house, wringing washing into the garden, which she strung through bamboo sticks and raised like flagpoles to dry in the sun. She raised flag after flag of wide black cotton trousers, straight white cotton jackets, baby clothes, dish rags, and face towels, and they fluttered gently in the breeze and bedecked the house like a celebration of her hard-working spirit.

When she finished doing this, she put her red hands over the banister and leaned out, her long, ugly face jutting from the eaves like a gargoyle, and peered anxiously down the road for signs of the family's return. Almost everyone in the Kim family had gone to meet Chuli this morning—she was arriving on the steamer from Shanghai for her first visit to her maiden home since the war ended, her first visit to Amoy in ten years. But the new widow naturally had remained at home.

There was no sign of the party, so Ah Yee picked up the baby of six months from its cradle and hastily gave it her breast. As soon as the baby began to suck, however, voices came from the road. She tried to put the baby down again, but the infant hung on to her and would not let go. So with the baby in her

arms and her widow's jacket flying open in front, Ah Yee ran down the stairs into the large central parlor of the house to meet her sister-in-law.

Chuli was just coming up the stone steps. When she saw the widow, she rushed into the parlor with outstretched arms, and raising her naturally loud voice to an astonishing shriek, cried, "I came as soon as I could get away! But I could not come sooner! With the Government moving back to Nanking and everything, and resettling ourselves in our house in Shanghai, there was so much to do. I just couldn't come for the funeral!"

The rest of the family, mostly elderly aunts and female cousins and a few younger girls, came crowding into the parlor with expectant smiles on their faces, and began to take in every detail of what Chuli was wearing, how her hair was done, how her face was made up, and the jewels she was wearing on her fingers and ears. She was their own Chuli, whom everybody knew, but she was also Mrs. Wong Sankuo, wife of the Minister of Education, world-traveled, modern, and unlike the Kim family in Amoy which she had left for so long, and in so many ways. During the war, Chuli had lived in Free China while her maiden family had remained in occupied territory here on the seacoast. But even before that, she had always lived in the large, modern cities of Shanghai, Nanking, or Peiping, and came home only occasionally to pay them a visit. Her life was completely different from theirs, and the family had looked forward to this visit with great excitement.

Chuli was a short, plump woman in her middle fifties, and was wearing a crisp blue-and-white printed nylon dress, nylon stockings, and stylish white leather shoes, and carrying a large matching handbag. She wore spectacles with shell-colored rims, which made her round eyes seem as if they were staring all the time, and her pear-shaped face was made up in the Western fashion with imported foundation cream, powder, and lipstick. She had kept her shining black hair long and straight, and combed it back smartly into a fat bun at the neck. The women remembered that as a child Chuli lost much of her hair after an attack of typhoid fever, and thought that the

bun must be a chignon. All this would be gone into later; now they were busy watching the reunion of the sisters-in-law.

To no one's surprise, Ah Yee had burst into tears, and was holding Chuli's hand. "Chuli! Chuli! What a long time!"

"I know, I know," Chuli said, with a deep frown on her sympathetic face. She put her arm around the nursing widow, and walked with her to the row of stiff-backed chairs against the wall, and sat her down. Shaking her head with pity, Chuli said as she watched the baby suck, "I am so sorry! I am so sorry! Often, I blame myself because I have not done my duty to my own family in Amoy! If you knew how many people I have helped in the Planned-Parenthood Clinics! If you had listened to me long ago, Ah Yee, you would not be nursing a baby at your breast now while my brother lies cold in his grave! And you need not blush, Ah Yee, mother of so many!"

The widow looked helplessly at the others, and an old woman in black, one of Chuli's aunts, came forward and pulled Chuli by the hand. "Now, sit down, sit down, Chuli!" she said, pressing her into a chair. "You have only just arrived, don't start in lecturing us right away!"

Everyone chuckled, and Chuli sat down reluctantly beside the widow, and turned her eyes toward the rest of them in the room.

"Ten years it has been! Imagine!" she cried. "I thought the war would never end! When I saw the children at the wharf this morning, I could scarcely recognize any of them! And Sima! When we were separated, she was a child of twelve. And now she is all grown up, and so pretty. Oh, my, oh, my! How the young ones have shot up while we grow old!"

She took off her spectacles for a moment, and rubbed her eyes with thick, short fingers. Her face was red with emotion. Several of the women wiped their eyes, too. The long years of Japanese occupation had not been easy, much had happened to them all; so many of the old folks were dead, among them Chuli's mother, and now just when the war had ended, the only son of the Kim family, Chuli's older brother Tuako had died, too.

Sima was Tuako's daughter by his first wife, whom Chuli had brought to Shanghai and raised like her own daughter since the girl was five years old, when her mother had died giving birth to her sister Ahua. When the war broke out in 1937 the Minister of Education and his wife were traveling abroad and Sima was spending a summer in Amoy, and so they had been separated for ten years.

Now everyone looked at Sima, and a blush came to her face. The girl, like Chuli, was short and inclined to be plump, and had the characteristic Kim family features, clear round eyes, straight pointed nose, and a face which was rather narrow at the forehead and full around the cheeks and chin. She was a quiet girl, whom the family often praised for her thoughtfulness and willingness to help about the house.

Sima knew that the family was thinking how lucky she was to be going to Shanghai now to live with her aunt again, and she returned their looks with a modest, although straightforward, smile.

For a moment, everyone was carried away by private thoughts, and no one spoke. Then Chuli put on her spectacles again and sighed. "Yes, how time does fly!" she said again, as if to prompt them.

Then the old aunt said, "Yes, we have all grown more wrinkled and old, but you only seem to have become younger, Chuli. Why, you don't even have a white hair to show for all these years!"

"Who says I have no white hairs?" Chuli cried immediately. She quickly bent down, and parted her smooth hair in different places to show them. "Look! They are all underneath!"

Everyone laughed softly, and Ah Yee said, "That's nothing. Look at me, and I am younger than you."

Now Chuli regarded her sister-in-law thoughtfully. "How old are you, Ah Yee?"

"Have you forgotten?" said the widow with a smile. "I am still ten years younger than you. You are fifty-four and I am forty-four."

"Well, it is a crime for a woman past forty to be still bear-

ing children," Chuli said, knitting her brows again. "Naturally your body is all worn out. You remember, after I almost lost my life in that miscarriage, I told Sankuo, 'We have a son. I am perfectly satisfied. Let us stop here.' And I have been clean for more than twenty-five years."

The women all tittered again, and the old aunt said, "Well, you have always been the modern one, Chuli. But I am surprised Sankuo didn't want to have more children. When one is a big official and so prosperous, one should have many children to carry on the line!"

Chuli threw her head back and laughed. "Who thinks about carrying on the line nowadays!" she cried, raising her voice again to an astonishing volume. "These days, when children grow up, each one goes his own way. You cannot keep them at home. One child or half a dozen, what difference does it make?"

"Well," murmured the widow, "not everyone can have things exactly the way she wants it, like you, Chuli. Not everyone is as lucky in life as you."

The rest of the women nodded in agreement, with traces of wistfulness and envy in their eyes. The sunshine streaming in through the wide-open front door was cruel on their careworn faces. White butterflies darted in the garden amidst the green foliage and magnolias.

Chuli bit her lip and shook her head surely. "No," she said slowly, "I don't believe there is any such thing as luck in life. In life we reap what we sow. Our fates lie in our own hands."

Everyone became quiet again, and most of the women thought Chuli was referring to the misfortunes which had struck this family in the recent years. They were a wealthy merchant family who occupied a prominent position in Amoy society; long ago Chuli's father Kim Yek-chiong started a successful business as importing agent of household articles, canned food, and modern plumbing and kitchen fixtures, a line of goods which catered to the luxury trade in Amoy. The firm of Eng Beng with its own warehouse on the wharf was well known all over the town. But when Tuako failed to take his responsibilities at

the firm seriously as his father grew older, business started on the decline. Now with the inflation and uncertain times, Eng Beng was floundering in the hands of the eighty-year-old man, and it looked as if the best days of the family were indeed over.

Finally, Ah Yee conceded, "Maybe you are right, Chuli."

"I know I am right," answered Chuli. "But tell me, I am anxious to know. How did Tuako die so suddenly? It was so sudden, although of course he had been ill for some months."

Now everyone looked at the widow, waiting to hear what she was going to say. Ah Yee, with her infant son asleep now in her arms, stared straight ahead for a moment, as if she had not heard the question. Then her eyes moistened, and she drew her upper lip down firmly over her long, bad teeth, and squared her shoulders, as if to say, "I know nothing. Ask me no questions. Since when have I been able to keep track of that man's comings and goings?"

But after a moment, it was as if something in her had burst; her cheeks streaked with tears, and she spoke with the righteous indignation of someone who had suffered a long time. "Huh, well, in the end it was pneumonia that finished him off—lying there on the veranda all night, with a bottle of brandy in one hand and a lewd book in the other, perspiring all the time." She paused, and waited to see if she was going to be contradicted, and then went on bravely. "But I say this: if it hadn't been pneumonia, it was bound to have been something else. I did all I could. But when a man has lived a dissipated life for twenty, thirty years, it all tells in the end."

She clamped her lips shut, and looked at everyone in cold dignity, and her eyes sparkled with tears. Her long years of suffering since the day she had first set foot in this house as a maidservant seemed to be ending only now. Of the seven children she had given birth to, only four were now alive.

"Well, it is better this way," Chuli said at last, "it is better this way. My brother gave you nothing but trouble when he was living."

The widow burst into tears anew. Feeling very sorry, Chuli

changed the subject. "Where is Ahua?" she said. "I didn't get a good look at her this morning."

The girl Ahua had been sitting on the stone steps outside. Of the two sisters left by Tuako's first wife, Sima had always been thought of by the family as the more serious and promising, while in this large family which was surfeit with girls, Ahua was known chiefly for being a chatterbox and for the unusual interest she took in other people's affairs.

Ahua had been listening to everything which was being said inside, and repeating every word after them to herself, working her lips and face very hard. Now she heard her name being called, she got up and walked into the house, muttering under her breath, "A penny saved is a penny earned. Act in haste, repent at leisure. Think twice before you speak. A stitch in time saves nine." She came in wearing a virtuous expression on her face.

"Come here, let me look at you," Chuli said with a smile.

The girl came forward, and Chuli studied her closely. She was taller and darker than Sima, and wearing a sleeveless white blouse and a blue cotton skirt. Short puffs of hair were brushed against her full, round cheeks, and a thick fringe came down almost to her scraggly eyebrows, beneath which a pair of huge eyes were gazing at her with great curiosity.

Chuli pulled the girl toward herself, and made her sit on her lap as if she were a small child. "But you are as thin as a stick! Look at these wrists! I could snap them between my thumb and finger, they are like matchsticks! How old are you, Ahua?"

"Like matchsticks," said the girl to herself. "Sixteen," she said out loud.

"And look at these shoulder blades sticking out of her back like knives!" Chuli continued. "How come you are so thin?"

"Like knives," thought Ahua. "This is a good, wholesome woman, and she cannot help herself."

"Ahua is just naturally thin, as Sima is naturally round," said Ah Yee. "It isn't she doesn't eat. She eats like everyone else."

"Yes, I am just naturally thin, as Sima is naturally round," said Ahua.

"Well, I shall see what I can do to fatten you up when you come to live with me," said Chuli, patting her round cheeks. "Not that I think your stepmother doesn't feed you properly," she added, afraid that Ah Yee might misunderstand her.

*It is only fair, Ahua remembered from her aunt's letter, that these two sisters should now come to Shanghai together, and have equal opportunity of education and meeting people. My heart would not feel right if I offered the advantages of my home to one, and not to the other. Ahua can continue her education in Shanghai, while for Sima, the question of her marriage has been on my mind a long time. I fully realize that she is twenty-two years old, and a flower does not stay in bloom forever.*

After a little more chatter, Chuli felt weary. Taking Ahua by the hand, she said, "Maybe I had better unpack. Show me where I am to sleep."

Everyone followed her upstairs, and Chuli became a little impatient, and hoped they would leave her alone to rest for a little while before lunch. She was shown to the small back room on the second floor which she had occupied as a child. It was clean and tidy, but she saw at once that no special preparations had been made for her. There was no bowl of flowers picked from the garden, which was so easy to do, or any other sign to make her feel really welcome. Well, when the mother is gone, things like this happen to a family, Chuli thought. What did she really care now about these cousins and in-laws, and they about her? But she was loyal to them. "I will take these two girls off their hands, but that is all I can do," she thought. "The rest . . . the Lord cannot help those who do not help themselves."

At five o'clock in the afternoon, Chuli was lying in her darkened room when Sima lifted the printed cotton curtain and came in from the veranda, carrying a dish of hot food and a pair of chopsticks.

The sky framed in the doorway was milky blue, almost lav-

ender. The magnolia trees in the garden had grown so tall that some of the blooms were overhanging the veranda. The air was full of their fragrance, and Chuli could smell the smoke of a charcoal fire going somewhere, too.

"The old man just came in," said Sima as she came into the room, referring to her grandfather.

"What is this?" said Chuli, sitting up and seeking her slippers with her feet.

"Oyster pancakes. Ah Yee made them for you. Very good."

"To tell you the truth, I was getting a bit hungry," said Chuli. "There was not much to eat at lunch."

"Well," said the girl, with a very serious expression on her face, sitting down beside her aunt, "it is like this. Grandfather has charge of the household money, and so nobody suggested preparing something special for lunch. But these pancakes are Ah Yee's treat. She made just enough for you and us, and she told me to take them in to you and for you to eat them in here."

It was all coming back to Chuli, life in a big family, with so many ears and mouths bent on gossip. "Well, I told your grandfather long ago that big-family life is no longer practical. Everyone drawing from the common well, but no one thinking for the common good." She stood up, and went to the wardrobe and brought out a zippered bag, and took out a stack of money half a foot high. "But for heaven's sake, let us have something decent to eat tonight, my first night home! I'll treat! I'll treat!" She gave the money to Sima. "Will this be enough? Say I am paying for dinner and if this is not enough, tell the cook to come and get more."

"Oh, this is more than enough," said Sima, and gave back half the money to her, "and for goodness' sake, put this money away, Aunt!"

"Well, I know this time I come home, I shan't be leaving without giving something to everyone. They expect it, and I am glad to help, within certain limits," said Chuli as she ate her pancakes. Then she came out of her room with the empty plate and chopsticks, and walked along the veranda quickly until she found the widow in a small smoke-filled room, frying pan-

cakes over a roaring fire behind a closed door. Frowning with concentration, Ah Yee did not look up when Chuli came in. Her own children, each with a plate and a pair of chopsticks, were all eating.

"These were delicious, Ah Yee," Chuli said. "Can you spare a few more?"

"Go ahead, eat them, that's why I made them," said Ah Yee, pointing to a stack she had made.

Chuli picked up four pancakes, and sprinkled pepper and vinegar over them, and turned and went out of the room again without further ado. She went downstairs quickly with the pancakes, and into her father's room at the back of the parlor. Her father was sitting in the dark, head and shoulders hunched over the writing desk. She had seen him already this morning at the pier, and not been happy with how he looked.

"Papa, what are you doing? How can you see?" she said as she came in, and snapped on the light. "Save electricity and ruin your eyes!"

The old man looked up and laid down his pencil.

"Are those the account books of the firm?" She put the dish of pancakes under his nose. "Here, eat these while they are hot," and poured a cup of tea from the teapot for her father.

Kim Yek-chiong eyed the food suspiciously, and shook his head. "I don't want it. What is it?"

"Oyster pancakes. Good for you. Eat, eat! You look as pale as a ghost and you are still the same, pinching money on food. Well, if you don't eat, you can't live to enjoy all the money you have made."

The old man contemplated the food a little more, and finally picked up his chopsticks and lifted a piece of pancake to his mouth as if against his will.

"All the money I have made!" he snorted.

Chuli sat down on her father's hard, wooden bed, and watched him eat and drink his tea. After he had eaten two pancakes, she said, "This time I come home, my heart aches. Everyone looks simply awful." The old man remembered that Chuli had never learned to judge the strength of words. She always used

strong language. "And this house is in need of repairs, it is tumbling down."

"All the houses on this street are in need of repairs," said the old man without looking up. "When the Japs were here, they ripped out all the metal that was showing on them. But I have no money to spend on repairs. Things are worse now than even when the dwarfs were here. Today it costs thirty thousand to row over channel harbor. Tomorrow it may cost forty thousand. Now with the foreigners gone, too, this town is not beginning to take on the commercial prospects it used to have."

"Well, Papa, at least you should be proud that extraterritorial rights have been relinquished here by the foreigners at last, and that this is now Chinese territory again," answered his daughter, to his surprise. The years spent away from Amoy did make a difference, he supposed.

"All I know is my hands are empty," said the old man. In his small world of commerce in this seaport town, he did not interest himself in politics. "During the occupation, we had to scrape through living on rent from the houses along the road. But now, what? Well, my luck has run out, that is all. Prosperity passes from one family to another, that's true."

"What nonsense!" said Chuli. "Now you know that if Tuako had had more character, instead of spending his life whoring and drinking . . ."

Kim Yek-chiong held up his hand. "Now don't preach. Maybe you are right, maybe you are wrong. But don't lecture, Chuli. Now you are so prosperous, you cannot imagine why other people are not doing equally well. But prosperity is a combination of several things, and sometimes just coincidence. When I started in business, everything seemed to play into my hands. When money is rolling in, there is no way to stop it. And when things start to go wrong, human beings cannot do much to coax them right, either."

Listening to her father's voice, sitting on his hard bed, Chuli found herself playing the role of daughter of the family again after many years. How they used to sit here, so many years ago, and plot ways to make money for the family! And how well

she understood, too, whatever was being discussed! To be uninterested in the financial situation of the family had seemed like something immoral to them all.

A set of unbalanced books was immoral, too, and now everything she had been feeling since her arrival this morning seemed to come together. With a sigh, she walked to her father's desk, and began to flip through the account books. She could get the gist of each page at a glance.

"How are you paying the clerks at the store? The entries are not clear at all," she said.

The old man answered reluctantly. "I always try to get a supply of reliable currency whenever I can. Come payday, or whenever the exchange rate is right, I convert what is necessary into national currency. But I cannot always get all the American bills I want." Kim Yek-chiong always lowered his voice to a whisper when he talked about money. His respect for the subject made him talk about it like a jealous lover. "Sometimes, I have to take Hong Kong dollars. The other day, some Philippine dollars came into my hands. I do these things through friends." Now his voice was barely audible. "I don't like to use the local exchange shops, which are technically illegal."

"Everybody is using them." Chuli's voice, too, had become very low.

"Yes, but here, about once a month, the police close them down. Then they say the operators have to make up any depreciation in the monthly salaries of government employees before they are allowed to open again. Corruption, I tell you."

"Papa, you are overcautious."

"A man can never be overcautious."

"Nonsense! Sometimes, a person has to take a few risks in life. The older I am, the wiser I become. You cannot always calculate too fine in life."

The old man smiled. He was amused by his daughter. Between father and daughter, there had never been much feeling. That was why Chuli could say anything she liked to him without causing any rancor. He said, changing the subject, "How is Sankuo these days?"

"He is very well and busy. And you know Zan has been in America almost four years now, studying."

"What is he studying?" The old man began to shake his head before he heard her answer.

"Well, Papa, he is studying philosophy." She stared at him with wide-open round eyes. Kim Yek-chiong thought she looked a little like an owl, with the spectacles and that startled expression on her face.

"Philosophy? If he wants to study phi-los-o-phy, he can do that at home. Young man goes abroad, he should study something more practical, like banking, commerce, or even science. Philosophy there is plenty of at home. No need going all the way to America to study *philosophy*." He pronounced the word with emphasis. He was laughing at her, without malice, but also without pity.

Chuli let out a scornful chuckle herself. She did not care whether her father approved or disapproved of what she did with her life. "Well, Papa," she said with an arch smile, "not everyone can be a businessman like you. And not everyone can see things your way."

They both laughed, noiselessly, the Kim way, as if they were relishing a private joke together. The old man was in a gossipy mood now. He said, looking at Chuli shrewdly, "Well, one thing I will admit. When you insisted on marrying Wong Sankuo, you had better eyesight than I did. How much are you worth now, Chuli? A hundred thousand American dollars? More?"

Chuli let out a shriek of horror. Her hands flew to her cheeks. "Where do you people in Amoy get such ideas! How I wish it were true! If I had half, a quarter of that amount . . ."

The old man would not believe her. "Sankuo has been a big official for ten, fifteen years," he said craftily.

"But you have it all wrong, no, no, no!" cried Chuli angrily. "It is true, he has been in and out of public life for a long time, but that doesn't make us rich! He is not like other officials who have been busy lining their own pockets. I swear to you, Papa, these long years in Chungking, we had to put in our savings every month to make ends meet. But how can you understand?"

I realize Sankuo is a very famous man, but if we had the money to match his fame, don't you think I would do something more to help you all? Do you think I would sit here, and watch you eat into capital? . . ."

"Well, don't get so excited, Chuli. I am not begging from you!" Her father was chuckling.

"I can still remember it as if it were yesterday," he said, abruptly launching into the past. Chuli remembered that her marrying Wong Sankuo had always seemed like a very good joke to her father. "You were of marriageable age, and it was time to look for someone for you. At that time, if we had really looked, you could have married into any family we fancied. Well, anyway, I was lurching with old Hhiok-hia down at the wharf one day, and he said there was a poor schoolteacher's son passing through town on his way to Quemoy. He was coming back from Peiping where he had a teaching job, and what he lacked in money, the boy made up in good character. Well, just for a lark, I said, all right, let's have a look. Doesn't cost money to have a look. And when he showed up, this Wong Sankuo, in that starched blue cotton gown, . . . oh, and looking as if he had been bitten by bees, the way his forehead bulged out! . . ." The old man was remembering it all now, and his voice subsided into wheezing laughter.

His daughter waited. "Well?" she demanded, looking at him sullenly. The final triumph was hers, so she could bear to listen to him.

"Well," said the old man when he could continue, "the surprising thing was, when your mother asked your opinion, you agreed to marry him. In fact, you would have no one else, if I remember correctly." He stared at his daughter for a moment, and pointed with a long forefinger. "Fell in love with him! You ran out and met him behind my back. That's what you did!" he said, and laughed again.

"That's right," said Chuli. After all these years, it was no longer necessary to deny it. She was sitting up very straight on the wooden bed. "I saw something in him, and fell in love with him." She was missing Sankuo very much right now. How far

away he had led her from all this, how much of life he had shown her, how wide the world lay outside, of which her family was not aware!

Now she was satiated with her old father. "Well," she said, "this time I am forking Ahua as well as Sima over to Shanghai. That will be two less mouths for you to feed."

"Yes," said the old man, "take them with you. You have servants, a big house. And later you can send them after Zan to America to study philosophy as well."

Chuli's head spun, and she walked out of the room, too annoyed to bother answering back. He was still laughing. And as she walked up the stairs, she felt almost like a young girl again, sneaking out of this loveless house to meet Wong Sankuo in the back streets of Amoy. What a scandal there had been! Hooh! Well, anyway, she showed them. As she went up to her room, she was smiling to herself.

"Are you glad, Sima, that I am going to Shanghai with you?" asked Ahua that evening after supper. They were alone in their room.

"Naturally, I cannot say that I am not glad," said Sima, who was washing some of her and Ahua's things in a tin basin.

"You know, sometimes you really make me boil. 'Naturally, I cannot say that I am not glad.' Why do you always have to be so passive, as if it would kill you to be positive about something for a change? You sound like an old woman already, you know? I hate to think what you'll be like when you are good and old."

Ahua was stretched out on her bed beside the window.

Sima did not answer. She continued to wash, and Ahua watched her, studying her sister's face as if she were someone she had never set eyes upon before.

"May I ask you a terrible question, Sima?" she said after a few moments, unable to bear the silence.

"Yes?"

"But you mustn't be angry with me after I ask it. I promise I will never mention it again after you've answered me."

Sima turned and looked at her sister patiently. The younger

girl leaped out of bed and threw herself at her sister's back, and wrapped her arms around her neck. She whispered into her ear, "Tell me, do you know if they embalmed Father?"

Sima jumped and let out an angry cry. "Really, sometimes you are so childish a person can scarcely stay in the same room with you! How can you ask such a question?"

Ahua held onto her sister with both arms. "But tell me! I must know whether he is going to decompose or whether he has been preserved. I won't mention it again after you tell me, I promise."

Sima shook off her sister's arms forcefully, and she said, her face becoming very pink, "Now listen to me, Ahua. Just stop it, do you hear?"

"But tell me, tell me!"

"I'll tell you this," said Sima, "that you are almost seventeen now, and it is high time you stopped acting so silly, and took yourself more seriously. Don't you ever think what kind of impression you make on people? And what do you think I feel when you ask questions like that?"

Ahua went back to her bed. "And how do you think I feel, when you refuse to answer a simple question?"

"There are things people don't talk about," Sima said, and returned to her washing again, with a set face. She soon carried the basin to the veranda, and when she came back, she turned off the light and slipped into bed beside her sister.

"The trouble with you is, you have no feeling, Sima. You're numb, numb, numb, and terribly conventional, you know that? Here Father is, probably half eaten up by worms already, and you can't talk about it because it isn't something people talk about. It just shows how superficial you are."

Sima did not answer, and Ahua rolled over and looked out the window. The moon, a large, yellow wheel, was so close that she could almost touch it if she held out her hand. The sky behind it was deep purple, and Ahua felt a sudden longing, longing for everything, to laugh, to cry, to be free. She felt that she was going to burst at any moment. She thought about all the evenings her father had lain on the rattan chair on the veranda this spring, in his checkered bathrobe, and how the

moonlight sometimes struck his face and made it look as though he were dead already. His eyes were sunken and dark like plums, and his cheeks were gaunt, and his hair came down over his ears. During the last weeks, he lay there all the time, seldom speaking or eating, and just watched the moon when it came up at night. He had lived a life full of ravishing sensual pleasure and wickedness, and now he was calmly waiting to die. She used to watch him from her window and wonder what it felt like. "Tell me, did everything live up to your expectations?" she wanted to ask. "Whatever you experienced, whether ecstasy or anguish, did you experience it in full measure?" Because if he did, then it did not matter that he was dying in the bald surroundings of their home. In the daytime, he read his obscene books and drank his brandy, seemingly oblivious of everything, but he must have been aware of the disapproving glances everyone kept casting at him, the three little girls of Ah Yee who were miniature replicas of their mother and would grow up and marry and hang washing up from people's verandas, and the women with hawklike eyes who were always talking about him and never thought of what it must feel like to be dying. It had always seemed to Ahua that she was the only one who understood what was happening, but she had never spoken intimately with her father, who had always been too busy to pay any attention to his offspring.

The long, sick spring had ended swiftly and suddenly. And now everyone was going about just as if it had not happened at all. Numb! Numb! Numb! She felt a rage boiling up in her.

Sima said, "Ahua, are you crying?"

The girl did not answer.

"You know I have only your good at heart, don't you? Are you listening to me, Ahua?"

"I'm listening."

"All I mean is sometimes you have to hide your feelings, and not say everything that comes into your head, and when I talk to you like this, Ahua, I am only trying to prepare you for life, because we are all we have in this world. You know how I feel, don't you?"

"Then why can't you understand?" Ahua said. "I have to live the way I feel. I cannot be a hypocrite and go around saying things I don't mean and doing things I don't like and pretend that I don't mind. And I hate the way you all go around, clucking your tongues about Father, as if you were better than he was. He did what he wanted to do. At least it was honest."

"Now you know I don't think I am better than anyone, but you must be fair. We are a family of certain position in Amoy, and the way Father behaved was a disgrace. You know that adultery is a sin, and I am absolutely against lust."

"You are very funny, you know?"

"I don't see anything funny."

"It just shows how superficial you are, Sima. This whole family is very superficial, and you don't know what you are like."

"What are we like?"

"Well, take the food we eat, for instance, the mounds of fish smothered with onions, the thick gray bowls of lentil soup, and the honest-to-goodness chunks of meat. In appearance and substance, the food this family eats, Sima, reflects exactly the kind of people we are—dealers in toilet seats and cockroach killers and household antiseptics. There is never any need to yield to any sentimental craving for beauty, because the craving is never there. Food, toilet seats, disinfectants, everything means only one thing, money in the bank."

"You should congratulate yourself that thanks to the firm of Eng Beng, you have lived in comfort all your life, Ahua, and never had to worry about food or a roof over your head. What a way to talk!"

"Oh, I am grateful. I know I cannot exist without a minimum of physical sustenance."

"Then why do you do so much irresponsible talking? Why don't you take yourself more seriously?"

"But I take myself very seriously, only you don't realize it. Every day, I wake up feeling as cheerful as can be, and try to face life squarely and honestly. I don't deceive myself, and I don't let anything get me down, although I am completely alone

in this world. I know I have faults, but I am harder on myself than you could know. Integrity! That's what I have!"

"Oh, Ahua, stop it!"

Tears were streaming from Ahua's eyes, but she did not let her sister know. She was too proud. "You never listen carefully to what I say. I know there is still a great deal in life I have to learn, but my views are not completely valueless either."

"Well, at least I am glad to hear you admit that," Sima said in a mollifying tone. She was quiet for a moment. Then she added in a completely different voice, "I was looking in Aunt's suitcases just now, and Ahua, you should have seen some of the things they are wearing in Shanghai! It looks as if there's a great deal we *both* still have to learn!"

## 2

IN THE summer of 1947, Government armies were deployed in an all-out campaign to wipe out the Communists, who held all the rural areas in the north and northeast of China. The Government controlled all China south of the Yangtze and held the large ports and all the major cities in North China and Manchuria as well. But with these latter, they could communicate surely only by air, for the Communists had cut all the railways connecting North China and Manchuria with the Yangtze valley, and continuously interrupted the railways which connected the east coast with the western mountain provinces.

A year ago, the first objective of the Government after the peace was to clear the country of Japanese forces and for troops to occupy all the strategic points as soon as possible to forestall the Communists, but they did not succeed in doing this, and now in the successful attempt to recapture the lost territories the future of the country lay.

Ever since the war ended, Wong Sankuo had felt the constraint of the heavy political and intellectual responsibilities

connected with his job. Now for three weeks while Chuli was visiting her relatives in Amoy, he had been living in the capital, absorbed in his work and the acute problems which faced the nation, and returned to Shanghai himself only a day before her ship was due.

On the following morning, as he stepped into his car from his home in the old French Concession to meet her, he felt stirred by a wistfulness which was in complete contrast to the mood he had been in for the last weeks. It was not often that he allowed himself to indulge in the luxury of this mood. As he drove through the residential section of the city, sunlight was playing prettily on the broad boulevards and birch trees and small shops and cafés, bringing back to him the more peaceful years he had lived in this city before the war. A thoughtful smile crept into his large, craggy face. He was a broad-shouldered, bony man, lean and wiry, with a dark simian face and a protuberant forehead over which shocks of short, graying hair, untrained and strawlike, grew as if in defiance and protest against every other aspect of his dress and appearance, which reflected the look of a man who left most of the details of his physical life to the care of a very homely wife.

There was an air of deceptive prosperity everywhere. The streets were crowded and the shops were crammed with goods and people were buying, buying, buying. Country peasants came to the city with bundles of money several feet high to carry away expensive goods they would not have dreamed of buying a few years ago, and Government employees and teachers had to eke out an existence on earnings which were less than what a rickshaw coolie made. A social evolution, larger than political parties or civil war, was taking place in the country, Sankuo thought, and how to prevent evolution from becoming revolution was the dilemma which occupied many of his waking hours since the war ended.

He became absorbed in this problem once more as the car moved toward the Bund in a tangle of traffic which was composed of pedicabs, rickshaws, buses, jeeps, and bicycles. When he stopped at last, he forgot to get out. A moment later, he

looked up and was startled to find the car surrounded by a crowd of beggars. As he opened the door, a dozen scrawny palms shot under his nose, and he was assailed by chanting, whining voices.

"Please, sir! Have you something to spare? Help a starving family. . . ."

Unthinkingly, he began to draw from his pockets a number of bills, and was in the act of distributing them when a rough voice which he recognized as the voice of officialdom cut through the crowd like a knife. Sure enough, a minor official in a gray, threadbare cotton uniform came forward, and smiling and bowing effusively, said, "Excellency! Excellency! The launch is waiting over here!" He was from the Shanghai Port Authority.

The young man pretended not to notice the beggars, but with a smart beckoning of the hand, led him to the quayside. The motor launch was waiting to take him to the steamship, which would be anchored at the mouth of the Whangpoo on the China Sea.

Under the cold, indifferent stare of the beggars, who a moment ago had been so aggressive, Sankuo boarded the launch with, somehow, a gnawing feeling inside. The sun was shining so brightly, the sky was so blue, it was such a fine day, that all trouble on earth seemed preposterous and incongruous to him.

Soon, they were put-putting up the river amidst skiffs and sampans. Sankuo stood at the stern of the launch and breathed the air deeply. How complicated life is! he thought. Why have we made it so that it seems completely at variance with nature?

The young man from the Port Authority was directing a stream of words at him, determined to make the most of this half-hour with his captive audience. He volunteered his name and said that he was a graduate of Taitung University, where Sankuo had served as president for many years. He said that he had seven children and that his wife was suffering from tuberculosis and had begun to spit blood. As he talked, the young man's thin, sallow face twisted itself into violent expressions. His older children had stopped going to school in order to take care of the younger ones, and what he was making at the Port Authority was not enough even to pay the doctor's bills.

Sankuo felt more and more constrained. He took from his wallet a name card, and scribbled a few words on it and handed it to the young man. "Take this to the office of the Education Ministry in the city," he interrupted the young man and said, "Maybe they can find a place for you."

The young man was overwhelmed. He took the card and now launched into even more exhaustive details about his wife's illness, as if he owed this information to Sankuo now that he had offered to help.

Wong Sankuo was feeling slightly sick when the launch came out on the open sea at last, and glad to see the Jardine-Matheson Line steamer on the horizon. He was conscious of a sudden life taking hold of him as soon as he was upon the open sea. A feeling of freedom from the intricate life of self-discipline he lived swept over him, removing for a moment the duties and cares the world imposed upon him.

As they approached the steamer, he discerned Chuli's figure on deck—she was wearing a crisp, blue dress and looking, as usual, neat as a pin. "There she is! What a good soul!" he thought, and cupped his hands and called to her, although the launch was still several hundred yards away.

Her all-seeing eyes had spotted him long ago. She smiled and waved back, and at that moment, when they acknowledged each other's presence, life seemed to pick up again for Sankuo from where it had left off three weeks ago. And yet, drawing near her on the launch, he saw her now in a strange, double perspective. He saw her as Chuli, his wife, and at the same time objectively as though against a larger picture of life. He thought she belonged to a breed of people on this earth who partook of a kind of immortality in time, serenely sure that in spite of any calamity, the progress of years, or the death of others, they would always be here. She was immune from the questioning insinuations of the spirit which were so much a part of his life, and always ceaselessly engaged in activity. When her brother died she had rushed back to Amoy to offer her great sympathy to the family, and now, with great moral resolution, had brought back two nieces to live with them.

So thinking, Sankuo was overwhelmed by a feeling of gratitude for her, and yet, he felt as if he were wholly responsible for her every action and for her happiness.

When the launch drew up beside the ship, a narrow wooden ladder was lowered, and he watched with amusement and affection as she, wearing her usual law-abiding, disembarkation face, clutched her handbag under the elbow and started down the ladder. He saw that her eyebrows branched out at the ends again; she always drew them before she put on her spectacles, and she never looked at herself again after she put them on. As she came down the ladder, her spectacles were knocked askew, and hairpins fell out of her hair, and he saw that she was greatly vexed. Every detail about her was something he was thoroughly familiar with, and he was seized by an irresponsible desire to tease her, this balance wheel of his life, who was having so much difficulty coming down the steps.

Cupping his hands, he called to her. "Hey, Chuli! Did you give them a good lecture at home about birth control?" and watched guiltily as she pretended not to hear him, and continued her descent with great aplomb. He thought she was thinking, "There he is, always choosing the worst moment to embarrass me." His knowledge of the way her mind worked drew them closer together. He knew that he had done something very childish only to attract her attention.

When Chuli stepped on the launch, she scanned his face expertly for any signs of a catastrophe which he might have concealed from her while she was away, and for signs of indisposition or neglect. Finding all in order, and noting only that the hair in his nostrils needed trimming, she asked her usual opening question of the past four years when they met again after a separation. "Has Zan written?"

"Yes, there's a letter. He is well," Sankuo replied.

This was the distillation of thirty years of living together. He clutched her hand hard, but now that she was assured that the two most important people in her life were well, she was turning her attention to the two girls who were coming down the ladder after her.

Sankuo saw, to his surprise, although he should have expected it, two grown-up girls, and for a moment, he felt so confused that he could not tell which was Sima.

But quickly, the first girl cried, "Uncle! What a long time!" He saw that the child with the long thick braids and gentle, quiet ways he had pictured in his mind these long years had been replaced by someone else altogether, someone, he felt suddenly, he would never completely understand again. He used to lift Sima up when he came back from trips, and tickle her under the chin, saying, "Sima! Sima! Simmma!" and she would let out loud peals of laughter. He was at a loss for words for a moment. Then he said, in a rough, strange voice, "Sima! Grown so big!" and a wave of shyness swept over him.

To Sima, ten years might have been ten days. When she spoke, she was reasonably the same girl he remembered, her voice had not changed. "You look just the same, only a little balder in front, Uncle," she said familiarly, and then she spun around, as if he might recognize her better if he saw her from behind, too. He remembered that, like Chuli, Sima's grasp of the immediate moment had always been sure.

Then he saw a long-throated girl in a pale green dress cross her hands and leap onto the launch. "This is Ahua," Chuli said.

When the girl looked up, Sankuo saw that she had a very simple face. It was a face so fresh and clear that he could almost count the hairs of her eyelashes, and her candid eyes revealed to him that apart from her personal arrival in Shanghai this morning, no other problem was on her mind. Beneath the bold strokes of her eyebrows, her eyes were completely untroubled, and she glanced at him only perfunctorily for she was more interested in everything else. Raising her pale slender hand to her forehead, she scanned the sky and the sea and the skyline of Shanghai with consummate, and yet detached, interest. He felt that if she had found the sea in a boiling rage and thunder crashing in the sky they would not have bothered her. But the sea was calm and the sky was bright, and she seemed to expect no less. When she felt him watching her, she turned her head away to

hide a secret smile. In all probability, Sankuo felt, she had formed an opinion of him already.

Coming back in the car, Sankuo watched and listened with silent interest and a feeling close to disbelief as his wife and the sisters kept up a ceaseless chatter. When the car drew up in front of the high iron gates of the house, Chuli was telling the girls that when they came back from Chungking after the war, they had found the house, with almost all the furniture in it, intact. The house had been occupied during the war by a collaborationist, and so nothing had been stolen or destroyed.

"It isn't a large house, it isn't a mansion, Ahua," Chuli said seriously as they waited for the gate to be opened, "and it isn't by any means as large as our place in Amoy. But there are good things inside. You'll see."

Soon, a very small middle-aged woman opened the gates. She was Yuma, who had been in service to the family for many years. Upon seeing the family, she jumped up and down and rapped on the window of the car with clawlike fingers. "Sima! Sima!" she cried.

The girl screamed with excitement, and when they came out of the car, the servant hugged Sima and began to cry. "How big and pretty you have grown!" she said, and took her by the hand and led her inside.

Wong Sankuo strode into the house with some of the suitcases. Time went on, relentlessly, in war, in peace, so quickly, so frightfully quickly that it never seemed to stop. But there were moments, like now, when it did stop, and he could hold the present in his hand.

In the foyer there was a deep blue carpet, and a single long, low table of teak with a tall vase on it and a sprig of flowers. On either side, wide doors with glass panes softly filtered the sunlight through white curtains.

Sankuo flung open the right side doors, and went ahead of his family into the salon. When Chuli came in, he teased her, as he had this morning when he felt bound to express his affection for her in some roundabout way. He said, claiming false

credit, "Chuli! See how clean and orderly everything is in *spite* of your absence?"

She ignored the remark, and came in, sniffing the air, skeptical. In the completely practical make-up of her character, there was no sense of humor, although she was at times capable of great laughter.

Everything was, indeed, spick and span. The woodwork was polished, the glass shone, and the curtains had been freshly laundered. The salon was about thirty feet long, and there were new Western-style sofas and armchairs of pale green, with matching drapes at the wide French windows.

Chuli flung open the windows and stepped out onto the stone terrace. In the back was a small garden, and her eyes were greeted pleasantly with the greenness of everything. The family followed her outside, and Sankuo came up behind her and put his hands on her shoulders and pressed down on them, as if he were trying to shut a hard-to-shut trunk. But she shrugged him off—it was no time for this—and asked, "Did you remember to tell the servants about lunch?"

"Of course I did," he boasted. And turning to his nieces with a gleam of hopeful humor in his eye, he said, "You know behind every well-disciplined man, there is always a strong woman."

Chuli took this as a compliment, and she launched into a piece of dialogue from their family repertory which was repeated on special occasions like reunions, anniversaries, and birthdays, sometimes in the hearing of close friends, but most often just within the family when they were especially happy to be together.

"Well," she said, "I don't claim all the credit for your success, but one thing I must in all fairness say. I am not that sort of namby-pamby woman with no will of her own who is always shrinking into the background when there are crises in the family and important decisions to be made. Have you ever seen me fade into the background when there are difficulties in the family in all these years?"

"No, I cannot truthfully say that I have," Sankuo said, touched by her characteristic *non sequitur*.

Without waiting to elaborate on this, Chuli walked back into the house and upstairs, for it was, after all, familiar dialogue, which she repeated as if by rote.

She came downstairs again saying, as if twenty minutes had not gone by, “. . . and that’s why I was so angry at my family this time I went back to Amoy. You know Ah Yee’s type, so weak and cringing. If she had had a firmer hold on my brother. . . .” and she launched into the story of her visit back to her maiden home, growing increasingly indignant as she did so. “Huh!” she said finally, “nothing has changed in that loveless house at all. You know the way my father was, he has not changed at all in spite of growing older. . . .”

Chuli had washed her face and changed into an old dress and taken off her stockings. She was eyebrowless, she had freckles on her face, and a long mousy braid of hair over her shoulder. She looked very youthful and completely different from how she looked this morning on the steamship.

Soon, lunch was ready, and they moved across the foyer to the dining room, where places for four had been laid on a round table with pale green Kiangsi porcelain and red-lacquered chopsticks. Against the walls, large glass cabinets were filled with crystal wine glasses and a tea service of silver and other china. The walls and curtains here were also green.

“Green is nature’s color, and it is also my color,” said Chuli happily.

Yuma brought in a large potful of steaming hot pig’s knuckle soup and a bowl of noodles, and Chuli stood up and began to portion out the food.

Sankuo said to Ahua, watching his wife all the time, “This is your aunt’s pig’s knuckle soup with left-handed noodles. It has to be doled out by the left hand, you see, by a short, plump woman who is practically blind because her glasses are steamed up, or it doesn’t taste right. It is a soup reserved for special occasions in the family, and has remarkable reviving powers.”

His wife was too busy to see the fond expression on his face. She said, “Sankuo, will you please *shut up* and eat before it

gets cold?" She said "shut up" in English all the time, not knowing that it was a rude slang expression.

And so he could not take her out of herself after all. When she finished serving, she sat down, and heedless of his banter, which she did not understand, said to Yuma, "I told Ah Yee that I think she is better off this way. He was already done for, you know. He had lost his virility and was drinking himself to death, giving everyone so much trouble and work, not to mention the cost. Yes, better off this way. We all have to go someday."

Then Sankuo heard Ahua mutter under her breath, "No, not me."

He turned and looked at her quickly, wondering whether he had heard right, and was struck by the serenity in the girl's eyes. She looked at him candidly. He felt bound to whisper back, "Not you? Are you different from everyone else?"

Then she blushed, as if he had overheard her say something which had been meant only for herself, and turned her head away, again to hide a secret smile.

Sankuo was stunned. "What is she thinking about?" he thought, "and from where has she sprung, a creature so completely complacent as this? Is it possible that the arid earth of Japanese occupation has bred her?"

After lunch, Chuli wanted to take the girls shopping—none of them seemed to be in the least tired—and they left, chattering like sparrows. He sat immured in his study all afternoon, stirred by a strange awareness of life. All his life, and especially during the war years, he had been aware of mortality. Death came often and yet never failed to impress. But life seldom struck him with so much drama. His mind's eye saw again Chungking burning for seven days, and charred bodies laid out many streets long; he saw lines of exhausted soldiers being fed into battle fire, and he remembered the fighting which was going on right now in the North. He had not been able to believe in the "peace" since World War II ended. Every impression he received this morning rushed to his mind: the beggars at the Bund, the young man whose wife spat blood. Yet in spite of everything, life burgeoned forth. While the world had been at war, a new generation had

grown up, strong, untroubled, and free, and with great expectations from life. It came to him almost like a revelation. Life! Life! I love you, he thought, magic, wonderful. . . . Life is a stronger force than death. He was suffused with a sweet and strange feeling, and his heart stirred. Had the war ended? Of course it had! There was peace then, even though a limited one, and he realized this only now. A feeling of enchantment took hold of him.

Much later in the afternoon, he heard the tinkling voices of the family again. Day had darkened, and into his study they burst, laden with new possessions which they unloaded thoughtlessly on his desk: dress material, matching sets of shoes and handbags, manicure sets, hair curlers which did not feel uncomfortable to sleep on; he did not understand anything, but everything to him was marvelous. He looked at them all with amazement. He felt that he must be responsible for their happiness. But the girl who had said "No, not me" seemed to have forgotten all about it. She was sitting down and admiring a pair of new shoes with complete absorption. Extraordinary!

In an extremely high-pitched voice, Sima began to tell him about everything as she held up each purchase, not so much to show him as to verify for herself whether the color of a handbag was really black or navy blue, or whether a piece of dress material *really* suited her. Was the pattern a little too flowery? Her face assumed a very solemn expression when she asked this. Helpless, he gave her his aesthetic opinions, but she did not listen, his opinions having nothing to do with the immediate realities of the world she lived in, and she turned to her aunt for advice instead.

She went on talking, her face becoming very pink with excitement, and he thought her remarkably pretty, and also somewhat acquisitive. He remembered that as a child, she was like a squirrel with her hoards of marbles and beads and little bits of cloth. She was usually a quiet girl, not endowed with great gifts of the mind, but, like her aunt, possessed of a strong practical instinct for the world. She just managed to eke past her examinations in school every time, and used to look up at him

with ardent round eyes and say, "I did try hard, Uncle, only I couldn't remember the names of the rivers," or the names of remote railroads or historic dates, none of which, she knew, had anything whatsoever to do with what really mattered in life. She wanted better marks in school because she wanted to stand better in the eyes of her schoolmates. He always ached at the thought that people might take advantage of her, or laugh at her.

"Never mind," he used to say gently, "you have other potentials to realize."

That became a stock phrase in the family; anyone who failed to do anything well had "other potentials to realize." He remembered how much happier she always was working in the house, helping Chuli to put away dishes after a dinner party or to tidy a closet, or just sitting quietly, listening to grownups talk. He had been sure from the very beginning that she would succeed with her life.

And now she had come back, it seemed, manifestly to prove to him that he had been right. To this end, he decided to do his best for her.

After supper, Sankuo retired to read in bed while Chuli helped the girls to unpack. Their voices came to him like music from a distance, and after awhile, he put down his reading and opened the long windows and walked to the terrace beyond.

The night was thick with stars and the air smelled of fresh earth. The feeling of almost religious enchantment still clung to his senses, sweet and reassuring. It was a feeling he had not had for a long time.

By nature, Wong Sankuo was a lonely man, happier in the company of books than with people. He was the only child of middle-aged parents, and grew up on the tiny island of Quemoy off the southern seacoast. Like his parents and everyone else on the island, he worked hard every day of his life. As a boy, he gathered firewood for his mother and fetched water from the well and dug for clams in summer to sell; but he also played long, solitary hours on the beach, watching the sea break on the golden sand and foreign ships pass on the horizon. In the

evenings he spent deep, rewarding hours under the lamplight with his father, who fed him magnificent expectations of life, which called from him infinite emotions, and a pathetic optimism. In this schoolbook-like utopia and atmosphere of almost childish innocence, he grew up, and then left the island one summer, when he was ready for college, to study in the famed old Taitung University in Peiping. It was a time in China when, just after the Revolution, society was undergoing a great upheaval, and young men with education could do remarkable things for the country. After Sankuo graduated, he stayed on at the University to work, fired by enthusiasm for his work and a boundless hopefulness for himself. He was suddenly shot to fame, as young scholars could be at that time, when he introduced the modern educational system to some of the primary schools in Peiping. Naively, and idealistically, he made plans to modernize the educational system throughout the country, which he tried to have passed at the Ministry of Education. Suddenly, he found himself caught up in a morass of politics, jealousy, and intrigue which confounded him, and disillusioned him in a way which only the very idealistic and inexperienced could be disillusioned. When at last his plans were passed, and he became, before he was thirty years old, the chief architect of the modern educational system in China, he felt as if he had been robbed from within. His bitter encounter with the meanness and pettiness of society was such that his instinct was to withdraw himself from public affairs and go back to his books.

In a half-sad, half-cynical mood, and feeling as if he had just waked up from childhood dreams, he returned to the South that summer, and stopped over in Amoy on the way home. A friend brought him to the house of a local merchant. He was sitting in the man's parlor, bored with the purveyor of plumbing fixtures, when he saw the toes of a pair of small red shoes peeping beneath the screen which separated the parlor from the rest of the house. As he was leaving, a girl bounced out from behind a tree. He recognized the shoes, which did not match the rest of what she was wearing. She was startlingly direct. At a time

when girls were not even allowed to go out in the street alone, she invited him to meet and get better acquainted, because there was talk of a marriage to be arranged for them. He was struck dumb with surprise, and readily consented.

She had never heard of him, but she could not go on living without him after one look at his unusual and unhandsome face, she confessed later. It was not long before she dazed and stunned and dazzled him into falling in love with her himself, and they were married at the end of the summer, against the wishes of her family and to the amazement of everyone, most of all himself.

When he returned to Peiping with her that autumn, everything seemed changed, but it was only he. From the impasse to which he had led himself, love had come and rescued him. For the first time, he felt called to do his part—his duty, in a moral world to which he at last belonged. He plunged into politics altogether, feeling that he could make unique contributions to it, for he knew he was different from all the others in public life who were practical men by nature and not because they set out to be. His moral fiber strengthened as it rubbed continuously against the abrasive of society, and of this he was more proud than of all his achievements as a scholar.

When Chuli came back to her bedroom at last, it was late and she sat down on the bed with a sigh. "You are glad I brought both girls to Shanghai, aren't you?" she asked. "I know it is a great responsibility, and it costs something to feed and clothe them. But you know what my nature is like. I cannot leave Ahua behind when it is so easy for me to have her here."

"Goodness, it is nice to have young people in the house again," Sankuo said, reaching for her hand.

"I asked you because we need another servant," she said. Her logic was indeterminate and synchronous. Cause may be effect, and effect may be part of the cause. He was used to it. "Yuma cannot do all the work alone, and the cook will not help. Just this afternoon, he threatened to quit because I said he was spending too much marketing money."

"Well," said Sankuo softly, "what is money for, but to get pleasure out of? That has always been our understanding of it. But that is also why we never save."

Chuli was silent for a moment. Then she said, "Well, you cannot expect to spend nothing, moving back to Shanghai like this."

"Will you please lie down now?" he said.

"You know me, I never spend anything on myself," she said as she changed, and she was still talking as she got under the covers.

"Hush," he said. "Anything you do is always right with me."

Then Chuli thought, staring at the ceiling, "I must take better care of this man. I have been thinking too much of my own family, but he needs me too."

### 3

ON A SATURDAY afternoon one day in the autumn, the Wongs and their nieces were sitting in the salon, each absorbed in his own occupation. It had turned rather cold, and a fine mistlike rain was coming down, alternating with sudden floods of sunshine. Hopefully, Chuli made up her mind to go out every time the sun came out, and changed it again when it disappeared. Finally, she resigned herself to an afternoon beside the electric fire. Sima, with her body twisted sideways, was doing a sketch of a pot of ivy in her little sketchbook, which was perched on the tea table, while Ahua was reading a book called *How I Learned To Paint With My Left Foot* and giggling to herself from time to time. A moment ago, she had just shown everyone a picture of the foot in the book where the author's picture usually appears.

The silence in the room was broken only by Ahua's giggles for half an hour. Sankuo was ensconced in his armchair reading,

and Sima continued to paint. Each second became more unbearable to Chuli, and her heart felt heavier and heavier. Ahua had started her first year of college this autumn, but Sima had done nothing since she came to Shanghai. She had filled up several notebooks with sketches already, and although she was fairly good at this, it was no way for a young girl to pass her time. Chuli was thinking to herself, "I wish Zan were here, because Zan could introduce her to some young men." From this she went on to think about her son, who had not written for six weeks. Granted he was busy and a bad correspondent, six weeks were still a long time for a mother not to hear from her son, and a mother had a right to know what was happening.

Growing increasingly restless, Chuli was on the point of summoning tea when Sankuo looked up from his book and said, "Look, there is someone coming up to the house."

"I must tell Glass not to let anyone in unless they are expected," Chuli said. Glass was the new servant, a buxom girl of eighteen. Sankuo still smiled every time the girl's name was mentioned. "Modernization will take us to hell when a girl changes her name from Jade to Glass," he said.

Soon, they heard Yuma talking in the foyer, and a moment later, she came in bearing a card which read "Mung Kaiming, Vice-Consul, Chinese Consulate General, New York."

"He says he has just arrived this morning and has something for you from the Young Master," Yuma said.

Upon hearing that someone had come from America with a package from her son, Chuli got up quickly, but before she could speak, a large man, who appeared to be in his early thirties, came into the salon. He was wearing a gray gabardine suit, somewhat creased, and it seemed that he had not worn a coat, for there were drops of rain on his shoulders. He had on a white shirt, frayed at the collar, and a rather old necktie, and brown shoes which were scuffed and down at the heels.

He came forward with long strides and hand extended, his thick, dark face cracked into a broad smile, showing a row of even, white teeth. His eyes were small and very bright, and his hair was very thick and black.

Wong Sankuo was startled, for although he expected to see a stranger when he looked up, he had not expected to see a man of such striking appearance.

"I beg your pardon for intruding," said Mung Kaiming as he came up to Chuli and shook her hand, and then shook Sankuo's. He had a rich, loud voice. "It is very kind of you to receive me. I have just come from New York—arrived only this morning—and hastened here to pay my respects to Your Excellency and Madam. Zan and I are schoolmates. He was most anxious for me to come and see you and tell you all about him."

At the mention of her son's name directly from the visitor's lips, Chuli cried, "Oh, please sit down, Mr. Mung! You are not disturbing us at all! I was just thinking this minute that I wish I had some news about Zan . . . one might almost say that it is providence that you came."

Mung Kaiming sat down between Sankuo and Chuli, and took from his pocket a small parcel, which turned out to be a compact. Chuli was delighted with it, and signaled for Yuma to prepare tea, and then turned her whole attention to the visitor, her eyes becoming very round, her hands clasped together in her lap.

"Tell me, how is he? How is he?" she pressed.

"Oh, he is very well indeed," Mung Kaiming said, and his small eyes shifted quickly, as if the mention of Zan's name brought pleasant associations. "As a matter of fact, if I may take the liberty of saying so—since I am a few years older than he is—I have seldom had the privilege of knowing such a brilliant mind. But of course, it is hereditary," he added with a smile, and turned to Sankuo with a somber air. "I consider it indeed an honor, sir, to meet you in person today." Chuli noticed that he held his back straight, and sat respectfully on the edge of the armchair.

With a deprecating wave of his hand, Sankuo smiled and said, putting aside his book, "Is Zan finding Columbia all he hoped it would be?"

Mung Kaiming looked thoughtful, and spoke slowly, as if he were choosing his words very carefully. He replied, looking

at the Minister straight in the eye, "You know, of course, that Zan is the only Chinese student studying philosophy directly under John Dewey at Columbia?"

"Is he really?" said Sankuo. "He hadn't mentioned that before."

"That would be like his modest nature, sir," replied Mung, with the same serious mien. He had the manner of someone who was singularly aware of the eminence of the company he was in, and would do anything rather than give the impression of levity.

"And what is your subject?" asked Chuli. She thought to herself that she would not let this visitor go until she had squeezed from him all he could tell her about her son. Mung Kaiming had brought life into this cold, autumn afternoon, and Chuli's eyes fastened upon him as if, through him, she could come closer to her son.

"Well," said Mung Kaiming, and a smile broke across his face again. "I'm afraid my subject is nothing so—ah—worth while as philosophy. As a matter of fact, I studied accountancy at Columbia."

He grinned shyly and turned up the palms of his hands at the word "accountancy," as if he were apologizing for not pretending to higher interests, although his eyes remained sharp and cold.

With a gleam of humor in his eye, Sankuo said, "Is that a subject required of young men joining the Consulate Service now?"

The smile vanished from Mung's face. "No, sir," he said respectfully, "to tell you the truth, I did not join the Consular Service through regular channels . . . that is, I was not sent abroad by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, but joined the Consulate in New York while I was there. It was of course during the war when they were short-handed."

Wong Sankuo raised his eyebrow, and Mung continued, "You see, I first went to work in the Consulate as a clerk. Later, the Consul General was kind enough to give me the title of Student Consul. I was in this position for three years, but my name was never officially entered in the records of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. In fact, it is primarily to regularize the pro-

cedure that I have been given a furlough to come back at this time, and to pass the Foreign Service examinations, which I never took."

"The Consul General must think a great deal of you to have taken this unusual step," said Sankuo. He liked the careful way the man explained his position.

They were silent for a moment, realizing suddenly after their first warm reception of him that they did not know each other after all. Mung paused, as if he did not wish to continue to talk about himself, and now for the first time seemed to notice the presence of the two girls in the salon. He included them in a polite, general smile, his eyes quick and bright.

Now Yuma brought in a large tray and Chuli explained, "It is our tea time. Won't you have a cup of tea with us?" She poured and placed a cup before the visitor.

"May I ask what province you come from, Mr. Mung? We are from Amoy, you know."

"I come from the province of Kiangsi," said Mung Kaiming. "I am from Nanchang."

"I suppose you will be going home first, then, before going to Nanking to take your examinations?" said Chuli, as Yuma brought in a dish of steamed pastries, and Chuli placed two on a plate and gave them to Mung. The visitor took his teacup and walked over to the settee and gave it to Sima. "No, I am not," he said, looking at the girls with a smile. "You see, I have no family. I have been on my own ever since I was a boy. I am afraid I have never known what it is like to have a loving family."

He came back and took a second cup of tea to Ahua. Then he sat down again, looked at Wong Sankuo, and added seriously, "As a matter of fact, I come from a farmer's family. I lost my parents at the age of eight when they were both carried off by a cholera epidemic. My people were poor farming peasants."

"Really?" said Sankuo with sudden interest. "What hardships you must have had to overcome, then, to be where you are today!"

Now Yuma brought in a large bowl of noodles heaped high

with a mixture of sautéed pork, shrimp, spinach, mushrooms, and tiger lilies, followed by a dish of small sweet omelets, stuffed with candied rose petals.

Looking at the food, Mung interrupted himself and threw up his hands as if in surrender. "When you said tea, I thought just a cup of green tea!" he cried. He accepted a plate of noodles from Chuli, who was saying with pride, "Taste this," and replied to Sankuo, "Well, sir, I still have a long way to go, but it is true that I have come a long way since those days."

"But how did you manage, a child of eight years old?" asked Chuli. "Did your parents leave you anything?"

"No, no, my people were tenant farmers you see," Mung said. "When they died, I was taken in by a neighboring family and helped on their land in return for my keep until I was older. Then I left to go to school, and if you don't mind my saying, sir, even then I heard of the great name of Your Excellency. . . ."

"And you went on to college?" asked Sankuo.

"Yes, sir, I went to college in Hankow," he said.

"How did you manage that?" asked Sankuo.

Mung Kaiming shoved a large mouthful of noodles into his mouth, and ate with great appetite as he seemed to consider this question carefully. He did not speak until he had finished his noodles, and then looked up suddenly as if he had decided to let down the barriers of ceremony and confide in the family. He said seriously, "Well, I have milled flour. I have carried freight on my back. I have helped to pull junks up the Yangtze. I have done any number of things. But I was determined to get a college education." He turned up his large, brown hands, and they saw that they were a laborer's hands, thick and strong and calloused, although it must have been years now since he had ceased to do manual labor.

With great curiosity, Ahua got up from her seat and came to look at his hands, and sat down again in a chair closer to the visitor, while Sima remained seated where she was, and looked at Mung Kaiming with a quiet, intense face.

Greatly impressed, Sankuo said, "Well, you deserve all the

credit for coming such a long way. I have always believed that environment does not influence a person's character so much as character decides a person's environment. Our destinies lie very much in our own hands. Do you agree?"

"Very much so, sir," replied Mung Kaiming. "Perhaps Your Excellency cannot be aware of how much I believe just that."

Sankuo smiled. "Well, perhaps I can," he said. "I come from a poor family myself."

Mung Kaiming looked surprised, and Sankuo thought he saw fire smoldering in his eyes. He was going to reply when Chuli said, "Won't you have some more noodles?"

Mung turned his head to the other side immediately, and his face relaxed into a broad smile. "I am afraid I am going to make a pig of myself, but this is delicious."

Chuli gladly heaped his plate high again, and said, "You need not be afraid of eating too much, because there is very little grease in the cooking in this house. These are Amoy noodles."

"Ah, yes! They have the true Southern flavor," Mung said. "I tasted it right away."

"These must taste good after the sandwiches and cold milk you must have become used to in America," said Chuli, watching him eat approvingly.

"Well, you are almost right," Kaiming said. Now he seemed very much at home. "The truth is, the first years in America I existed practically on nothing but oatmeal."

"Oatmeal? How awful!" said Chuli, screwing her face into a frown.

"Well, you see," said Mung, "I worked my way to America on a freighter. When I arrived, I took odd jobs. It was not until I went to work as a clerk in the Consulate that I began to have a regular income." He said all this as if he were amused to think back on those days.

"Just the same," said Sankuo softly, "you must have a strong stomach to take oatmeal straight for—a year, was it?"

Mung Kaiming did not reply to this one at once. Then he said modestly, "Well, it is better food than millet, on which I grew up as a child. It is more nourishing, it is filling, and for a

peasant son like myself . . . well, I thought it was good enough!"

Wong Sankuo's eyes narrowed. "Yes, I believe you are right!" he said. And now he looked at the visitor more carefully. The man had the physique of a country peasant, but he seemed large in more than one way. What a change this was from the smoothly polished bright young men in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs! Sankuo sat up and took the visitor more seriously than before.

"Well, now your struggles are mostly over, you have worked hard and you will be rewarded," said Chuli as she gave him two sweet omelets.

Mung ate them without trying to hide his appreciation of the good food, and watching him, the family smiled. When he finished he looked up and laughed, as if he had surrendered any pretense at formality that was left. He looked at the family warmly and said, "May I say, sir, that when I walked into this room this afternoon, I was deeply touched by the picture of a happy family I saw, and it struck me deeply that after coming all the way across the Pacific, I had really no one to come back to. There comes a time in every man's life, I think, when everything seems empty and purposeless unless there is someone to work for."

Chuli clenched her fists. She seemed to realize for the first time that here was an eligible young man.

"Is it a long time you have been abroad?" she asked.

"I was in America for five years."

"I am surprised you never fell in love and married an American girl this long time abroad," she said with a broad smile, proud of the devious way she thought she was asking if he were married.

"No, no," Mung said quickly, "frankly I never considered it. Mixed marriages are difficult, extremely hard." He smiled again, "I suppose I didn't have the courage to contemplate it."

"I think you are very wise," said Chuli, and she was beaming.

"And then, of course, it is not easy to find a girl anywhere who will have a pauper like myself for a husband," Mung added. "And when I say pauper, it isn't just a figure of speech. I mean

exactly pauper." He seemed carried away for a moment by recollections of a bitter world in which he had struggled very hard, and the flow of conversation came to a stop.

He looked up at the family a moment later and said in a different voice, "But I have talked too much about myself, and you want to hear about Zan. He is always talking about his family . . . he is devoted to you all."

It was seven o'clock in the evening before Mung Kaiming got up and said, "I really must go. I have eaten too much and talked too much. I have enjoyed this visit so much, and hope to have the pleasure of calling again before I leave for Nanking."

They accompanied him to the foyer and watched as he wrapped an old blue muffler around his neck. A large button was missing from his jacket. Then he took an old gray hat in his large hands, and turned with a proper expression of respect and bowed to Wong Sankuo.

"Don't you have an overcoat? It's cold outside," said Chuli.

"No, I never wear a coat," he said, and after thanking the family again for their hospitality, disappeared into the night.

The front gate had scarcely clanged shut before Chuli and the girls began to speak. "What a remarkable young man!" Chuli said.

Sima was giggling. "Did you see the awful scar on his neck?" she cried, and her voice was wild and piercing. "And did you see that missing button on his coat? I have very sharp eyes and I saw it the moment he walked in. Now who is this? I asked myself. And when he wolfed down his third helping of noodles, I almost died. Did you ever see anything like it? I nearly had to run out of the room!" She let out a peal of laughter, high and hysterical.

"No, you must not make fun," Sankuo said gently. "I have a great deal of respect for a person who has been able to make so much of himself from such humble beginnings."

Abruptly, the girl stopped laughing and looked at her uncle with tears in her eyes.

"The man has ability, decided ability," Sankuo said seriously. "Often a young man like that, who had to struggle his way up in the world, has a better sense of values in life than a young man from a better family, with his head stuffed with lofty ideals but who has never come into contact with real life."

## 4

THE next morning was Sunday and Wong Sankuo rose late. As he came downstairs for breakfast he heard his wife talking excitedly to his nieces in the dining room. Chuli had finished breakfast, but was sitting at the table with one girl at each side. Sima, with her eyes downcast, was playing with a spoon on the table, and Chuli seemed to be directing all her words at her.

"What is all the excitement?" he asked as he came in.

"We are talking about Mung Kaiming," Chuli said. "He telephoned this morning to thank us for our hospitality and I invited him to supper."

"So that's it!" said Sankuo, smiling and sitting down and drawing his pipe from his pocket.

"I have been trying to tell Sima not to be too shy. . . ." said Chuli breathlessly. The girl, looking very pale this morning, did not look up when her aunt spoke. "You must not expect perfection. Your uncle is not perfect, and I know I have my faults, too. But I want you to behave naturally when he comes, speak more, and try to know him better. You say he looks coarse and unrefined, but he is perfectly *presentable*, and that is all that is required so far as a man goes, that one should not feel ashamed to walk into a room with him. Am I right?"

"Right!" said Sankuo, grinning.

"All I can say is, it will be a relief when he's gone to Nanking," said Sima. She bit her lips, and the spoon shook in her hand.

Now Chuli turned to Yuma and said, "I wonder what we

should give him? Amoy noodles again? Everyone always likes that. But what else? Help me think, Yuma!"

The servant smiled, but could offer no suggestions.

"If you allow me to say a word," said Sankuo, "there is no need to prepare a feast, when only one guest is coming. . . ."

"My head is spinning already," said Chuli, "don't interfere. Yuma, you'd better go to the kitchen first and tell the cook. It is almost lunch time already. . . ."

Yuma had not been gone long when they heard a great outburst of noise from the kitchen. Chuli ran into the kitchen and found the cook, a young man, standing with arms akimbo, shouting abuse at the small woman.

When he saw Chuli, he directed his torrent of words at her. "I have just come back from the market, I cannot go again. Just you wait! The day will come when the working people will no longer suffer injustice at the hands of the rich. The day will come when you rich officials answer to the people!"

Now Sankuo had come into the kitchen too. Seeing him, the young man quieted down a little, but Sankuo said quietly, "Get out."

"I'm not afraid of you," the cook started again. "You cannot dismiss me without two weeks' notice and a month's wages!"

"You will have your month's wages and two weeks besides," said Sankuo. "Take your things and be out of this house in five minutes."

He turned and walked out of the kitchen. The young man continued to rave. "The day will come when we working people have something better to live for!" In a moment, they heard the clang of the gates, and Sankuo said with great pain, "We're well rid of the hot-headed young Communist."

"Was he a Communist?" Ahua said with great wonder. "Do you mean that there are Communists *here*?"

Wong Sankuo looked at Ahua with surprise. Her face, rosy after a good night's sleep, was striking against the powder blue dress she was wearing. "There are Communists everywhere," he said softly. "You mean to say you haven't heard?" The girl's face drained of color, and she looked frightened.

When Chuli remembered again that a guest was coming for dinner, and realized that they did not have a cook, she wondered what to do. Then Yuma said that she had an old relative who was looking for a job, and she sent her to find him at once.

It was late afternoon before Yuma finally returned in a rickshaw, saying that she had not been able to find her relative.

An hour later, Mung Kaiming arrived at the house, and Chuli greeted him like an old friend. She explained what had happened and apologized to him for their unpreparedness, and she went upstairs with the girls hurriedly, for they had not yet changed.

Mung Kaiming followed Sankuo to his study, and Sankuo said, with a rueful smile, "What confused, dangerous times these are! I am all for a young man with some fight in him, and it is true that the majority of our people deserve something better in life. But if we don't watch out, idealism will land us right in the lap of the Communists! Idealism is like a peach in summer, beautiful to look at, but which needs very careful handling."

"Perhaps so, sir," said Mung. "But I have always been too busy coping with reality to have given much thought to idealism."

"But the question is this," said Sankuo with a smile, "need the two be exclusive of each other?"

"From my experience at least, they have always been at opposite poles," said Mung. "You might say that my taking up accountancy instead of something more—shall we say, abstract—is an upshot of what I have had to learn from life."

Sankuo studied the man with sharp eyes, and thought, "How extraordinarily sure of himself this man is, and how very intelligent!" Mung Kaiming returned his gaze with a thoughtful, enigmatic smile.

"Yet it is sometimes very dangerous to be too realistic," Sankuo said, "if reality and idealism are at opposite poles, as you say. Take my son, for instance. Some people criticized him when he was going abroad for taking up the study of philosophy, instead of something more 'useful,' like engineering or chemistry, to help build a strong nation when he comes back. And yet I believe that now more than at other times, a man needs to believe

in a few things which are not directly practical or useful. It is too bad for our country that our moral standards are so completely identified with nationalism these days."

They both looked up as Chuli and the sisters came in.

"We are taking you to dinner," said Chuli.

Mung's eyes shifted and he leaped to his feet. "Oh, please don't go to a great deal of trouble on my account. It is your company rather than the food which is important to me. . . ."

"Wouldn't it be possible to have something simple at home?" said Sankuo comfortably.

"Well, the kitchen is empty," said Chuli. "There are only some leftovers, a cabbage, and eggs."

"Good enough! Good enough!" Mung cried heartily, and there was something boyish and enthusiastic about him which Chuli found hard to resist. "If you would allow me, I would be glad to cook supper for you," he said. "In my long time abroad, I had to learn to cook a few simple dishes, nothing to compare with your excellent cuisine, but simple, country food."

They were surprised, and looked at him curiously.

"Why not?" Sankuo said with a smile. "We often eat very simply at home."

"Then lead me to the kitchen!" Mung Kaiming said to the sisters, as Chuli still protested. Finally, they all went to the kitchen, and Mung Kaiming took off his jacket and rolled up his shirt sleeves. He found a cabbage in a basket and some salted fish and a piece of spare ribs. The family laughed to see his good spirits, and at last Chuli conceded, "Well, the stove is hot, the rice can be ready in no time. . . ."

Mung was already cutting up the cabbage with a big knife, and soon he was frying it with chilies in the sizzling back caldron, and making salted fish stew with beancurd and spare ribs soup.

They watched him, smiling and intent, and Sima fell silently into the role of his assistant, as he began to issue orders in a mock-serious way.

"Salt please! Now hand me a bit of ginger! Have you strong stomachs? Then let us not spare the chilies!"

Watching, Ahua could hardly keep her lips together because she was so amused, and she blushed for them both. Now the servants had set the table, and in a very little time, Mung Kaiming bore a tray to the dining table, laden with three hot dishes and a soup. He went back to the kitchen to wash his hands, rolled down his sleeves and put on his coat, and sat down at last to a round of applause and laughter.

"Ah," said Mung Kaiming suddenly solemn, "what a rare thing it is in life to meet up with genuine people in this world! May I say, Mrs. Wong, that when you invited me to tea yesterday, and showed such interest in myself as a human being, I was . . . deeply touched." His face thickened, and then he smiled again.

"You speak as if you really understood us," said Chuli softly. "We are simple, honest people, and we don't know how to pretend."

As usual when she was in strange company, Sima was very quiet, and scarcely uttered a word all through supper, although she listened with great intent to everything that was said. Once, while he was speaking, something flashed into Sima's mind. It seemed as if, although she hardly knew the man, she understood him perfectly, as if she had known him all her life; she alone understood that he was trying very hard to give a good impression to the family, but that he was completely different from how he appeared to be. She could not explain this, and she felt as if there were something wrong and dishonorable to understand this about him. She tried not to look at him any more, lest she should betray herself through her eyes.

"Are you going to be in Shanghai for long?" Chuli said.

"No," Kaiming replied earnestly. "I shall be going to Nanking in a day or so for my examinations. And if I am lucky enough to pass, I shall be leaving for America again very soon afterward."

Sima felt her heart beat very fast. She looked up fiercely, and her face flushed red.

"Leaving again? So soon?" Chuli asked.

"I expect to go back to New York," Mung replied. "The

Consul General was exceedingly kind to give me a furlough and I cannot stay for long."

After supper, Sima sat quietly while Mung Kaiming talked to her aunt and uncle. He told how he worked on the land as a boy, and how at sixteen, he earned money by pulling junks up the Yangtze River. A rope slipped from his shoulder once and made the scar on his neck. She listened attentively, and saw that her aunt and uncle seemed greatly impressed. She thought, "But they don't understand him. *He isn't like that at all.*"

As he talked, her breast ached for him and she did not know why. But at last he got up to go, and color flew to her cheeks again. She thought that they must have all seen it, and when Kaiming shook her hand, she was conscious suddenly that no barrier existed between them. She looked at him frightened, almost as if she expected him to punish her for all she had been thinking of him. After he was gone it was as if a part of her had left with him.

She flew upstairs abruptly as soon as he left.

Chuli stared after her with stern, troubled eyes and then looked at Sankuo. A feeling of awe came over her, as if all that she had only imagined to be possible this morning were actually going to happen very soon.

Sima lay awake a long time that night. Mung's face and voice seemed everywhere, and she felt as if she could not go to sleep while his presence hovered so near. She got up several times on the pretext of drinking some water, saying that the food disagreed with her, in order to go to the window and take in a breath of fresh air. The night was very dark, and looking into it, it was as if she could see her future before her. "Of you, Mung Kaiming, I am not afraid," she said to herself, without thinking why.

Ahua lay quietly, pretending to be asleep, but nothing escaped her eyes. "The poor creature is having stomach cramps already," she thought. "Before she knows it, she'll be finished. All he has to do now is issue his mating call, and she'll come flapping her little wings. What a fool! I can just see her, looking as pretty as a picture with a bouquet of flowers in her arms, going on the ship

to America with him. She'll link her arm through his, and when she's on deck, she'll wave to me and say, 'Ahua, take good care of yourself now and try to be more serious.' In no time at all, she'll turn into his self-satisfied wife and some child's doting mother. 'Oh, the baby is doing very well, now, thank you. I'm *glad* you told me to let him sleep right through, instead of waking him up to give him a feeding.' 'Oh, Kaiming was promoted last week, the Consul General thinks very highly of him. Yes, I know it was quite unexpected, and were we surprised!' 'Little Kai! Come here at once! I thought I told you to stay away from that window!' 'No, life in the Foreign Service is not always easy, but there are compensations.' And before you can bat an eye, she'll be on her second and third children, and be so busy feeding them and changing their pants and slopping about with dish rags, mops, and pails, scraping carrots, trailing slippers, making nourishing soup, and wondering how much the butcher charged her for a scrap of meat, that she will never know that nature has duped her into it all. She'll never stop to think. She'll just muddle her way through life, repeating proverbs and platitudes and saying whatever comes into her mind, incapable of forming a single opinion of her own, feeling hot and bothered when she feels it reasonable to be hot and bothered, and never use her brain at all. But it won't make any difference. A person can live just as well without any brains. And to the end of her life she will never find anything out, though she goes to America or any corner of the earth with this man, who has such a good sense of values in life, and who can give her more love and happiness than some young man whose head is stuffed with lofty dreams."

It rained all the next week, and Chuli found the house very quiet, with Sankuo in Nanking and Ahua at school. Sima caught a cold, and stayed in bed for several days. When she was able to come downstairs again, she began on her sketchbook once more. It seemed to Chuli that the freshness had gone from her face, and that she was even quieter than usual. Neither of them would bring up the name of Mung Kaiming first.

But one morning, as they sat, one painting and the other sewing, Sima said abruptly, "Well, thank goodness, the man's left for Nanking! Now we have some peace!"

Chuli looked up sharply. He's in Nanking, she thought, but he can come on weekends. It's only two hours.

The girl looked out of the window every time she heard someone walk up to the gate, and when Sankuo came back on Friday night, she half expected to see Mung Kaiming also. But the weekend went by, and the man did not show up.

None of them mentioned this, but disappointment was plain all over Sima's face. Chuli noticed that she began to turn more and more away from her. She moved like a shadow about the house, and was slow to recover from her cold. Chuli herself became impatient, too. Surely the next move is up to him, she thought. We have done enough.

One day it seemed as if the man had never been there. Three weeks had passed and not a word had been heard from him. Surely, he had taken his examinations already, and was probably on his way to America already, Chuli thought, and she felt angry, as if she had overextended herself to this young vice-consul, and been snubbed by him. Sima was ironing in her room, and Chuli was sitting on the bed, watching her, and not liking at all what she saw. The girl's face was pale and pinched, and her mind seemed not to be on her work. When she burned a hole in one of her dresses, and held it up to show her, Chuli felt a white flash of anger. She could contain herself no longer.

"Why punish yourself?" she said directly. "We have only seen him twice. Have we no pride?"

The girl was taken by surprise. Tears dropped from her eyes before she could help it, and made a sizzling noise on the iron. It was as if this proved something which she had tried not to believe was true, she let go of the iron, and seizing Chuli by the hand, fell sobbing and shaking on her shoulders, not knowing what would come of this, and feeling that she must be mad.

Chuli's face became very stern. So she felt this way about him! she thought. Foolish girl!

“What do we know about him?” she said softly, lifting up the girl’s face. “How can you feel like this?”

Sima did not raise her eyes to meet hers. She kept them low and secret, almost as if this were something between herself and him only. After awhile, she dried her eyes and began to iron again, her lips thin and pale.

When Sankuo came back, Chuli told him what happened at once. At supper, he looked at Sima, and was surprised that he had not noticed the change in her before. Everything about her seemed different, the face, the eyes, the mouth, and even the way she sat. And when Sima felt him looking at her, she looked back, stony and mute, as if she were completely helpless.

It was true, then! But how could this have happened? Sankuo remembered the night in the kitchen when she had helped Kaiming to cook supper. How quiet she had been! She had scarcely even spoken to him! But then she was usually quiet and stiff in strange company; it was only when she was with her own family that she became gay and vivacious. He remembered that as a child, she used to go to parties and stand timidly beside Chuli and never utter a word, and yet when she came home she always had a great deal to say about everything, and talked as if she had enjoyed herself after all. And he recalled many impressions of her as a child, five years old, helping Chuli to arrange fruit and rinsing plums in a solution of potassium permanganate to disinfect them, and never getting a drop of the violet liquid on the tablecloth, and how she looked up and gave him a secret, proud smile when he praised her. She had always had a quiet reverence for herself, secret and profound, which he found curious and likeable. He remembered her at seven, gap-toothed, skipping rope in the garden.

Peanuts! Penny a packet!  
First you crack it,  
Then you eat it,  
Then you wipe it  
On your jacket!

Everything gnawed at him all at once. Why, Sima was in love! She had grown up and fallen in love with someone with whom she had scarcely spoken a word! Why, I must do something for her! Is it true, as Chuli said, that Mung Kaiming was making her unhappy? Why, he was scarcely good enough for her!

One evening in Nanking several days later, Wong Sankuo arrived late at a party given by the Commissioner of Overseas Affairs, which was being held on the official grounds. As he came in he saw that people were dancing, and he was at the door, watching for a few moments, when he saw Mung Kaiming among the dancers. Mung saw him also, but continued to whirl his partner around the dance floor until the music stopped, and then came up with the young girl and said, "It is a pleasure and an honor to see you again, sir! I have been wanting to call on the Minister to express my gratitude for your kind hospitality, but I dared not presume that Your Excellency had time to see me."

Under the soft lights, Mung's face looked very handsome. His partner was the daughter of the Commissioner. The music was so gay, and the girl was so pretty, that Sankuo was confused for a moment. He remembered Sima's dumb, white face, and felt a sharp stab in his heart. "Why are we not here dancing?" he thought unreasonably.

"I hope that Mrs. Wong and your nieces are well," Mung Kaiming said politely.

Abruptly, Sankuo said, "We would be happy to see you again in Shanghai. You left quite an impression on my niece." An expression of complete astonishment came over Mung's face. They stared blankly at one another for a second, as if neither could believe what the other was thinking, and then said good-by. Sankuo left the party soon afterward.

It was midnight when Mung Kaiming walked into the street after the party. As he danced at the party tonight, it had struck him that none of the people with whom he mingled knew anything of what was really passing in his mind. He had been work-

ing so hard since he came to Nanking, trying to meet as many people as possible, and the anxieties of his forthcoming Foreign Service examinations weighed so much on his mind that he had not enjoyed himself at all although he had been holding pretty, rich girls in his arms and dancing. He was aware that in Nanking, he should appear better dressed in order to make a better impression, but there was such bitterness and contempt in him sometimes that he did not mind attending a party and mingling with the official crowds as he was, in his frayed and old gabardine suit.

Now he walked away from the main streets, for he did not care to meet anyone at that moment. He lit cigarette after cigarette, and threw them away before they were half smoked. Something new was shaping itself in his mind, and he felt greatly agitated. He began to review what had happened between himself and the Minister of Education. What had the old fellow meant? "You left quite an impression on my niece." So I must have! Why hadn't I thought of it before? Finally, he let out a bark of laughter in spite of himself. He lifted his eyes from the ground, and only then did he realize that he had walked into the dark back streets of the city. Stench rising from the foul corners assailed him all at once. Without thinking, Mung Kai-ming began to run. He brushed past people whom he could not see, but everything about poverty was so familiar to him that he did not have to see, and only had to smell, to know what it was like.

A few minutes later, he was back in a completely different world of modern buildings, bright lights, and automobiles, and he breathed more slowly and slackened his pace. But his feeling of revulsion for the dark slimy streets, enveloped in everlasting fetid smells, for the rotting huts and ugly people who lived in them, clung to him, and it made this other world seem like a make-believe world, in which people only pretended to live, and in which nothing he did could matter, since it could not change the real world he had just run away from.

## 5

ON THE following Sunday morning, Chuli was writing to her son in her room when she happened to look out of the window and saw Mung Kaiming walking up to the gate. At the same moment, Sima flew into the room, shrieking, "He's come! It's him! It's him!" She could not bring herself to mention Kaiming's name.

Chuli looked at the girl with serious eyes. "How changed she is, my Sima, who used to be so quiet and calm!" she thought. The girl was white in the face, and looked as if she had completely lost her wits. Chuli was a little annoyed.

"And what if he has come?" she said, looking at the girl steadily.

Sima had no time to speak before Yuma came upstairs with the news. Yes, indeed, it was he, Mung Kaiming. Chuli's first reaction was cold and hostile. Sankuo had told them of meeting Mung Kaiming in Nanking this week, from which Chuli had formed the opinion that the man was "looking for bigger fish up the river" after having passed over the "small fish" he had seen in Shanghai. So he has come, has he? she thought. Very well, we shall see what he wants. Only this girl must not make a fool of herself before him.

"Stay upstairs until I call you," she told Sima sternly. The expression on her face was so serious that it was almost as if she were afraid of Mung Kaiming. The girl gave her a long, silent look, and went back to her room.

Chuli went downstairs slowly, for she did not mean to hide her reluctance to see Mung Kaiming again. At last she came down the stairs and said coolly, "It is a long time since we have had the pleasure of seeing you, Mr. Mung."

Mung Kaiming—aye! he was still wearing the same shiny gray suit—turned around at the sound of her voice and came forward quickly.

"How gracious it is of you to see me!" he said in the hearty manner she remembered. "I hope I have not disturbed you. I came back from Nanking only yesterday."

"Indeed," said Chuli, looking at him hard, as if she were seeing him for the first time. She thought he looked older than her impression of him before, and there were white hairs on his head which she had not noticed before. He was wearing a not very fresh shirt and the same shoes, although he had changed his tie. How old was this man? Thirty-five, at least. Rather old for Sima anyway, she thought, and felt her heart contract.

When they sat down in the salon, the sun shining through the window happened to strike his face and made it look thick and coarse, and the scar on his neck seemed darker than before.

Kaiming's face was serious and troubled. "I wanted very much to come sooner," he said, "but I did not want to impose myself upon you, knowing how many more important people must demand your time."

In spite of herself, the lump of anger in Chuli's breast began to dissolve. The man looked as if he were in trouble, she thought.

"Believe me, I find this most difficult to say," Mung Kaiming said. "I have waited and debated with myself, but now I have come, perhaps in spite of my better judgment."

"Why, what is the matter?" Chuli said, surprised.

"To tell you the truth, Mrs. Wong, I am a little frightened at this moment," he said, with a nervous smile on his lips.

"Frightened? Why should you be?"

Mung frowned and stared at the carpet for a long time. Then he looked up, swiftly and fiercely, and said, "May I see the Minister for a few moments?"

"The Minister?" cried Chuli, and her heart was beating very fast. "Why, is something wrong? He is working in his study, but if it is something important, I am sure he will see you."

"If you would be so kind," Mung said, and perspiration stood out on his temples.

They waited in silence for Sankuo. Had he failed his examinations, then, Chuli thought. Was the man in money trouble?

Had he come to borrow? Or had he come to ask Sankuo to put in a good word for him with the Minister of Foreign Affairs? Knowing her husband, she wished she could warn him before he came in, but there was no chance.

Mung Kaiming did not try to make small talk while they waited for Wong Sankuo, but rather sat pensively, crouched forward in his chair, hands clasped between his knees. When Sankuo came in, he leaped to his feet.

"I beg your pardon, sir, for this interruption upon your work," he said. "But as I am leaving for America in two weeks, I had to come."

Wong Sankuo glanced at his wife and sat down.

"I was telling Mrs. Wong, sir, I am a little frightened and somewhat astonished, too, to find myself here and by what I am about to ask of you."

He sat down again, and they waited for him to go on, but Mung became very quiet and still. He was silent for half a minute before he thrust his head up again and said rather abruptly, "I know that I have no right, it should never have entered my head in the first place . . . but could you give me permission to take your niece Sima out, this afternoon, tomorrow, any time she is free . . . to see a show, and dine, perhaps. I know that I have no right to ask. But if it would be at all possible . . . sometimes, the heart overrules the head . . ."

He ended falteringly.

Chuli was so astonished that she began to say, "But you have no need to ask our permission," when she sensed that Mung Kaiming was in fact asking for much more than the permission to take Sima out. This was a different man from the one who came to dine a month ago, and her eyes narrowed for a moment.

Sankuo was embarrassed by Mung's display of emotions, and drew at his pipe steadily, and looked at his wife. After a moment, he could say nothing except, "Don't you think you had better ask Sima herself whether she wants to go out with you?" and he started to smile when he saw the man's eyes. They were so dark and serious that Sankuo became uneasy.

Then Chuli sent Yuma up for Sima, and they waited in strained silence. Chuli felt so confused that she did not know what to think. The man had come back, yes, but all the things she had thought about him could not be so easily forgotten. Or had she just imagined them? What did they know about this man? she thought. The seconds went by very slowly, and Mung glanced at the door from time to time. Yes, he was asking for much more than the privilege of taking Sima out, Chuli thought, and her heart rose to her throat.

When they heard Sima's footsteps, they all looked up at once.

She came into the room like an illumination—this girl who had come shrieking into Chuli's bedroom just a few minutes before—her curly black hair, her white face with a touch of scarlet at the lips, and her somber eyes all seemed to give off a radiance. She had changed into a pretty mauve-colored dress, much too thin for this weather, and she was lovely. She seemed more adult, somehow, and more sure of herself, than they had ever seen her. Mung Kaiming once more leaped to his feet, and went forward to her.

When she saw him, she looked at him boldly and seriously, and something electric passed between their eyes. Her love for him was as plain on her face as the sun in the sky, and seeing her, Sankuo felt a deep anguish for the silent suffering she must have endured before.

## 6

TEN days later, Sima and Mung Kaiming became engaged.

The wedding would take place a week later, and the couple would board the ocean liner for America the same evening. The wedding ceremony was to be as simple as possible, at the request of Kaiming, and since the bride's father had not been

dead for a year, Chuli agreed. In any case, there would be no time to do things properly.

A small engagement dinner just within the family was held, however, when the engagement became official.

While Chuli was dressing that evening, Sima flounced into her room, looking very pretty. She and Kaiming had just come back from town, and her face was rosy with the cold wintry air. She had been so busy these last two weeks that she scarcely had a moment to speak to the family.

"Aunt, I simply have to tell you something very funny," she cried at the top of her voice. "This afternoon Kaiming took me to the cinema and said he wanted to buy loge seats. 'Why so grand?' I said, I have to be the thrifty housewife now, you know. And he said, 'Why, I thought loge seats were cheaper than the seats downstairs.' Have you ever heard of such a thing? Really, you know, sometimes I don't know what I'm going to do with a country bumpkin on my hands. You don't think he is *stupid* or anything, do you?"

"No, Sima, I think you are marrying a very intelligent man in Kaiming," said Sankuo, looking up with a smile. He had been reading a newspaper in bed.

"Well, so long as he isn't *retarded*, it's all right, then," said the girl cheerfully, waving both her arms in the air. She was fitting out of the room again when Chuli called out, "Hey, bride, don't go away! I have important business to talk with you!"

Sima turned back and sat down on the bed with the air of someone who had to resign herself to inescapable duties.

"Someone from the Kim family must come up to represent you at the wedding," said Chuli, winding her hair into a knot. "We must get a cable off to Amoy tonight. The most logical person is your stepmother Ah Yee."

"Ah Yee?" Sima got up and went to Chuli and stared at her in astonishment. "Why should she come to represent *me*? You know that I have never been able to consider that person as my stepmother, although she is illiterate."

Sankuo frowned. The characteristic absence of logic in her conversation intrigued him.

"Well, you know that someone from the Kim family should be present—I myself don't count, I am a Wong now, and besides, we mustn't forget the family, especially since they are not so prosperous as they used to be now. They will feel offended, thinking we are slighting them. Ah Yee is the most logical person, and since she has been wanting to come to Shanghai to have her teeth fixed for so long, why not let her come?"

Sima became very thoughtful. Then she said with a sigh, "Well, if Kai doesn't mind, I have no real objections, I suppose. You know me. I'm always very easy to convince. I am always too good." She began to help Chuli with her hair.

"You're like me," Chuli said.

"Oh, but one thing I must make clear to her! I shall certainly be too busy before the wedding to be expected to show her around the city! I shall have no time to act as tourist guide!"

"I'll make Ahua responsible for her, don't worry about that," Chuli said.

"I guess it's all right then," Sima said, and heaving a sigh, flounced out of the room.

Downstairs in the salon, all the lights had been turned on and Mung Kaiming, wearing a new navy blue suit which was Sima's present to him, was prancing about with a glass of brandy in his hand, and looking at the vases on the bookcases and tables. He picked one up and scrutinized it. "This one must be very old. Is it Tang Dynasty, Ahua? It must be worth a fortune."

"I know nothing about antiques," Ahua said.

He sat down beside her and pinched her cheek.

"What is the matter, Ahua? Why so sullen? Aren't you glad that I'm going to be your brother-in-law?"

"I'm glad for Sima's sake," she said.

"You are all very wonderful people, do you know that?"

Kaiming said. "But none of you has any idea whatsoever what the world is like."

"What do you mean?"

"Well, let's see. Have you ever really suffered in life?"

"What do you mean?"

"I mean have you ever experienced anything really unpleasant. Have you ever been really hungry, for instance, I mean really starved?"

"No, I don't suppose we have."

"One summer when I was a boy, there was a drought and I had to eat tree bark and grass to keep alive."

Ahua raised her eyes and looked at him deeply.

"There's nothing which establishes one's sense of values in life so quickly as hunger," he said, leaning back on the sofa, and flinging his arm behind her on the seat. "And until you've gone through something like that, you cannot know what life is like. That's why I say you are all living in an unrealistic world. You live in a world of illusions."

She studied his face closely, and saw how rough his face was, pitted here and there. "He is scarred by life," she thought. "How different his life is from mine, this man, who has gone forth into the far-flung world, and embraced life with his strong, workmanlike arms, gathering experience of every kind into his breast, and who stands his own sure ground in the dark, mysterious world!"

"Myself and Sima, perhaps," she said, drawing the dish of peanuts and cakes to her on the table, and beginning to abandon herself to mindless gluttony. It didn't make any difference, she had never starved anyway.

"Do you know what they call your uncle in Nanking?" Kaiming said, tossing his head back with a bark of laughter. She looked up at him, feeling very small and helpless.

"They call him Mr. Hao-hao."

"I didn't know."

"And as for your aunt, she's really very funny. But that's what makes you all so charming and adorable. I'll never forget

the way she plied me with noodles when I came to tea that first day."

"I thought you liked them," Ahua said slowly. "This has the real Southern flavor, hasn't it? I remember."

"Well, it's bad manners not to show your appreciation when you are a guest, didn't you know that?"

Ahua turned her attention to the peanuts again. "You're wrong, Kaiming," she said after a moment. "I have suffered."

"What have you ever suffered?"

Her lips trembled, and large tears formed in her eyes. "Spiritual wounds," she said hoarsely.

"Spiritual wounds?"

"Yes. Many times."

"Really?" He bent very close to her, and pinched her cheek again. "You're very sweet, you know?" Kaiming said.

Ahua looked into his eyes, and was so surprised that she lost all desire to talk.

"Won't you tell me about them?" he said.

"No, I cannot," she replied. "But you mustn't say I have never suffered, Kaiming. I have."

Then Chuli came downstairs. She was wearing a new dress and Kaiming rose to his feet. "How young you look, it is difficult to think of you as the mother of a grown-up son!" he said, grinning.

"Oh, I'm an old woman now," Chuli said. "And this dress is really too bright for me, but Sima insisted I should get it, and I thought I'd better wear it before I get any older."

At seven-thirty, Yuma drew the heavy satin curtains in the dining room. Outside, the wind whistled through the trees. The cold weather had set in early this year, and clouds which were torn and frayed sailed past the moon.

With great expectations, the family sat down to dinner. Since the wedding ceremony was going to be so very simple, this dinner had been ordered from a restaurant as a celebration within the family. Chuli said that she did not know when the family would all meet again. It was not a year since Sima had come back to them, and now she was leaving again, before

they had had a chance to enjoy her company, and she wondered when Kaiming thought they would come back to China again.

"In the Foreign Service, it is hard to say," said Kaiming as soup was brought in. "One goes where one is sent. Cuba? Mexico? Rio? Or even Europe or Africa."

"But don't you get regular furloughs?" Chuli asked.

"Sometimes one is called back by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and then it is usually for something special, either a promotion or a demotion," Kaiming said. "No, there are no fixed furloughs."

Chuli and Sankuo were both stirred when they heard this. But seeing Sima, who seemed to show no feelings at the thought of leaving the family for so many years, Chuli said, trying to sound gay, "What a lot of the world Sima will be seeing! I don't say I don't envy her, although it takes courage, too, I know, to leave everything one is familiar with behind, and go forth into the world like this."

Sima smiled when Chuli mentioned courage, and looked very proud.

The soup was followed by braised calf's-foot tendons in prawn eggs, green noodles with roast woodcock, and chicken stuffed with bird's nest. As the dinner wore on, Chuli became more and more talkative. "You must not think that we indulge in extravagance like this all the time," she said when Kaiming protested that there was too much food. "But today is a special, happy occasion, and we have only a few simple joys."

"Yes, you are such real people," Kaiming said seriously. "To tell you the truth, when Zan told me that his cousin was living at home in Shanghai, I dared not even entertain the idea of approaching her. Frankly, I thought she would be too expensive for one thing. . . ." He scratched his head self-consciously, and glanced all around the table.

"Well, if that was what was keeping you," said Chuli happily, "you need not have tarried, Kaiming. But I must put in a good word for Sima. Kim family girls are all well brought up. We are not like some of the spoiled girls from rich families, although

at one time the Kim family enjoyed a certain prosperity in Amoy, too."

"This is all like a dream," said Kaiming modestly, glancing at his fiancée. "I cannot understand what Sima sees in me. I have so little to offer in the way of either social position or security. . . ."

"Now I am going to tell you something which you probably don't know," said Chuli. "There is a saying for which I am famous among all our friends."

"A famous saying?"

"Yes. You see when the Minister and I were married, the Kim family, as I say, was quite well-to-do, and I suppose I could have married into any family I fancied, whereas His Excellency was only the son of a schoolteacher. But people told me that he was hard-working, honest, and intelligent, and that was good enough for me." She looked at Sankuo with a sly smile. "And so when my father asked me what my opinion was of this penniless schoolteacher's son, I said, 'Money does not matter,' and no one has ever forgotten it since." Her eyes sparkled and she beamed at Sankuo. "And now you see, these hands are rough and wrinkled, but I have never regretted my wise saying of more than thirty years ago. In a way, that is our family motto." She was slightly carried away by wine and emotion. "'Money does not matter.' We are hard-working, honest people, and if today we are where we are, it is due to our hard work and honesty."

"I feel very humble," Kaiming said, looking very grave. "I hope I may be worthy."

During the rest of the dinner, the conversation was about the wedding. They marveled at the swiftness with which everything had happened. Yuma, exercising the prerogative of an old servant in the family, joined in the conversation and said that the marriage was made in heaven. On his part, Kaiming told again of how his palms had sweated when he came to tea for the first time. Everyone laughed a great deal, as if this was the first time they heard this, and assured him that he need not have felt any qualms at all about the family, who were, ad-

mittedly, such simple people. Then they beseeched him to tell them again how Zan looked and how he liked America, and whether he had gained any weight.

"Oh, don't worry so much, Aunt!" cried Sima. "I promise you, when I get there, I'll make you a full report about how much he weighs, what he eats, and what he does every day!"

Her voice was high and shrill, and her eyes shone with pride at her powers of repartee. Everyone laughed and Chuli conceded, "Well, you know the sort of person I am. I cannot be a bad mother because I don't know how."

"You should learn to take a more optimistic view of things in life, like me," said Sima.

Sankuo raised his eyebrows at the word "optimistic." He was sure that she did not understand what she was talking about, but it did not matter, manifestly it did not matter. The bride-to-be, in a week's time, had blossomed into a different person. The dignity of her new position filled her with a sense of importance, and she had a word of advice for everybody.

After dinner, Kaiming and Sima walked into the garden.

"Nothing seems real. I cannot believe it's true, Sima," said Mung Kaiming, holding his fiancée by the waist.

"You have had a great deal to drink."

"No, I mean it. It is the first time something so wonderful has happened to me. Look at these little rosebuds embroidered on your beautiful coat. I have never seen anything so fine. Are you sure, Sima, that you don't want to change your mind?"

"Oh, Kai, don't tease me."

"I'm not teasing you. But don't imagine life will be like here in New York, pig's lung soup, rose petal omelets. You will have to skimp and save on my salary, and wash my socks and cook my meals. Why are you willing to do this for me?"

"Because I love you, Kai."

"You love me?"

They stopped walking and in the moonlight, his face looked claylike and troubled.

"Yes, I love you, and that's why I am willing to go with you

to the end of the earth, if necessary, and leave everything behind. I don't care about anyone but you, Kai. I don't know what's come over me. I cannot even feel sorry about leaving my family." She thrust herself upon him, and he parted her coat and took her breasts and squeezed them. "You see, I'm not even angry when you do that."

After awhile, she broke away from him. "I have something to ask you, Mung Kaiming," she said impishly.

"What is it?"

"No, take your hands away from there. I'm very serious now."

"Can't you ask it like this?"

"No, I want you to be serious."

"I am serious. Go ahead. What do you want to ask me?"

"I want to know what you have been doing in Nanking all this time."

"Nanking? Why, haven't I told you? I was taking my Foreign Service examinations."

"Well, what were you doing one night when Uncle saw you at a certain party?"

After a moment, Kaiming let out a shout of laughter. "Oh, that!"

"Yes, that!"

"I'd completely forgotten, you know that?"

"Well, what were you doing there?" She twitched his nose.

"I was invited to dinner. I believe there was dancing afterward. There, I am hiding nothing from you, am I?"

"But would you have come back to me if you hadn't met Uncle again that night, Kai? Is it true that you were chasing after a lot of girls, oh, *much* prettier, and of course more important than an insignificant person like me, and after they all turned you down, you decided to turn back to me?"

"Where do you hear these things, for God's sake?" Kaiming said. "I'm really amazed at you."

"But I don't mind, Kaiming, you can tell me the truth. Honestly I don't care."

"But there's nothing to tell."

"Oh, you mustn't think that just because I pretend to be

simple-minded sometimes, I can't figure out a thing or two for myself, Mr. Mung," she said.

"What do you know?" Kaiming said. His voice became hard. "Tell me, what have you figured out for yourself?"

"Why, I was only talking, Kaiming. Don't look like that."

"Where do you get all these fantastic ideas? Is that what your uncle has been saying about me?"

"Oh, Kai, don't be angry now. I was only talking. Nobody said anything about you. Uncle couldn't have a better opinion of you. Please don't be angry with me."

"I'll not be angry if you stop saying these idiotic things about me," Kaiming said roughly. His face was white and thick.

"Oh, Kai, please. I can't stand it if you are angry with me," Sima said, and encircled his waist with her arms. "I'm sorry. I'm sorry I said something wrong."

"Well, you should never say such things again," he said in a softer tone. "Listen, Sima, you will be reasonable tonight, won't you?"

"Oh, please!"

"What is the matter? It has to happen sometime. Now or next week, what difference does it make?"

"Please don't. Don't think I'm small-townish, but I just . . . just can't throw myself away."

"Throw yourself away!"

"I mean . . . I mean . . ."

"You said you were willing to follow me to the end of the world, but you don't mean it. I was telling Ahua only before dinner. You all live in a world of illusions."

"Don't criticize my family, Kai."

"I'm not criticizing your family."

"But what were you saying about Ahua?"

"Ahua's thin as sticks. I'm glad you're not thin as sticks."

"Oh, Kai, you're awful. Don't do that."

"Where should we go first? Would you like to go to the Roof Garden of the Park Hotel?"

"I don't care."

"I only want you to be reasonable."

"If I am reasonable, will you stop being angry with me?"  
"We'll see."

Their voices drifted through the cold air, soft and clear. Ahua stood behind the screened window and listened.

She watched the restaurant people leave through the side door with their equipment, and after awhile, Sima and Kaiming went out, emitting asinine giggles, through the front gate.

"Physically and spiritually, I am self-sufficient," Ahua said to herself. "And nothing will happen to me without my intellectual consent. I don't blame Sima for compromising her flesh, for she is, after all, only a happy idiot. But does no one recognize me, Kim Ahua, for my true self?"

## 7

Two days later, Ah Yee arrived in Shanghai by plane with her youngest child, Old Nine, and was immediately pressed to work. There was the bride's wardrobe to get ready and trunks to pack. The tailor was waiting in the dining room. Quantities of material were piled on the table, and Chuli ordered the household to be run on a "wartime emergency" basis until the wedding was over. Cold meals were served in the salon and eaten, haphazard fashion, each at his own time. Chuli had to tear Sima away from Kaiming many times a day, "Bride! Come here! Business first! Which is the piece of material you decided on for wearing on board the ship after the wedding?"

Grinning, Kaiming threw up his hands in surrender and sat in the salon, pipe clenched between his teeth, and resigned himself to reading a newspaper. At first everyone tried to entertain him, but after a few days he was like one of the family, and they left him alone. Once he went to the dining room to help choose a piece of material for Sima, and the bride-to-be had

to double up with laughter. "Oh, Kaiming, not that red embroidered! So provincial! Go and read your newspaper and leave us women in peace!" She turned around again, with a very serious expression on her face. "You know what's very smart? Green linen with matching coatee. And don't say I must have it lined, Ah Yee, because I'm not going to row across the Pacific, you know! And goodness, if I feel chilly, I can always throw the squirrel cape over my shoulders."

On the eve of the wedding, almost everything that had to be done was done. The trunks had been sent off to the steamer, the bridal dress was hanging in the closet upstairs, and everything else they could think of had been taken care of. After supper, Chuli sat back with a solemn air and said, "All in all, Sima, I don't think we have done too badly for you, although if you had given me more time, I would have married you off in even better style. But I don't think we need be ashamed of how you are being married tomorrow." Her voice broke and she continued haltingly. "Now your uncle and I have decided to give you two thousand American dollars. You are just like a daughter to me, and I want you to put this money in the bank, and not touch it." She glanced at Kaiming. "It is not as much as I would like to give you . . . I know outsiders think we are worth a great deal, but two thousand is all your uncle and I can do for you at the moment. You know what our financial position is like. Now Kaiming, since it is all within the family, I want to know approximately how much savings you have. We have made this match for her and she is going so far away. My heart will not be at ease unless I know how things stand with her exactly."

Mung Kaiming leaned forward in his chair, and stared at the carpet without speaking.

"Surely, you are not offended by my question," Chuli said.

"No, no, not at all," Kaiming said quickly. "You have a right to know." His whole face changed. He looked uneasily from Chuli to Sankuo to Sima. "Well, I don't know how to put this," he said at last, "perhaps a man in my position has no

right to have the same desires and ambitions as men richer than myself. . . .”

“Why, what is it?” Chuli cried, frightened.

“The truth is this—I do not want to hide anything from you—I have a few outstanding debts in America. You see, I am trying to be as straightforward as I can. . . .” He stopped, and sheltered his eyes with one hand over his brow. “When you told me that evening that the motto of the family was ‘Money does not matter,’ I was . . . deeply touched. I felt that I had been accepted by your family, for myself . . . as a human being. When I discovered that I was in love with Sima, I was frightened, and for a month in Nanking debated with myself what to do. . . . I convinced myself that I had the right, as well as anyone, to make a bid for the hand of this sweet and good girl. If I have erred, forgive me. I hope I have never given you any impression but that I was a poor man.”

He took his trembling hand from his face, and they saw that his eyes were dark with feeling. He said no more.

“But how much do you owe?” Chuli said under her breath.

“These debts I incurred during my first years in America—before I joined the Consulate. Later I was able to pay some back, little by little, but there are still a few outstanding items.” He looked steadily at Sankuo. “I want to hide nothing from you.”

Kaiming paused, and bit his lips hard. “Even without these debts, Sima would have to skimp and save and work hard. . . .”

They were silent after Kaiming spoke, and Kaiming turned and looked at Sima. The girl was quiet for a moment, and then she stretched out her two white hands and turned up her palms. She said with quiet resolution, “These hands are not afraid of hard work.”

Quickly, she was overcome by the dramatic impact of her own words and blinked back her tears, trembling. Her face was deadly serious.

Kaiming grasped her hands and held them very tight. “I have nothing to say,” he mumbled. “I feel very humble.”

“How much do you owe?” Chuli asked a moment later. “I must know.”

Now Kaiming looked up and replied, "Four thousand dollars." "Ai-yo!" exclaimed Ah Yee involuntarily, who had been sitting very quietly.

Chuli looked from Ah Yee to Sankuo and back to Ah Yee again.

At last Sankuo said, his face contracted with emotion, "You have been perfectly straightforward with us and never tried to give us any impression but that you were a poor man. Don't worry too much about it. When Sima said she was not afraid of poverty just now, I felt as if all these years we have tried to teach her something of the true values of life have been rewarded. I am proud of you, Sima. A man's true qualities cannot be judged by how much money he has."

Chuli remembered how she also had married for love, but she was torn between loyalty to her innate beliefs and the power of love. She looked from her husband to Ah Yee in confusion. "When I was young, I had a lot of courage, and said money does not matter," she said miserably. "Now I am older and wiser and I know money does matter."

After she said this, she got up dazedly and went upstairs. Soon Sima and Kaiming went out again.

When she and Sankuo were alone, Chuli said worriedly, blinking rapidly as she spoke, "I didn't know he had debts. It is one thing to go abroad as the wife of a vice-consul, and another to go as the wife of a man pursued by creditors."

"The least we should do now is back Sima up as much as we can," said Sankuo. "The salary he gets will be spent on their living expenses every month. I want her to have some peace of mind, and not have to worry too much from the day she is married. Do you think we can give her another thousand?"

"Another thousand?" Chuli whispered. "How?" She began to count their assets, as she often did, because it could be done by crooking her fingers. Most of what they had was in this house. There were a few hundred shares of stocks in the Shanghai Stock Exchange which must not be touched, and a rather more fluid amount they kept in the bank, out of which they were paying something into their monthly expenses all the time, since San-

kuo's salary was not enough. Any extra money Sankuo earned from his writing went into purchases and other expenses which they could not foresee.

"How are we going to do it?" Chuli asked.

"I want to do it," Sankuo said. "What is money good for except to be there when it is needed? Only what we feel in our hearts gives it any value."

Chuli saw that her husband looked tired and sad. In spite of her misgivings, she kept quiet.

"I understand Kaiming," Sankuo said. "I know that when a man has a run of bad luck, he is treated by society not with sympathy, not with pity, but with suspicion, cold, cruel, and hostile."

"You are always too soft," she whispered.

"No, it is not my softness, but the hateful and shameless harshness of life," he said.

All his life, he had tried to give people the impression that he was a practical man and not a dreamer, but he was conscious that the more he lived, the faster he must hold to the bondage of a few dreams and ideals. This set him and his family aside from others, he knew, but this was how it must be.

That night, Chuli had an unusual dream. She dreamed that her dead brother's spirit came back to visit her, and stood right beside her bed and said, "Thank you, Chuli, for looking after my daughters." Her dream was so vivid that when she woke up the next morning, she was sure that it had really been Tuako's spirit and not a dream at all. Warmed and excited by this unusual expression of gratitude from her dead brother, she became happier that they decided to give Mung Kaiming the extra thousand dollars. Her face shone as she told everyone about the visitation, and when Kaiming came, she immediately repeated the story to him, and took his hands and said in a very formal way, "Kaiming, we have thought it over, and the Minister and I want you to accept this, a gift of a thousand dollars from us." She had prepared the check.

Kaiming's face turned claylike. "Is it possible that people

like this exist?" he thought. They were all dressed up in new clothes, and so impressed with the solemnity of the occasion, and seemed so happy to be themselves that they were like children playing make-believe. And yet he could not laugh at them inwardly.

"Please, leave me a little pride," he murmured, scarcely knowing what made him say it. Chuli exchanged looks with her husband. All at once, the misgivings in their hearts were banished. They had not misplaced their confidence in him after all. Ah Yee, with her mouth agape, turned with bewilderment first to Chuli and then to Kaiming for his refusal.

"Let it be so, then," Sankuo said simply.

Like people brought together by a storm, they stood together that afternoon in the salon as Sima and Kaiming were married. Only a few friends of Chuli's had been invited. Kaiming wanted a very quiet wedding and invited no friends of his own.

Everyone noticed that the groom was more nervous than the bride. After the ceremony, Kaiming looked stunned and dazed and talked very little. His white hairs seemed to have multiplied in these weeks, and on his face there was an expression of melancholy and mockery, almost as if everything were happening against his will. He scarcely ate or drank.

After dinner, they went to the Bund and boarded a launch which took them to the sea. The great steamship was anchored in the dark, shimmering with a thousand yellow lights. They went on board and drank coffee in the lounge. Sima looked wonderfully pretty in her pink satin dress and silver slippers, and all the passengers on the ship could see that she was a bride and kept looking at her. She stared back at them openly, wondering out loud who they were. She talked incessantly, clasping the squirrel cape about her shoulders with her be-ringed hand. They had a second-class cabin, and Sima told everyone that the Ministry of Foreign Affairs was paying her passage as well as his.

Chuli, her emotions welling over, expressed her admiration again for Sima's courage in going to the other side of the world armed with only love and faith in her husband.

Kaiming looked deathly white. "You haven't caught a cold,

have you?" his wife asked, with a new possessive air which amused Sankuo and also shook him a little. She seemed saved in life from many things because of her naïveté. She stood before him, in all her vivacity and vigor, eyes bright with the radiance of an indestructible belief in herself, blissfully happy and also somewhat silly, immune from many a doubt and oblivious of many a truth, out of the reach of time and death.

He hugged her and said good-by, and when they came back, it was snowing. The sky was a pale gray and the air was biting and crisp.

In the morning, Shanghai was covered with a layer of soft snow. Cars and pedicabs moved noiselessly on the roads, and here and there, homeless people made bonfires on the streets to keep warm.

All over Northern China, the snow fell, too, and the cold in the north was bitter and severe, and not like the cold in central China. The Government, having thrown one million, six hundred thousand troops, or about eighty per cent of its regular forces into battle, had driven the Communists out of their capital, Yenan, earlier in the year, and recovered much of the area in the central plains. But they had failed to conquer Shantung, key province to the north, and were disastrously defeated there. The Manchurian railways had been cut, and the Government held only large islands of territory around the major cities. Mukden and Changchun, the key cities in Manchuria, were virtually in siege, with the best Government troops surrounded and unable to break out. They had been forced on to the defensive everywhere.

Wong Sankuo plunged into his work in Nanking, growing increasingly uneasy of the inept leadership and corruption in high places of Government. He found it impossible to separate the work of the Ministry of Education from politics, hard though he tried. He found himself in a particular situation, gripped in the general crisis of the war, hating the confusion of honest hard work with politics. Yet as always he felt conscious that by steeping himself in trouble, he was exerting some influence on the

life around him, and this was all he could do, but no more than he should do.

## 8

"Would you like to see my new teeth?" whispered Ah Yee, glancing carefully about the tearoom. "What are we having to eat?"

"Cake and tea," said Ahua. "But you should wear them all the time."

Ah Yee took her dental plates out of her handbag, bent down, and snapped them into place. She straightened and smiled carefully.

"Every time I put them in my mouth, I want to vomit."

"You should wear them all the time and get used to them."

"How do they look?"

"They don't look real."

"Don't they?"

"They are too white. You should have told the dentist dark ivory to match the others."

"Oh, girl! You haven't changed at all, have you? And I thought you'd be high and mighty with big-city manners by now!" Ah Yee covered her mouth from habit and laughed. Ahua had never seen this merry, girlish side of her stepmother before, which only came out now she was a widow.

Ah Yee was looking especially ugly this afternoon, with too much dead white powder on her nose and her cheeks blue with cold. The new front teeth made her assume a strange expression, and Old Nine, sitting on her lap, kept staring at her.

"Well, now the wedding is over and I have my teeth, we should be going back to Amoy, Old Nine and I," Ah Yee said, trying to suppress her giggles.

"Ah Yee, why don't I come back with you?"

"Come back with me? What for?"

"I could come back and mind Old Nine for you, help you cook and wash. I really don't care very much for Shanghai."

"Why, what do you want to come back for?"

"Life is a farce, Ah Yee."

"It's the cold weather. You're not used to it. It isn't so cold in the south."

"The day after Sima left, I almost threw myself into the pond coming back from school through the park."

"Oh, Ahua, I do believe you're feeling sorry for yourself because your sister married and left you!"

"No, I'm not. As it turned out, the pond was only a few feet deep. What a fool I would have made of myself!" The corners of her mouth began to twitch. "Ah Yee, may I ask you a frank question?"

"What is it?"

"Did I ever have your breast as a baby?"

"Now how could you? When I came to take care of you, I wasn't even married. You were raised on cow's milk."

"Ah Yee, I'm thinking of becoming a nun."

"Don't be silly."

"I'm perfectly serious."

"What sort of nun are you going to become? A foreign nun, or one of those barefoot ones?"

"Any sort of nun."

"Oh, Ahua, you have the whole world in your lap, don't you know?"

"What?"

"With Sima and Zan both abroad, you are like an only child to Chuli and Sankuo, and two better souls I have never known. If I had your chance, I would be studying very hard. I wish I had gone to school as a child. Often I regret I had no education."

"Yes, Aunt and Uncle are very good souls, they're like children sometimes."

"If I had an education, I might have become a schoolmistress or even a lady pilot, who knows?"

"Kaiming said they have no idea at all what life is like. They are very simple. You have to admit that."

"Kaiming said what?"

"That Aunt and Uncle have no idea at all what life is like. They live in a world of illusions."

"Well, Chuli has been very lucky all her life, that's true."

"What does Mr. Hao-hao mean exactly? Kaiming said that's what they call Uncle in Nanking."

"Well, I guess it means a person who is easy to convince because he believes in the good of everybody."

"You know, Sima didn't even want you to come to the wedding? She said she was ashamed to have you represent her."

"Did she say that!"

"Yes! And did you see her face when she was on board the ship and drinking coffee? How self-satisfied she was! When I saw that expression on her face, I said to myself, 'What a shallow person she is!' But she doesn't mean any harm, poor soul. She just can't help being herself."

"Well, I like you better than Sima, Ahua, I always did."

"Really? I never knew!"

"Yes! You have such a warm heart, and this time especially, you were so good to me, taking me to the dentist and being so patient, holding Old Nine for me when I went inside."

"I never give myself airs, Ah Yee."

"Why don't you eat these Old Maid Tarts?"

"I had some. We can wrap these up and take them home. Aunt is always wrapping things up and taking them home."

"Well, Miss Kim Ahua, I must thank you for a lovely time."

"I like to see you enjoying yourself, Ah Yee. You've had a hard life. Do you still take Bile Beans for your indigestion?"

"Here, do you want some?"

"No, I just wondered."

"The doctor said I had indigestion because of my bad teeth. Now all my troubles are over! Free as air! That's me."

"I'm glad for you, Ah Yee. You deserve every happiness."

"Well, life is not always easy."

"Would you like to go to the Roof Garden of the Park Hotel? I'll treat you to a drink."

"No. This time I have enjoyed myself so much already. And

bought so many things, and gone on the escalator, too. That's enough excitement. Let's go home."

"Do you know what they call Shanghai?" Ahua said. "The Madam of the Orient, where every kind of evil is purveyed."

When they came downstairs, it was six o'clock, and the shops on Nanking Road were crowded and brightly lit, and the air reeked with the smell of food. Chestnuts were being raked over charcoal fire in caldrons of molasses sand, sweet potatoes were being roasted in tin ovens on the street. They walked slowly, without speaking, looking into the shops, wondering what other people were buying and what they should buy.

Then Old Nine started to whine, and Ahua put her step-mother and the baby into a pedicab, and said she would walk home.

She threaded her way through the crowded streets, rapt in a soft luxuriance of despair.

When she emerged from the noisy Nanking Road to the long, quiet Bubbling Well Road, she began to break off pieces of Old Maid Tart and put them in her mouth. "I have never had a piece of this in my mouth before while walking down Bubbling Well Road in a winter's dusk," she thought. "It tastes just right, not too heavy or too sweet. But it will never taste just right again."

To either side of her, dark outlines of high brick walls and tall poplars arose above her, and their shadows poured into the street. She saw an old man moving his bowels in a dark corner, and a few street urchins playing with a bonfire near the curb. She watched the leaping flames for a moment, and then because she wanted to do something to equate the magnitude of her feelings with the outside world, she beckoned the children and gave them the tarts.

Instantly, children materialized from nowhere, like pigeons in the park when bread crumbs were being thrown on the ground. In a moment, the old man who had been moving his bowels was swooping down on her also, and she screamed.

In the midst of the confusion, two men came out of a gate

in the high brick wall. The shorter man was holding a club in his upraised hand.

"Get out! Go away from here! You are not allowed to create disturbance here!"

The beggar children disappeared as suddenly as they appeared, like birds frightened by a sudden noise. With club in hand, the man still advanced on Ahua. "Do you know whose residence this is?"

Before Ahua could speak, the other man came forward.

"Why, you are Miss Kim, aren't you?" he said, surprised. To her great relief, Ahua recognized him as a boy who went to the same college with her. "Oh, Hsu Weilin!" she cried.

Seeing that they knew each other, the gatekeeper backed away. Hsu Weilin was wearing slacks, a beige-colored sweater, and tennis shoes.

"What are you doing?" he said.

"I was only giving some cake away."

"Well, you shouldn't do that sort of thing," he said. "You might have come to harm. Are you hurt? I'm sorry if our gatekeeper frightened you."

"No, I'm not hurt," she said. "But I wasn't doing any harm."

"Well, it's useless doing that sort of thing," Weilin said. "Come inside and have a cup of tea. This is where I live."

He led Ahua through the gate. They walked up an asphalt driveway through a tunnel of dark overhanging trees. On either side, there were seemingly endless woods, and in front, Ahua saw a brightly lighted white mansion of three stories, with two or three long cars parked in front.

"You were giving cake to beggar children," Weilin said. "Why didn't you give them money?"

"I thought they'd never tasted cake before."

"I used to do things like that, too, until I accepted the fact that there were limitations in life, in other people as well as in oneself, certain boundaries. And then I stopped doing such useless things." He looked at her intently, with very serious and melancholy round eyes. He was a very thin boy with a light voice, and about the same height as Ahua.

"You're Hsu Paofung's son, aren't you?" Ahua said.

"Yes. And you are the Education Minister's niece. I have seen you about."

They walked without speaking for a few moments. Weilin kept his hands in his pockets and kicked a pebble forward with his shoes.

"Do you mind being known as the Education Minister's niece?"

"No. Why? Do you resent being known as Hsu Paofung's son?"

"I used to. Everywhere I went: 'And this is Hsu Paofung's son,' or 'This is the small Hsu.' No identity of my own. But I don't mind it any more."

"Why?"

"It's what I've just said, accepting the limitations of other people, and of myself . . . of other people, mostly. I may mind being known as Hsu Paofung's son, but people don't mind. It's an asset, actually, in their eyes, and my resentment of it is wasteful, like throwing a good thing away. People don't understand it. You don't understand what I am talking about, do you?" He glanced at her.

"Oh, yes, I do," Ahua said quickly. "I really do."

They came to the brightly lighted mansion and went up the steps into a vast reception hall shining with chandeliers and mirrors. Hsu Weilin led her into a small sitting room where there were wicker chairs, bookcases, and a phonograph.

Weilin sat down in a loose-jointed way and flung his legs across the arm of a chair. His face looked extremely frail and pale under the glare of the lights, and green veins showed across the bridge of his nose and at the temples. His head was shaped like a long triangle, the forehead full and high, the chin sharp and pointed.

"Sit down," he said seriously. His normal expression was a serious one.

"This is a great big house," said Ahua, looking about curiously. "Do a lot of people live here?"

"There's my parents and my uncle's family and a few other assorted relatives."

"Have you sisters and brothers?"

"I have older sisters, all married."

"I used to live in a big family, too, in Amoy. It was nothing like this, though."

"During the occupation?"

"Yes."

"I was right here all during the occupation. Never went anywhere. But my father was everywhere during the war."

"So was my uncle."

Weilin smiled briefly. And then he seemed to have nothing more to say.

"Behind this room is a ping-pong room. Would you like to play ping-pong after you finish the tea?" he asked, just to be polite.

"Not especially," said Ahua. "Do you like ping-pong?"

"I never play it. My idiot cousins play it," he said, and they smiled again, as if in tentative mutual understanding.

"Your father owns the China-Pacific Tea Firm, doesn't he?" Ahua said.

"Yes. He likes to call himself an industrialist, though. We're in the tea industry." He looked at Ahua curiously. She was sitting on the edge of her chair politely, with a pleasant smile on her face. "What year are you in at college?" he asked.

"It is my first year."

"Did you have to learn Japanese while you were in middle school in Amoy?"

"Yes. You too?"

"Of course." Weilin crinkled up his nose and started to chuckle. She could see his pink gums when he did this. "Those days seem so far away already, don't they? I remember how I used to think the war would never end. Not that it was so uncomfortable here during the occupation, but knowing that it all must belong to the past one day was like walking in the dark and not knowing when you'll stumble onto a door and open it and enter another world."

"Yes! I had exactly that feeling, too!"

"Really? I thought it was just me. Now every morning I get up I have to think for a moment before I say to myself, 'Oh, yes! I'm Hsu Weilin, and this is the year 1947.' Do you ever get that feeling, too?"

"I do. I think, how funny it is that I am me. But there are people, you know, who never stop to think like that."

"I know, I know!" Weilin said. His eyes lit up with keen interest. "My father, now, he never stops to think that it's funny he should be Hsu Paofung. He knows exactly who he is and what he is doing all the time—he thinks he does, anyway."

"My aunt is the same way," Ahua said. "This summer she made a speech at the Y.W.C.A. about 'meal patterns.'"

"'Meal patterns'? What are they?"

Ahua opened her handbag and took out a newspaper clipping and gave it to him.

"Do you mean you carry it around with you?" he said and came over to take the clipping from her hand.

"Yes. I always have it. I like to take it out and read it when I'm on a bus or waiting for classes to begin. It gives me such pleasure."

Weilin sat down on the arm of a chair and read,

"Mrs. Wong Sankuo said today at the monthly meeting of the Y.W.C.A., 'I was shocked that the report of our members revealed that the midday meal should be the main meal of the day. I wonder how many of you who made the report had young children who stayed at school for lunch. When I was bringing up small children, the evening meal was always the main meal of the day. Until the children grew older, our daily pattern was this: breakfast for my husband and children at different times (I never eat it), lunch at school and for my husband at his office, where conversation often supersedes food in importance and interest; tea and sandwiches or soup noodles off the trolley in the living room at four (or on the terrace when weather permits), and at seven, a substantial and well-

planned hot meal, when every member of the family gathers around the dining table and really enjoys each other's company as well as the food. Most of my friends in similar circumstances arranged their meals in the same pattern.' "

"That's very good! That's perfect!" Weilin cried. His face lit up. "That's her unconscious voice coming through. I get a thrill out of reading something like that, too! She has such a sure grip on the world!"

"I know! She's a very good-hearted woman," Ahua said, delighted that he understood. "All the soap we use at the house is made by the blind. She goes to a lot of charity bazaars."

"Ours is made by convicts," Weilin said.

"My aunt goes to the Planned-Parenthood Clinic two afternoons a week and does nothing but give people advice. Does your mother love to give advice, too?"

"No, my mother laments."

They looked at each other, and simultaneously burst out laughing helplessly. Weilin fell back from the arm of the chair where he had been perched and doubled up with laughter. Tears streamed down Ahua's face.

"She laments?" she asked when she was able to speak again.

Instantly, they were both off again, laughing so hard that they felt pains in their stomachs.

At last, wiping tears from his eyes, Weilin said, "My mother isn't well, you see. She has heart trouble and is in bed most of the time—lamenting."

"Oh, I see," said Ahua, as bubbles of laughter started up in them both again.

Gradually, with the help of gulps of tea, they brought themselves under control again, and Ahua said, standing up, "I should be going home now."

"I'll take you home in our car," said Weilin. He still giggled in little spasms, like a small boy. "Will you be embarrassed if you go home in a Cadillac?"

"No, why?"

"I just wondered. I used to feel embarrassed about it, and go

around in an old car deliberately. Then I realized that for me—the son of Hsu Paofung—it was really more humble to ride in the Cadillac. Do you know what I mean?”

They came out on the steps and a chauffeur came out and drove the long, dark blue car up to the front of the house. Weilin got in after Ahua and they drove out of the estate together.

“Where to, sir?” asked the chauffeur.

They exchanged mirthful looks as Ahua gave her address, and laughter threatened to burst from their lungs once more.

“You know, we have almost identical minds,” she said. “I’m really shocked.”

“Yes, I know,” Weilin said thoughtfully.

They did not speak again until they arrived at Ahua’s house.

“I would like to meet you again to discuss life with you,” Weilin said as Ahua got out.

“Discuss life?” Ahua said, turning her head in wonder for a moment.

“Yes,” he said seriously. “I would like to explore the values of life with you.”

She smiled, embarrassed, and went inside.

## 9

ABOUT two weeks later, Ah Yee had left for Amoy with her child and Chuli was alone in the house one morning when she looked out of her bedroom window and saw a woman pacing up and down in front of the gate in the pouring rain. After half an hour, she was still there, and Chuli sent Yuma out to ask her what she wanted and why she was loitering in front of the house.

She watched from the window as Yuma went out. The woman was wearing a shabby black-and-blue printed cotton

jacket and black trousers and carrying a yellow oilskin umbrella. She had a bundle looped through her arm.

After a moment, Chuli opened the window in the driving rain and shouted, "What is it? What does she want?"

The woman put aside her umbrella for a moment and looked up and smiled. She was about thirty years old, a peasant woman at a glance, and Chuli thought she might be a friend of one of her servants who had come to look for work.

"Please, ma'am! I am looking for a Mung Kaiming of Fox Head Mountain! I have urgent business to speak to him! I have come all the way from Fox Head and just got off the train this morning!" she said.

Chuli was puzzled and told Yuma to let her come in. When she came downstairs, the woman was at the front door.

"Who are you, and what is your business?" Chuli asked.

The woman was very dark of complexion and had a narrow, thin face. When Chuli spoke, she quickly made a bow, and said again, "Please, ma'am, I am looking for a Mung Kaiming of Fox Head Mountain. Would he be staying at your residence?" She spoke in a heavy provincial accent and Chuli had some difficulty in understanding her.

"Mung Kaiming? Yes, we know someone by that name, but he has left the country. What business do you have with him?"

At these words, the woman closed her umbrella and took a step forward. "Left the country!" she cried. "Then I have come all this way for nothing!" She addressed Yuma rather than Chuli.

"What business have you with him?" said Yuma. "Speak out quickly, don't stand here keeping the Mistress waiting!"

"A week ago, a friend of mine she showed me a newspaper which said Mung Kaiming had married the niece of the big official Wong Sankuo. And that is why I have come all this way! I have not set eyes on him for ten years. And now you tell me he has left the country." She looked as if she were about to cry.

"But what is your relation to this man?" Chuli said. "Who are you?"

"Why, I'm his wife, ma'am," the woman said.

"You say you are Mung Kaiming's wife?"

The woman looked at Chuli and nodded vigorously.

"You'd better come inside."

The woman wiped her feet on the door mat and swept back her disheveled hair. She followed Yuma timidly into the house. "Leave your wet umbrella outside," said Yuma, and she went out again and came in with a frightened expression on her face. When she saw the inside of the house, her eyes opened wide. She followed Chuli into the salon and remained standing, still carrying her bundle.

"I am sure there is some mistake," Chuli said. "Who are you, what is your name, and what is this all about?"

"There is no mistake, ma'am," said the woman excitedly. "Your niece has married a person called Mung Kaiming from Fox Head Mountain, hasn't she?"

"Mung Kaiming comes from Nanchang," Chuli replied hoarsely.

"Ah, then it is the same one!" the woman cried. "The very same one! Kaiming was born in Fox Head Mountain, but he lived in Nanchang a lot, so I suppose it is reasonable for him to say he comes from Nanchang."

Chuli felt her mouth dry up. "You say you are Mung Kaiming's wife? Were you really properly married to him?" she asked.

"Why wasn't I properly married to him?" replied the woman belligerently. Her voice became shrill and she talked very rapidly. "We have been married twelve years, although I haven't set my eyes on him for ten. We have known each other all our lives. We were neighbors, our people plowed the land together, side by side. When his people died we took him in with us out of pity. . . ."

Now Yuma said, "Don't shout. The Mistress was only asking you. Say what you have to calmly and quietly."

"Well," said the woman, looking bewildered and confused, "as I said, my parents took him in to live with us when his people died, but he didn't like to work on the land, so when he was fourteen my people sent him to Nanchang to stay with an

uncle of ours who worked in the porcelain kilns. Well, one year there was famine and we all had to go to the city too, and then was when my parents married me off to him, thinking that would be one less mouth to feed. But when the drought was over, Kaiming refused to go back to the mountain with us, and I was needed on the land, you see, so we separated. He would come back from time to time, though, until one time he said he was going to Hankow. From that time on, I saw neither sight nor sign of him, and that was about ten years ago, when the Japanese came. That is why I got so excited when my friend told me about his marriage, and my father said in any case I should come and find out if it was the same Kaiming."

The woman's eyes fell upon a wedding picture of Kaiming and Sima standing in a silver frame on a table. She dropped her bundle and rushed over and took it in her hands. "That's him! That's him! My goodness, how smart-looking he's become! But that's Kaiming!"

She came back with the picture and said, now more sure of herself, "You'll pardon me, ma'am, if I sit down? I have been on my feet since dawn. The train arrived at four o'clock and I must have walked miles and miles before I found out where you lived, and when I arrived, I saw this high wall and I dared not enter. I was afraid you would set dogs on me or your servants would beat me if I tried to come in. But I said to myself, I have come so far, I cannot leave without going in and finding out whether it is the same Mung Kaiming, at least. That was why you saw me pacing about, ma'am. But you are a kind lady, ma'am, when I saw your face, I said to myself, there's a fortunate woman. Omitabah!"

She screwed up her eyes and stared at the picture again. "And what a pretty bride this young lady is! She comes from your side of the family, ma'am?"

Chuli's face had gone gray. "Mung Kaiming has left the country," she said once more.

"Ah-yah! Now what shall I do? I have come all this way for nothing, then," she said, crestfallen, but still staring at the picture.

"You had better wait until my husband comes back," said Chuli numbly. "He is coming back tomorrow. He will want to talk with you himself."

The woman looked up sharply at these words. "The Big Official? Oh, no, I don't want to talk to him, ma'am. I don't want to make no trouble. If you tell me Kaiming has left the country again, I know you are not fooling and I'll just be on my way again. I didn't want to come, it was my old father who said, 'Bee, you should go to Shanghai and find out what has happened to that husband of yours.' I told him I knew he wanted to have nothing more to do with me, especially if he had gotten himself married again and everything." She was on her feet and took up her bundle again.

"No, you must see him," Chuli said.

Yuma added, "Don't be frightened. When the Master comes back you tell your story to him and he'll know what to do."

The woman seemed utterly confused and frightened. "I don't want to make no trouble, ma'am. If you say I must wait, I'll wait, but I'll make no trouble, no, ma'am." She seemed anxious to get away from Chuli. "I'll wait in the kitchen if you say I must wait."

Yuma said, "You look so tired. Have you had anything to eat all day?"

"I haven't eaten since I left Kiukiang yesterday morning, good sister. If you'll be so kind to give me a scrap of something, Buddha will bless you for it!"

Chuli felt dizzy. "No. It is lunch time now. Eat with me, if you haven't eaten since yesterday." Her head was spinning. "This is Kaiming's wife. She should not eat in the kitchen," she thought.

"No, I wouldn't think of sitting down at table with a lady like yourself."

"Nonsense. Set another place at table, Yuma," said Chuli and walked to the dining room. The woman took her bundle and followed, and when she sat down and platters of hot, fragrant food were brought in, her eyes grew large and she ate enormously, pushing rice into her mouth in great lumps.

Chuli watched her and ate nothing. When the woman finished eating, Chuli winked at Yuma not to bring fruit to the table but tea only, and Yuma served this from an old teapot.

"Tell me, what is your name?" Chuli said at last.

"I am called Yeh Chinyung, ma'am, but people call me Bee because I'm always buzzing about the fields."

"Tell me, Bee," said Chuli heavily, "have you any children?"

"No, ma'am, no children," Bee said. "We have no children."

After the tea, Chuli led the woman back to the salon and sank into an armchair. Bee was now no longer frightened, and began to speak rapidly, in a dialect Chuli could just understand, and tell all about herself and Kaiming and Fox Head Mountain, and how it was the very first time that she had come so far away. She was not a good-looking woman, even by country standards, with her small eyes and narrow face and a mouth full of crooked teeth. Her short hair was matted with rain and hung in strands behind her small ears, and her arms were blotchy with the marks of mosquito bites. Chuli thought she exuded an odor of old clothing and garlic.

At four o'clock in the afternoon Chuli felt suddenly as if she were going to faint. She looked out of the window at the pouring rain. Ahua was not yet home from college, and Sankuo was not expected until the following morning.

"Bee, you must go now," she said abruptly. "Tell me, can you read and write?"

"Oh, I can some," she answered proudly.

"Then write down your name and address for me and when the Minister comes back, I'll send for you."

Yuma, who had been standing by all afternoon listening, produced a pencil and paper, and Bee wrote her name down laboriously. She studied what she had written for a moment, and gave the slip of paper to Chuli. A few strokes were missing from the characters.

"But you have not written where you are staying," said Chuli, feeling very weary.

"Staying, ma'am? I don't know where I am going to spend the night," Bee said, looking very much upset. "Maybe you

would let me spread my bedding in a corner of the house? A corner is all I need."

Chuli sucked in a deep breath. "No, you may not spread your bedding here," she said. "You must go. If you have no money, I'll give you some."

She climbed the stairs, feeling as if all the strength had been drained from her legs and got her purse. Then she handed a few bills to Bee.

The woman jumped up and cried, "Buddha bless you for being so generous!"

At last, she lifted her bundle from the floor—the bundle had not left her side all day—and looked for her umbrella. Chuli said, "Yuma, perhaps you know a place where she can go. Take her."

Yuma reminded the woman that the umbrella was outside the front door, and said that no one was thinking of stealing it, and at last, Chuli saw them go out through the side door. She felt a little sorry for sending them out in the rain, but she thought, "I cannot shelter Kaiming's wife under my roof," and it seemed as if everything were reeling. She climbed upstairs and collapsed into bed.

The next day, Bee came early in the morning and was given breakfast and then lunch. She waited downstairs while Chuli remained upstairs in her room. At last Sankuo came back, and was told what had happened. He talked to Bee for about an hour, and when he came up to Chuli she said, "Has she gone?"

The room was dark, and Chuli was sitting beside the electric fire.

"Yes, she is going back to Fox Head Mountain today," said Sankuo, parting the curtains to let in some light. His face was terrible to see.

Chuli said coldly, "So we have been taken for damn fools!" and made a noise through her nose.

"No, Chuli, no," said Wong Sankuo.

"Then what is the explanation?" She looked up and waited. Her eyes were huge.

"I am going to write to Kaiming and demand an explanation and I shall have this woman's story verified," Sankuo said.

"He took us for damn fools," Chuli said again, ". . . and after the way we treated him!"

All at once, Sankuo snapped, "No! You must not lose faith so easily!" and when she heard his voice, the mocking expression disappeared from her face, and she became afraid for him.

"Ah, what sins people commit," she said more softly. "We are over fifty, and still we do not learn."

Sankuo walked out of the room without answering. From the bottom of the stairs, Ahua was looking up at him with great eyes, and a terrible shudder ran through him when he saw her. He felt a sober sense of responsibility toward her and toward them all.

"What are we going to do?" she said. Her face was white.

"Don't worry," he said.

"Is there something I can do?" Ahua said in a very small voice.

"No, there is nothing you can do. Leave it all to me," he said and smiled briefly. He walked straight to his study and shut the door behind him, and sat down and began to write. He wrote Kaiming of Bee's visit and what she had told them, and then he laid down his pen, and did not know how to continue.

He knew nothing of this world if not that human beings were capable of inflicting mortifying cruelty upon one another, nor had he worked for this long in public office without knowing that people brushed shoulders with blackmail, extortion, and even murder more often than it was generally suspected. From the first time so long ago when he experienced the bitter ruthlessness of society, he had never been allowed to become unaware of it again. How many times a day did he have to act with brusque unsentimentality in his work, and have to bring his feelings sternly into line! And yet how fresh his feeling of disgust was every time, and how he wished that it did not always have to be so! But he had allowed none of the hatefulness and shamelessness of it all to touch his family so far. . . . They had opened their hearts without reservations to Mung Kaiming because they would not judge him on the level

of the world, while Mung Kaiming must have held in mockery and contempt all these things in which his family believed!

He remembered how Sima had, without a moment's hesitation, stretched out her hands and said, "These hands are not afraid of work." And that day, when Mung Kaiming and Sima were engaged, he had said, "You are genuine people. I am grateful for your acceptance of me for myself, as a human being." The man had a curious hold upon Sankuo's emotions. He felt as if he were being put to a test of some sort, and all his deep reverence for human feelings conflicted with his hard, practical sense. Had Kaiming not turned down the thousand dollars they wanted to give him on the morning of the wedding? Whatever the reason might be—and he could see no reason now—for what he had done, Sankuo owed him a chance to explain himself; he could easily tell the Minister of Foreign Affairs to have him recalled. "To myself and to him, I owe this much respect," he thought, "for are we not all caught up in the same dilemma . . . prisoners all? I believe in the power of man to bear witness for himself." He was not thinking about one man, but all men. And then his heart became less noisy, and his mind more at peace.

He picked up his pen and wrote, "Having in mind Sima's happiness above all, I am waiting to hear from you before taking further action, believing that I have not made an error of my judgment of you as a man."

He signed the letter and sealed it, and stared out of the window for a long time.

When Kaiming's letter came, Wong Sankuo knew before he read it what it contained. He had left him only one door open, what else could Kaiming say?

His letter read:

Respected Uncle and Aunt,

Your letter was received at the Consulate this morning upon my first day's return to work after our arrival. First

let me assure you that Sima is well and that we are happily settled in our apartment.

Then let me quickly answer your letter. It is true. I was married to Yeh Chinyung twelve years ago. I am well aware that I should have told you this before—I have no excuse. I made a grave mistake, and the mistake was falling in love with Sima when I had no right to. Upon this I beg you to judge me. I am at your mercy.

But perhaps I can plead my case. My state of mind for many years has been one of indifference toward all things in life. I have worked hard, I was guilty of a kind of cynicism about human affairs. It was a surprise to myself, then, that I fell in love with your niece when I saw her. I was afraid of losing her, that if I told you I was already married, you would not let me marry her, since I had so little to offer. When you consented to my offer of marriage, you humbled me in your great human understanding, and I shall remember it to the end of my life.

As for Yeh Chinyung, my feelings for her at the time of marriage and now are nil. I believe she has not misrepresented the facts to you and will tell you herself that I have never loved her, or even thought of her as my real wife. I have written today to a lawyer friend of mine in Nanchang instructing him to go to Fox Head Mountain on my behalf and arrange for divorce.

Believe me, I have not betrayed your trust, or your judgment of me.

Your humble servant,  
Mung Kaiming

Sankuo locked the letter in his desk after he read it. Seeing the expression on his face, Chuli dared not ask him about it.

The man is asking me to extend my faith in him, he thought. Does he take me for a feeble sentimentalist? But can I deny it to him? All his adult life, he had tried to give people the impression that he was a practical man, but he knew that no

matter how hard he tried or how long he lived, something would always set him and his family apart from the rest of the world, and he did not wish it to be otherwise; he was proud of the fact.

He went to Nanking, and maintaining a surface calm, performed his duties without betraying the state of mind he was in. But somehow, the struggle in his mind seemed reflected in everything he saw. The sorry spectacle of corruption and lack of efficiency in Nanking made a strong impression on him. Coming back on the train later in the week, Sankuo gazed into the fields which were passing by. The sky was gray, foreboding more snow, and the countryside looked bleak and barren. He felt an exquisite pain and a yearning for something which he could not directly put into words.

A letter from Kaiming's lawyer in Nanchang had arrived during his absence. It said that Yeh Chinyung would consent to divorce Mung Kaiming if the sum of ten thousand American dollars were settled on her.

Chuli's hands flew to her face. "But this does not sound like Bee at all!" she cried. "I am sure it would never occur to her to ask for this much money! She kept saying she wanted to cause no trouble."

Sankuo did not speak.

"One thousand dollars is more likely, and too much at that," Chuli went on. "She seemed like such a stupid woman."

"She may be stupid, but she has a father who may not be so stupid and a lawyer from Nanchang who I am sure is not stupid at all," Sankuo replied at last, and his voice was strange. These words, coming from his lips, seemed to make a crack in the idealistic shell which contained them all, and through it the hostile atmosphere of the outside world was coming in.

"How is Kaiming going to pay?" Chuli said, frightened.

Her husband looked at her fiercely. "Are you simple?" he said sharply. "The letter is addressed to me."

A few days later, a registered airmail letter come from Kaiming, protesting his outrage at the sum which was being demanded and at the same time, begging Sankuo to help him.

"The question is whether Sima still wants to live with this

man," he said coldly. "She does not have to stay with him. She can come back."

Chuli gasped at the words.

"All I am concerned with is how Sima feels, and there he has us by the heartstrings," Sankuo said, and his voice broke. He heard her voice. "*Do you know what's very smart? Green linen with matching coatee!*" He never did find out what a coatee was. His heart went out to that child whom he had brought up, innocent and protected from all which was not good, who knew nothing of the rough world, and he felt a great sense of guilt toward her.

"I don't understand," Chuli said. "What did he expect to gain by it?"

"He took a chance," Sankuo said, his voice brittle and like frost. "He took a chance that his previous marriage would never come to light, and it was a good chance. They were going away. The quiet wedding, the hasty departure . . ."

"But what had he to gain?" Chuli insisted.

Sankuo let the tears well in his eyes. His lips trembled. "What had he to gain?" he whispered. "A pretty, innocent girl . . . who was willing to slave for him, family connections . . . need you ask, Chuli?"

"And if his first marriage came to light?"

"Then what had he to lose so long as he could make us pay through our hearts?"

In the middle of the night, Chuli touched her husband's hand. "Do you think the poor child knows?" she whispered. "He isn't keeping this from her, I hope." They had both lain awake, plowing the fields of this ugly affair, and turning up stone after unexpected stone.

He did not answer, although he was awake. At three o'clock in the morning, Sankuo said, "I shall send a cable off to Zan in the morning. He must go and see her."

"Yes! That's right!" The introduction of Zan into the developments reassured her. Yes, from Zan, an impartial opinion could be relied on. He would be able to tell them what the situation was like over there.

The sky paled to a sleepless night. The day was gray and overcast, as if the mortifying meanness of earthly things had stained it.

In the afternoon, Sankuo flew to Peiping on a tour of inspection of schools and universities. His eyes were deep and sharp as he stepped from the plane. Officials who met him thought he looked more than usually severe. His head looked almost abnormally large, and his manner was crisp and curt. No one could have guessed that beneath the cold, passionless exterior, his heart was throbbing with so much yearning.

Peiping since the end of the war had become the hub of political intrigue, motivated by some politicians and intellectuals who hoped to bring a coalition government with the Communists to power. Everywhere, there were rumors and unrest and speculation. Communist forces, after a few weeks' lull, had renewed attacks on Manchuria and captured Sinlitun, the railway junction west of Mukden, and to the south of that city, severe fighting was going on. The atmosphere of hostility was in the air Sankuo breathed.

That evening, in the bitter northern cold, he went to his old university to give a lecture. The students came in, four thousand strong to listen to him, and as he mounted the platform, Sankuo felt their eyes upon him. They stood, with mufflers wound around their necks, and blew on their hands to keep warm. Their faces swelled up at him, and Sankuo, looking down, was overcome by an emotion which knew no other name except love. He knew that to love truly was an abstraction and that if he told these young people that what he felt for them was love, they in their imperturbable independence and self-sufficiency would laugh within their hearts, for they did not know the world yet. Rather, he would say that he felt for them an affinity—no, that word was too cold. He felt involved with them in many ways then, these young people who were growing up between wars, and who were yet to develop their powers.

He said he was glad to be told that so many of them were

taking courses in agriculture and chemistry and engineering in their idealistic desire to build a strong nation out of the ruins of war. But do not forget the arts, he cried. Do not forget the abstract values in life and become so realistic that you cease to dream! For art heightens life. For art gives a man dignity. Concern with the form and shape of things is not a frivolity at this time when the nation is gripped in a struggle for survival, but it is more important than ever now. For the artist lifts man from the level of animals and adorns him with grace. It had come to his hearing that a student from this university had been granted a scholarship to go abroad to study plastic surgery but did not go because his friends thought that to be concerned with the appearance of things, with beauty, at this time was not patriotic enough and persuaded him not to go. He could understand the sentiment. But it is so dangerous, you are prone to self-betrayal if you forget the intangible values in life. Can the country be in such stress that her young people are too busy for art and culture? This is what he hoped to kindle in young hearts today, the courage to stand by personal beliefs and values.

## IO

“I WAS a green boy when I married her,” said Kaiming with a deadly set face. They were lying in bed together in the dark, in the little apartment on Claremont Avenue, two small rooms and a kitchen. Beyond this Sima could not think anymore. This was all she wanted, if only Kaiming were happy too. She did not mind anything so long as he loved her. “It is more than ten years since I even saw her,” he explained. “She was the daughter of a neighbor, and ugly as a crow. But as you yourself know, sometimes a person makes mistakes—as perhaps you did, Sima, when you married me.” Kaiming looked at her, cold and mocking, waiting to go on.

"From the moment I met you, Kai, I stopped knowing what was right or wrong any more," she said unsteadily, "or else how could I have let you come near me before we were married?"

"Are you sorry, then, that you married me?" he said in the dark. His voice was very cool.

She said, in a voice breaking with fear, "What can I say to make you believe me, Kai, if it isn't enough to tell you that I love you even more since this happened? You remember I said I couldn't be angry with anything you did," and with fearsome passion Sima drew herself up to him on the bed, and put her arms around his broad shoulders.

"Love?" he said, rolling the word strangely in his mouth.

He was silent for a long time, as he fondled the soft arms and felt her heart throbbing on his breast. At last he said with the same cold voice, "Love? That is something which is not talked about where I come from. Feeling, yes, we talk about feeling. And as far as Bee was concerned, my feelings for her were nil. When the war came and there was such furious fighting in the mountains, I thought she was dead."

"No, that's not true, Kai," Sima replied, steady. "You don't have to make it sound good for my sake."

Kaiming was surprised by the evenness of her voice. He chuckled sorrowfully. "All right then, but she may as well have been dead, so far as I was concerned," he said. "When I had a chance, I got away from her as fast as I could, even before the war started."

"And when your feelings for me cool," she replied, "will you make your getaway as fast as you can too?" Why did she punish herself so? Sima thought.

Kaiming was taken aback and annoyed. I did not suspect this little creature could be so tough, he thought. "When you think that because of you, I risked my future, my reputation, everything, how can you joke about such things?" he said.

"While I risked nothing," she replied quietly. "How long did you live with this woman, Kaiming?"

"If you want to know, on and off for a few months only. But

I won't say that I didn't sleep with her. That wouldn't be human or true, would it?" he said deliberately.

But this time before he could chuckle, she drew herself up to him and kissed him so fiercely that it was as if there were something frightening about the way she loved him, and as if by loving him so, she could shift some of the blame upon herself.

Kaiming stroked her head slowly, and became quiet. It was enough to be in trouble without a woman crying on his breast, he thought. And yet it was not such a bad thing to have someone care for him so deeply as this. "Maybe it was bad luck for you when you married me, Sima," he said. "You should have married some rich man's son, you would have made him a very good wife."

She stiffened in his arms. "What are you talking about, Kaiming?" she said, raising herself from the bed abruptly. He could hear her choking breath. "What are you still talking about, when I am carrying your child under my heart? You must quickly settle this shameful affair."

He sat up too, and fished a cigarette from the table beside the bed and lit it, his hands trembling.

Sima felt as if she had nothing more to fear in life if she could live this moment through. "You ought not to blame me, Kaiming," she added, sick with loathing.

He lifted his eyes swiftly, and for a moment before he shook out the match, she saw his face, naked and grotesque before her eyes, all he was, no more and no less.

"Oh, God forgive me if I blame you!" she heard him say. "Never did I think that after all these years, there would be this day! You will bring me honor, Sima. One day we and our children will sit on top of the world, yet!"

She held him very tight. She put her hands on his head and pressed his face to her own, wishing that through her body she could take from him all the grief and hurt he must have lived in his life. Suddenly, she felt the stronger of the two of them. As she felt him inside of her, she thought, "From now on, I have nothing to fear, so long as Kai and I are together."

"Honor?" she said after awhile. "What does honor matter, Kai?"

"Does honor mean nothing to you, Sima?" he said, now lying flat on his back. Now he spoke again in that half-cynical voice he used so often when he spoke to her, but she did not mind any more. She still could feel the tears which had wet her breasts. "You have never been without honor, then. In the mountains we were very poor. When a man is poor, he may as well be a leper so far as society is concerned. Do you know what it feels like to see other men, no better than yourself, get what they want in life while you must just stand and watch, because you are poor? A poor man is like one born without arms and legs. A rich man may be a cripple in reality, and yet he is honored and welcomed by the world, and even genuinely loved."

Sima listened very hard. "Honored and welcomed, maybe, but I don't think a person can love another just because of his money."

Again, Kaiming sneered. "You don't know much if you have any doubts about that," he said.

"Wasn't there ever a time when you were a child, Kaiming, when you did not feel as if the world were against you?" she said.

"If you had grown up in Fox Head as I did you would never have any doubt that our lives are the result of our economic needs. There is only one reality in this world, and that is the reality of dialectic materialism."

She did not understand the words he used, but she listened very hard, and she did not like much the way he seemed to be condoning what he had done.

"Not everybody is necessarily like that, Kai," she said. "My family, for instance, can you say that my uncle put his faith in you because of your money, now?"

"Your uncle!" Kaiming snorted. "He can well afford to show a little faith in me, if it costs him nothing!"

Now Sima did not like it at all. "I don't remember your arguing with him on that score when you came to our house," she said.

"Why should I argue with him?" he said, laughing. "I have hung around officials long enough to know what they are like. Flatter them and you have your way with them. Why should I waste my breath arguing with them?"

"You speak as if you weren't a government official yourself," she said halfheartedly. It really didn't matter whether she liked what he said or not anyway. From the moment she set eyes upon him at home in Shanghai, she had felt that she was the only one who knew what he was truly, perhaps even better than he knew himself.

"What if I am?" he said. "Don't be so naive, Sima." He felt better now, and more like his natural self, and he could not help smiling inwardly a little at his wife. If he told her all the trouble he was in, what would she do? And if he told her what was going on in his mind, what would she think? But he did not want to test her any more.

"Naive," Sima thought. "Yes, I suppose that's me." She had been small-townish and naive before, she realized that now. She remembered the things she had found in his apartment when they first arrived, which had caused her so much pain. Now she was glad she had never asked him about them, pictures, letters, and other traces of a gay bachelorhood . . . how many women he had had, before her turn came! But none of that mattered now. Now she must never doubt him again, and be equal to what he demanded of her, for he needed her, even if he didn't know that himself.

"No, I'm no small-town mouse any more," she thought. "After this, nothing can shock me any more. I'm not the silly girl I was when I first arrived in this country," and an expression came to her face, hard and smooth. She felt a little contemptuous of everything and everyone with which her old life was connected, before she had faced this adversity in life.

"I LOVE KAIMING. WE EXPECT A CHILD," the brief cable read. It was signed by Sima.

"I love Kaiming. We expect a child," repeated Sankuo. These were words familiar to him, they were speaking a native tongue

again after they had been thinking and speaking in a foreign language. A reckless joy, deep and fulfilling, rocked him. Perhaps because he had known so much pain, the simplicity of Sima's statement gave him an exaggerated sense of beauty and strength. All his human feelings shuddered through him, and his heart blossomed into new life. The final triumph was his, he had always known.

"There is nothing to do but start negotiations with Nanchang," he said, and his voice was strange and proud.

"Do you mean you are going to pay?" Ahua asked. "I don't understand."

"I am doing it for our own sake, not for that man's," he said.

"Why?"

"Your sister loves him," he said, his voice very soft. The girl stared at him, her eyes huge and perplexed.

"Are you crazy, Wong Sankuo?" Chuli asked him. He felt her agony in every measure, and understood the conflict which was going on between her sound money sense and her heart. Ten thousand dollars!

"I am sure they will be willing to settle for five," he said, almost avoiding her eyes.

"Not if they know she is expecting," she answered. She was always quicker than he about these things.

"We shall see," he replied, and he didn't want to discuss it further. Yes, this hard world, this shabby world which she knew, in which they must live—but had they not in a way liberated themselves from it?

Negotiations were started with the lawyer in Nanchang and a settlement of eight thousand dollars was finally agreed upon, the first installment of four thousand to be paid at once, the rest within a year.

When it was done, Chuli wrote to Sima about it. Sankuo refused to discuss the matter any further, or to mention Kai-ming's name again.

## I I

WHEN it was early spring, Sankuo took his family to Hangchow for a much needed vacation. "I have not seen West Lake again since the war," he said, "and Ahua has never been there. She must see it."

Now when Sankuo mentioned Ahua's name, his voice had a rough, strange sound. He always watched her when she was in the room, his face troubled and sad, as if he were afraid for her.

Of Mung Kaiming he no longer spoke, although they knew that the matter was still very much on his mind. Often when Sankuo was away, Chuli unburdened herself to Ahua and Yuma. What was happening to that poor girl now? She had not written them more than two letters since what happened, and each letter was brief and gave no indication of what she was feeling; it was almost as if she wrote to them out of politeness only and had nothing much to say. Yes, Chuli was glad that they had settled the affair for her this way, although what it meant to them was a great strain financially.

The countryside was jade green as they drove to Hangchow. On either side of the highway, farmers were ankle deep in the rice paddies. The weather was mild and warm, and it would be a good year. Except for the holes on the highway which were made by Japanese tanks, nothing seemed to have changed.

They went to the Garden Hotel where Chuli and Sankuo had sometimes stayed before the war and found it open and intact.

Ahua woke up the next morning on a narrow wooden bed. Yellow sunlight was streaming through the mesh curtains and she got up and opened the windows. The lake lay directly below, calm and still. It was unlike the sea in Amoy, flamboyant and lively and foaming on the beach. Ahua thought that the lake

was so beautiful that it was almost frightening, like a very old woman who was still attractive.

A little later, she had breakfast with her uncle and aunt in the garden near the water. The gravel crunched pleasantly underfoot and the shadows of weeping willows swept the table as they ate. In the distance, the mist was beginning to dissolve and a rowboat or two were on the lake.

Hsu Weilin, whom Ahua saw often nowadays, had also come to Hangchow to spend the between-term holidays and was living with his maternal uncle Wu Anson in their country house. This was the time of year when his uncle, buyer for his father's tea firm, came to look over the tea farms and see what the year might yield in crops later on. The culture of tea required a rich, light soil, a warm climate, and moist air, and Hangchow with its gentle rolling hills produced a delicately flavored leaf.

Soon after breakfast, Weilin came to the hotel, wearing his usual transparent light blue nylon shirt, through which a plastic comb and two coins could be seen in the pocket, and carrying a book. They got into a long, narrow boat with a canvas awning, and the boatman stood behind and rowed them out on the lake. Now the sun had burned the mist away and the water was a milky green. Suffused with a feeling of quiet and calm, Ahua leaned back in her seat and said, cracking a melon seed between her teeth, "Do you feel better now, Weilin?" Her voice sounded musical over the water.

"I am feeling somewhat better, although not entirely myself yet," he said. "I think now it isn't my heart giving extra jerks but vibrations traveling through the chest."

"Do you know what you are? A nervous wreck," Ahua said, smiling.

"A nervous wreck?"

"Yes. I used to be one, too. For instance, when I set my hair after I washed it, I had to get all the hairpins at certain angles to each other, then I'd be *all set*, you see, until I washed it again. But if I couldn't get them just so, I thought something terrible would happen to me, and sometimes it turned out that way, too."

"Well, I never had any idiosyncrasies like that, thank goodness."

"You've never had to set your hair."

Weilin sniggered and put his hand over the side of the boat and let it glide in the water.

"I had fish porridge for breakfast," Ahua said.

"I had a soft-boiled egg and a cup of Horlicks."

"You eat like a baby."

He smiled.

"I don't know why we should smile. Life is very sad," Ahua said.

"Yes, I know, but smiling doesn't influence the *basic* sadness in me in any way. If you like, I'll burst out crying."

"Oh, don't. Please don't."

"I won't. But picture it if you can, the humiliation, having to stand there in front of the entire family and listen to him. 'All right, Father', I said, *anticipating* what he was going to say. I can usually anticipate his thoughts. 'I'll really make an effort and try to graduate in July. I'll really try.' But do you think he hears me? He sails into his lecture just the same. 'Why is it that you won't show any determination and zeal and put some extra effort into your work? I want you to work harder so that you will graduate in July. Do you hear me?' And all the time he was going on like this, I was watching this pulse of his stand out on his temple, and noticing how every time he raised his voice, it throbbed, and I felt really sorry for him. It neutralized my feeling of humiliation and I didn't care any more what he said to me. I wasn't bothered."

"I feel the same way sometimes. I look at my aunt and uncle, and I feel like a grandmother toward them. I told you what happened to my sister?"

"Yes, you told me."

"Such drama at home when the cable came! 'I love Kaiming,' Sima said. I can't tell you how moved my uncle and aunt were. Here's this girl who Understands Life, you see. She's Standing by the Side of the Man She Loves in the Face of Adversity, and we must not let her down. And do you know, all my sister is—

I discovered this long ago—is a person who lives by instinct only. She is mindless, like a dog. She goes through life repeating things she heard people say and applying them to herself. I have never heard her form an original opinion or utter a single independent thought. I think she has an intelligence quotient of about sixty.”

“You’d be surprised how many people are walking around with I.Q.’s lower than that.”

“But it doesn’t matter.”

“I know it doesn’t matter. You need very little to get by.”

“‘What that poor girl must be going through,’ my aunt says all the time now. But do you know what? A girl like that doesn’t know what she is going through. She’s just upset. She’s just upset.”

“I know what you mean.”

“Sometimes I think I am the only one who is able to see things clearly, who has any perspective.”

“I shouldn’t be surprised if you were,” Weilin said. “We can see things clearly because we aren’t embroiled in a lot of things emotionally or financially or physically. I read something once which said people our age are ‘immature’ because we tend to think more about the past and about the future than we do about the present. A sign of maturity is you are concerned more with the present than with the past or future. But don’t you see that just proves our point? We can see things more clearly because we see the whole picture.”

“I know. Everyone is always saying, ‘Ahua, you are really very young,’ and trying to ‘prepare Ahua for life’ and all they mean is I have never yet compromised my aesthetic ideals in life. They want me to see things in the ‘light’ of their ‘experience.’ But all that means is they have let experience alter and distort their vision. It’s more ‘darkness’ than ‘light.’ That’s why I’ve made a promise to myself that if ever I should find myself altering my values in life one day, I’d try to remember how I saw things now, and go by these standards and nothing else. But one thing I must say. I’m not so gullible now as I used to be.

Oh, how that Kaiming took us all in! I even thought I was in love with him myself once, because he looked so experienced."

"You were in love with him?"

"He existed for years and years on nothing but oatmeal, Weilin."

"And you don't love him any more?"

"And he had these real white hairs all over the sides of his head. He came to the house wearing these down-at-the-heel yellow shoes."

"And now you don't love him any more?"

"I don't think I really ever loved him. I don't think I could really *love* anyone, you know what I mean? I can be fond of them, but love is a form of blindness. We agreed on that."

"Ahua, I used to think that I was the only one who thought such things. But perhaps I don't have the courage you have to carry out these convictions. Like this tea business. My father wants me to know the tea business, so I go around with my uncle and look at a lot of tea leaves. And this graduation business. Everyone has to have a college degree. So I force myself. I bow to people's wills."

"Don't you like to study?"

"I don't mind. It's just that I don't see any sense in graduating. What does it mean? Listen!" Weilin said, and leaned forward. He opened his book and put it on the little table between them. "This is from 'The Light of Asia.' "

He read:

"We are the voices of the wandering wind,  
Which moan for rest, and rest can never find;  
Lo! as the wind is, so is mortal life,  
A moan, a sigh, a sob, a storm, a strife.

Wherefore and whence we are ye cannot know,  
Nor where life springs, nor whither life doth go;  
We are as ye are, ghosts from the inane,  
What pleasure have we of our changeful pain?

What pleasure hast thou of thy changeless bliss?  
Nay, if love lasted, there were joy in this;  
But life's way is the wind's way, all these things  
Are but brief voices breathed on shifting strings."

"Why, Weilin, that's beautiful, and frightening!" Ahua said.

"I believe in it, with my heart and soul," Weilin said. "You know I hate it when people pat themselves on their own backs and say, 'Ah, humanity is great! Love is eternal! Death is all right too, because life goes on!' It's all a lot of rot."

"You notice people don't start talking about immortality until someone has died, don't you? And they have to call cemeteries names like 'Evergreen' because things aren't so green any more."

They started to laugh, and Ahua said suddenly, "Oh, Weilin, here we are talking like gods, and all the time, all I'm really thinking about is, I have to go on shore, desperately."

"We'll draw up at the temple over there."

"You see there are complications and inconveniences in our lives," she said with a deep blush.

"We're only human animals after all," said Weilin with an impersonal air. "What clumsy and inconvenient bodies we have! Our physical demands do so constantly interfere with our spiritual desires! What a glorious thing it would be if we did not have to have bodies!"

He was still talking when Ahua skipped ashore, and she felt enormously grateful to him.

Weilin spent almost every day in the company of Ahua in Hangchow, and eating at the hotel with the Wongs. He so loved the peace and quiet of old Hangchow and going on the lake with Ahua when the sun was shining softly, and sipping fragrant tea and trailing his hand in the water. As the last days of the vacation drew near, he began to dread the prospect of returning to Shanghai. He brooded so much over it that he actually looked sick. Seeing him, Ahua explained to her aunt and uncle that Weilin had a very sensitive soul.

"All good things must come to an end," Chuli said on the last evening. They were having dinner in the garden under colored electric lights. Chuli's natural fondness for children of good family made her look very indulgently upon this friend of Ahua's.

Under the lights, Weilin's face looked haggard, and Chuli, afraid that he might be catching a cold, urged him to drink several cups of warm wine.

"But do you understand, sir, what I mean when I say that the standards are false at college? We are herded through like sheep. All we are after is the diploma. It is only a label, a brand name, so that we can get certain jobs later on and draw certain salaries. It hasn't anything to do with education."

"Bravo, Weilin!" said Sankuo. "I agree with you! If a man is interested in something, he will educate himself anyway, and if he isn't, forcing him through the mill won't do him a bit of good."

Surprised by the Minister's approval of his opinions, Weilin went on, "How I wish my father could understand, though! He calls me an impractical dreamer. It is so gratifying to find that Your Excellency agrees with some of my ideas!"

His eyes were burning.

"Maybe from now on everything will turn out right for you, Weilin," Ahua said warmly. "Suddenly, you might find that you were right about everything all along and everyone else is wrong. How wonderful that would be!"

"I wish everybody were as unprejudiced and unbigoted as you," Weilin said.

"You're right, I am unbigoted!" Ahua said, stretching out her arms and falling back in her chair. "I have the utmost good will toward everyone in the world, college degree or not, whether they are prostitutes or convicts or beggars or anything!"

Chuli and Sankuo watched the two, and smiled.

At the end of the meal, feeling a little tipsy, Weilin insisted on going out on the lake for the last time with Ahua. While she went upstairs to get a coat, he stood in the garden, his eyes flicking like lights in his drawn face.

"Are you feeling all right?" Chuli asked. "Don't stay out too late. The air is cold at night and you children must not catch cold."

"No, not at all," replied Weilin sleepily. He had made himself a promise, that he would stay awake as long as possible tonight, and live every precious second of his holiday fully.

If only he could live for the rest of his life here, he thought! Or even if he could just come here whenever he liked! Was that asking too much for the son of a rich man like his father? What was money for, if something so simple could not be arranged? He would find a small room somewhere, very quiet, where there were no servants stamping in to dust the furniture or people to call him to a meal just when he was thinking or dreaming to himself. He would play his harmonica to his heart's content, but not too much so that he would arouse too much emotion in himself, just enough, to release feelings which had no words. The human language was ugly, words used by common people to bargain with and haggle and whine and deplore and boast and scold, words were bereft of grace. And in that little room, life would go on just the same. Nothing too unpleasant would happen, or anything too good to be true. That was all he asked of life.

"We must come back again in the summer," Sankuo said the next morning as they were getting in the car. Weilin was riding back to Shanghai with them.

The two weeks had done them all much good, and Sankuo faced the work which lay ahead with renewed energy. There filled in his heart again hope and good spirits, and he welcomed it like a long lost friend. "Come, fill me up. It's been a long time."

The spring was crucial for the country, and fraught with dreams and hope. The first National Assembly in the history of the Republic had convened in Nanking, ending the period of "political tutelage," and a government by popular election had been formed. Could the Government annihilate the Communists in a total war in three months? It was being talked about. Gov-

ernment troops were trying to reach the hundreds and thousands of soldiers trapped in Mukden and Changchun since winter by opening a corridor to Liaoning through the west. One third of the total annual national expenditure was being spent to try to reach these soldiers, and to fly ammunition, food, and gold to them to keep their loyalty and give them moral support. And the Government promised that although fighting elsewhere might subsequently make these areas strategically less important, these besieged soldiers would never be abandoned.

The azaleas on the hills were in bloom all along the road back from Hangchow, but as they drove near Shanghai, the smoke and fumes of the city grew thick, and Weilin grew more and more depressed. Soon, he would be back in his home, with nothing to look forward to except college. It seemed excruciatingly foolish, all the rules, all the regimentation, all the competition, all the idiots who were his classmates.

When the car dropped him at the Hsu residence, he was feeling so depressed that he thought it would have been better if he had not gone to Hangchow at all, and so would not feel the contrast between the two cities so sharply.

To crown it all, his father was at home when he came in, and before he had a chance to go up to his room, called him into the study.

Hsu Paofung was in his late forties, a man of medium height with thinning hair and a round, youthful face. He smiled at his son through silver-rimmed glasses when he came in.

"While you have been vacationing," he said, "I have been working hard, trying to come to a decision on the policy of our firm." As he spoke, he looked at Weilin's short-sleeved shirt and slacks and tennis shoes. "As you know, it has been impossible for your uncle and me to carry out the postwar plans we made, since the economic situation has been so unsteady. I have given this matter a great deal of thought and finally come to the conclusion that we would be making a wise move to shift our headquarters to Hong Kong now, before it is too late. But I don't want to do this without your approval, Weilin."

Hsu Paofung lifted a sheaf of paper and handed it to his son, who read on the cover, "China-Pacific Tea Firm Turns Over a New Leaf." He quickly turned his head away from his father to avoid letting him see the expression on his face. He saw a robin resting on the ledge of a window. "I really feel sorry for this poor man," he thought.

"I want you to study this carefully," his father said. "I may go to Australia in the summer to arrange a loan from a Sydney bank."

"You, borrow money, Father?" Weilin's attention was jerked back again.

Hsu Paofung stopped talking abruptly. The boy is not stupid, he thought. I know the soaring flights of thought his mind is capable of. If only he did not look so despondent!

"Son, I want you to have a working knowledge of how business is conducted, how money is made," he said evenly. "I would like you to arrange your classes this term so that you can come to the Stock Exchange with me twice a week."

"Yes, Father," Weilin said, trying to wear a bright expression on his face. Hangchow had slipped out of his grasp forever, but it seemed only natural that it should be so.

## I 2

"How can you sit here and eat bananas?" Ahua cried. "You're getting soaked."

It was a few moments before Weilin realized that he was being spoken to.

Ahua had not seen him for several weeks since they came back to Shanghai, and today after classes she was coming across the park on her way home when she saw him from a distance, sitting on a rock, eating a banana, and staring into space as if he were lost in a trance. A light warm rain was falling and there was almost no one in the park.

She went up to him, but he did not even see her until she was standing right in front of him. He didn't move.

"What are you doing, anyway?" Ahua said. "At least come sit under a tree!"

Weilin got up and followed her to a large pine tree. They sat down and he said, "I've failed my midterm examinations."

"How many courses did you fail?"

"Three."

"Three out of five!"

"I don't even remember what happened. I was sitting there in the classroom when suddenly, veil upon veil seemed to wind itself around my head. I couldn't think."

"Isn't that the oddest thing?" Ahua said. "You mean you don't remember what happened at all?"

"I believe I had epileptic fits as a child and they're coming back. That must be it."

"Oh, don't be ridiculous."

"No, it's perfectly true. When I was a child, they told me sometimes I would become all rigid for a second or two, and never remember what happened afterward. Doctors said nothing caused it particularly and when I grew up, I'd grow out of it, which I did."

"Did you foam and froth at the mouth?"

"No, I didn't foam and froth at the mouth."

"I've never seen anyone foam and froth at the mouth."

"Ahua, I've been feeling wretched ever since we came back from Hangchow."

"Yes, what have you been doing with yourself, I mean besides failing examinations? I haven't seen you."

"I've been making money. Yesterday I made three hundred gold dollars."

"How?"

"At the Stock Exchange."

"Oh, how grand! How did you do it?"

"Well, you buy, you see, and then you sell," Weilin said. "Sometimes you sell first, and then you buy."

"Is that all?"

"That's all. I don't want to talk about it. You ought to go there sometime and feast your eyes on some of the specimens of your fellow Homo sapiens."

"Why, I think that was very grand of you, Weilin!"

"It makes me sick. I try to see everything my father's way, but it doesn't help. Then, I think, the reason I find it all so pointless must be because I am in fact too rich. Three hundred dollars can't arouse any emotion in me. And it's the same with all the other things we talked about, Ahua. The only reason we feel the way we do is because our families are well-to-do, and we aren't engaged in any kind of meaningful struggle for existence, like everyone else."

"What kind of struggle do you mean?"

"Well, like making a living, having to hold a job or support a family, things which give real meaning to life. I have been thinking that you and I, Ahua, we're not really living. And the more I think about it, the less faith I have in myself."

"Don't you think you're really living?"

"Not really. And in the end, Ahua, in the final evaluation of things, you have to weigh our lives on the scale of society, in terms of everyone else's lives."

"But Weilin! You mustn't think that! Just because we aren't poor and struggling or anything, it doesn't mean that our emotions are less real or that the reasons for our feelings are not just as good. In fact, people like us are the only ones who can lead meaningful lives because our *physical demands can't interfere with or compromise our spiritual ideals.*"

"Do you think that's right?" he asked doubtfully.

"Of course I think that's right!" She moved a little closer to him. "I hate to see you like this, Weilin. I like to see you asserting yourself. Say, 'This is me, Hsu Weilin, and nobody is going to cut me to a pattern or tell me what to do!' That's what I would do if I were you. Why don't you stop going to the Stock Exchange if you dislike it so much?"

"I go for my father's sake. You don't know how sorry I feel for him. I don't want to hurt his feelings."

"Are your parents devoted? I suppose your father has mistresses, since your mother isn't well?"

"No, he's strangely devoted to her."

"That's nice."

"Ahua, you know, you redeem my faith in mankind?"

"What?"

"You redeem my faith in mankind. When you talk to me like this, I feel so much better."

"That's because we're kindred spirits, Weilin."

"Do you really think so? I have butterflies in my stomach when you look at me like that."

"Do you?"

"Why don't we get married?"

"What?"

"I said, let's get married. We'll have a big wedding and declare to the world that here we stand, Weilin and Ahua, who believe in each other!"

"Are you serious?"

"Of course I am. Is it such a ridiculous idea?"

"No. But are you really serious, Weilin?"

"Of course I'm serious. Why shouldn't we get married? Nothing could make me happier than if we could face the world together, side by side."

"Then you really mean it."

"Of course I mean it."

"I'm going home."

"You mean you don't want to get married?"

"No, I'm just going home, that's all." Ahua stood up and looked at him angrily. "I come across the park and find you sitting in the rain, eating a banana, and suddenly you want us to get married."

She walked very rapidly away. Weilin followed her, trotting closely behind. She could see from the corner of her eye how he looked at that moment, so pale, with such serious eyes, and she was frightened. It seemed as if her whole future had revealed itself to her in one second, when it had been so safely unknown, so well hidden and distant only a moment ago. This was the way

it must be; things grew fewer as time passed, the infinite prospects, the limitless variety of possibilities of things which can happen to oneself narrowed and narrowed.

At the exit of the park, she hailed a rickshaw and said again stiffly, "I'm going home."

He stared at her blankly. "I'll see you tomorrow."

She gave a little contemptuous toss of her head, and looked down her nose at him as she felt herself being borne away.

But once the rickshaw had left him safely behind, Ahua turned around and looked at him. "Oh, is it him? Is this him?" she wondered, and her heart pounded very fast.

Chuli was sitting on the terrace with Sankuo, pouring tea. "I was remarking to Yuma this morning, the price of all the staple foods have shot up so rapidly," she said. "Really, I don't know what kind of world we are living in. Sometimes I am afraid for us all. What is going to happen? Have we given up trying to come to terms with the Communists?"

The plan for annihilating the Communists in three months had hardly been put into action when the Communists struck a new blow in the very heart of central China. They attacked and captured Kaifeng even while the National Assembly was still in session. The dream was turning into a nightmare.

"Remember the battle at Nanking-Hankow Railway twenty-five years ago?" said Chuli. "At that time, remember, everyone thought it was all over for us, too, and yet in the end we were able to suppress the Leftists. Why can't we do so now?"

"We're fighting on a larger scale now," Sankuo said, "and of course, the whole economy of our nation was never put to right after the World War."

When Ahua saw them on the terrace, she ran out and flung herself into Chuli's lap and threw her arms around her waist.

"Get up!" Chuli cried. "What's happened? You're all red in the face!"

Ahua sat down and picked up a piece of cake from the table, and looked at her uncle and aunt for a long time without speaking. Finally she said modestly, "I was proposed to just now."

"Who proposed to you?"

"Weilin. He said, 'I have butterflies in my stomach every time you look at me,' and he said, 'Nothing would make me happier than if we were to face the world together, side by side.'"

"Really!" Chuli exchanged looks with her husband. "And what did you say?"

"Nothing."

"Why not?"

"Well, I thought I'd better come home. He'll wait."

Sankuo leaned forward and said with a smile, "Don't you think you are a little young to get married, Ahua?"

"No, I'm not young in that sense," she replied, looking at him seriously. "I understand everything I need to understand about life."

"Is he serious?" said Chuli unbelievably.

"Of course he is serious," said Ahua evenly.

She was sitting very straight, her feet together, her head held high, now calm and composed. "What do you think of Weilin?" she asked seriously after a moment.

"Why, he's a very nice boy," Chuli said slowly. "But he is very young. Twenty-one or two? Of course we cannot expect him to be like a responsible man of thirty or forty. The important thing is how you feel about him, whether you think he will make you a good life companion."

She was surprised at finding herself saying these things, and her eyes began to twitch. Sankuo was looking at Ahua deeply and a little sadly.

Ahua took another piece of cake and held it thoughtfully in midair. After a moment, she rose from her seat and walked, as if in sleep, and with consummate dignity, into the house.

Chuli stared after her, astonished. "She is thinking seriously of getting married!" she cried. "Is she conscious of what marriage involves?"

"No," Sankuo said. "And let no one tell her what it involves! It isn't as if she and Weilin have to struggle after they marry."

Chuli turned sharply at these words. Sankuo was looking wistfully after the girl.

"Don't you see how she is?" Sankuo said. "Calm and blissful and unintimidated. If she wants to get married now, why should we prevent her?"

The garden was thick with foliage, and birds were pecking at the tomatoes which were swelling under the warm sun. The air was heavy, windless, buzzing with flies and bees, twittering birds. For once there was no price or penalty in life.

Chuli stood up and carried the tea tray inside. Now tear after tear rolled from her eyes. The thought of another wedding brought everything on suddenly. Her heart was sore.

When Weilin came to call for her the next evening, Ahua kept him waiting. She was in her room, staring at herself in the mirror. She tried combing her hair several new ways and at last brushed it all back behind her ears so that her earrings would show more prominently.

She walked down the stairs with carefully measured steps, and walked right past him and out to the street. Weilin's car was waiting, and she got in. She smelled the antiseptic smell of the mouthwash he used when he sat beside her, and she let him take her hand and sat very still.

"I think it's going to rain," she said.

"I don't know. It may not."

"The clouds are hanging very low. When clouds hang low, it always rains."

"Ahua, what are you trying to do to me?"

"Where are we going?"

"Would you like to go to a cabaret?"

"All right."

They rode for a few minutes in silence, holding hands, through the dark streets brooding rain, and with her free hand Ahua played with the button in the car door to make the window go up and down.

"Hydraulic pressure," Weilin said.

"I know."

"Ahua, what are you trying to do to me?"

"Weilin, will you make me a good life companion?"

"What?"

"I said, will you make me a good life companion? My aunt said, 'Ahua, you must find out in your heart whether he will make you a good life companion.' "

"I will make you an excellent life companion."

"I think so, too."

She was on the verge of tears in spite of herself. He gulped and said softly, "You've given me self-respect and dignity, Ahua. I'm so happy!" and she saw that he was crying, too.

"Oh, Weilin, we'll never, never be separated again!" she said fiercely, tightening her fingers around his. "We'll face the world together, side by side. We'll go through flood and fire together."

It began to rain, and the water splattered on the windows and made them look as if they had freckles all over their faces and hair and clothes. When the car came to the busy sections of the city, Ahua, looking through the pock-marked windows saw people walking with their shoulders bent and their faces creased with rain and their chins tucked into their breasts. She held Weilin's hand in an iron grip and dug her nails hard into his palm.

The car delivered them at the mouth of a long dark alley, and they got out and walked hand in hand up the cobble path which smelled strong of urine and rain, and with water gushing down pipes and the walls. At the end of the alley there was a building with a brightly lighted entrance. They went up narrow stairs to the second floor and there was a dark room, and it smelled very bad and was very crowded. Several hostesses were standing near the door, and under the blue neon lights their painted faces were like clay. Their long hair hung in turbulent masses from their rocklike faces and their eyes looked deep and sharp and mean.

"They look as if they have gone through fire and water," Ahua said when they sat down.

"Don't keep staring at them," Weilin said.

"I wonder what they think about when they go to bed at night. What insults and injuries society has afflicted on them! Why don't you dance with one of them, Weilin?"

"I don't want to."

"I want you to."

"What is the matter with you, Ahua?"

"I want you to dance with one of those hostesses who have gone through fire and flood."

"Will you stop it, for goodness' sake. What is the matter?"

Ahua was crying. "Oh, Weilin, it's just because I want them to know that we don't despise them just because they are hostesses, and I won't be jealous if you dance with them, and I won't be a possessive wife after we're married. We'll never hurt people's feelings and we'll never be snobbish and condescend to people. We'll always be good and humble and not mean. And when we've gone through the world together, Weilin, and are old and gray, we'll have lived a good life. . . ."

"You frighten me," Weilin said chokingly. "Let's leave. I don't like it here." They were both trembling. When they came out again into the slippery alley, he held her by the waist and pressed her to him. She could feel his narrow shoulders and smell the good cloth of his expensive coat, and she cried.

Weilin took her face in his hands. "Oh, my dear, I love you so!" he said. "You don't know what you mean to me, Ahua! I have suffered so all my life!"

"Me too, me too," she said. "I have been all alone."

"Let's get married very quickly," he said. "We must get married very quickly."

They started to walk, and it continued to rain. They walked through half-dark streets and past shops boarded up for the night, through which children could be heard coughing and old men wheezing, and they kept whispering to each other, "From now on, we shall always be with each other." They walked past fires sputtering on the roadside and past houses with people asleep inside who worked very hard in the daytime. Over them a few windows were still bright yellow and inside there were women who stayed up all night, waiting for their husbands to come home, and men who did their account books and old men who could not sleep. Behind the walls there were people who had catarrh which would never clear up and thin maiden aunts who frowned and did not know it, and mannish-looking girls

who would never get married and didn't know it yet, and brothers who hated each other and children who grew up cynical and too smart and people with recriminations in their hearts, who were complicated and clever and never wondered what made them that way. . . .

"I feel as if we were being watched by a thousand eyes," Ahua whispered, "and people are saying, 'Who is that lucky girl who is so happy, walking down on the street there with her life companion?' "

"Don't be like that," Weilin said.

"Are you afraid, Weilin?"

"A little."

"So am I." She wanted everyone behind the walls to be as happy as she was, but she knew it was impossible even for everyone she loved to be as happy as she was.

"We must love each other always, Weilin, and wholly, and never fight, because there are just two of us in this world, Weilin, you and me. When people fight they change, and they aren't the same people any more. We mustn't change."

"Ahua, you take my breath away," he said. "This is the happiest day of my life."

Chuli was awake when she heard Ahua come in. She said, "These two sisters, whom I brought over from Amoy, you may say that they had the same opportunities. If anything, Sima had the advantage over Ahua. But look at what happened. Ahua seems to be walking into the bosom of a very wealthy family, while Sima . . . when I think about Sima, I blame myself."

"These things cannot be blamed on anyone," Sankuo said softly. "They seem to have been planned. If Ahua marries Weilin it is only because she is Ahua."

"I wonder if that girl over the other side of the earth knows how much my heart aches for her," she thought, "and I wonder if she cares any more."

Her son had written to say that Sima was like a changed person, and had only a few polite words to say to him when he went to see her, which was seldom, because she seemed not to

welcome his visits. She acted like a stranger when she saw him, although the cousins had played together almost like brother and sister when they were children. It was beyond Chuli to imagine what the matter was now, now that the divorce had been settled. And the girl never wrote herself. It was as if she had lost her soul since she was married, and was completely bewitched by that man, and was out of touch with all the past and everyone who loved her at home. And Chuli felt that a piece of her heart had been taken away from her.

## 13

"I AM SORRY I am a little late," said Hsu Paofung, rushing into his drawing room with outstretched hands. His guests had already arrived. "The Stock Exchange suffered its worst setback this year after the loss of Kaifeng."

"You must have a busy time," said Sankuo, standing up and shaking hands with his host. It was the first time he had met Hsu Paofung, although he had heard a great deal about this successful businessman.

The drawing room was decorated with European paintings and modernistic lamps and furniture. There were no other guests except the Wongs and Ahua.

"Has your mother been told our guests are here?" Hsu Paofung asked of his son as he shook hands with Wong Sankuo, with an air which conveyed to his guests his awareness of his position and fame.

Weilin left the room to see. Turning his attention to Sankuo again, Mr. Hsu said, "I am distressed over the news from the North. I don't understand what is happening to our country, Your Excellency. Perhaps you can enlighten me. A businessman tries, but cannot understand what is happening really."

Hsu was referring to the riots which had broken out in Tientsin and Peiping. Refugees, wounded soldiers, and students

escaping from the northeast had been pouring into those cities, spreading stories of corruption at the battlefront and distributing Communist propaganda pamphlets. Wong Sankuo had just returned from the North that morning.

"What is happening in the North is a patriotic and emotional as well as an ideological or political reaction," he said. "We are trying to do the best we can for these refugees by giving them food, clothing, and shelter, but the Communists do better by identifying themselves with the cause of Chinese nationalism. People don't mind suffering, but they need a cause. Mao Tse-tung is well ahead of us in the race for the support of the intelligentsia and the youth."

At this moment, Weilin's mother came in. She was a fragile-looking woman in her middle forties, and had a very pretty oval face and a very fair complexion. Her hair was beautifully combed into a butterfly-shaped chignon at the back, and she had beautifully arched semicircles of eyebrows. She was wearing a black velvet dress and black silk embroidered shoes, and a pearl necklace.

"Paofung, are you talking about politics?" she said with a reproachful smile at her husband as she came in. "We must forget that tonight. After all, this is such a happy occasion!"

Chuli went up to meet her. She clasped Mrs. Hsu's hands warmly and said, "Tell me, how are you? How do you feel?"

"I am not at all well," said Weilin's mother with a worried little smile. "I am afraid I am one of the world's least fortunate women. But tonight I am happy, so we shall not be reminded of my misfortune."

The two women sat down together on a sofa.

"What a charming creature Ahua is!" Mrs. Hsu said to everyone. "My eyes brighten and I forget my misery every time I see her. Come and sit beside me, Ahua. You mustn't be afraid of me, you know. I do not have the strength to be the severe mother-in-law even if I wanted to be, and I don't."

Her voice fell like soft, warm rain. Ahua, who was wearing a pink silk dress and high-heeled shoes, got up shyly and walked to Mrs. Hsu and sat down on the other side of her. The woman

took her hand immediately and fondled it as she talked, a slight flush rising on her cheeks. "But child! Your hands are like sandpaper! What do you do to them?" she cried. "Let me give you some lotion after dinner. You must rub it in your hands every morning and every night."

Everyone laughed, and Mrs. Hsu said, as if to justify herself, "We must take good care of this girl who is going to be Weilin's wife. The future of the China-Pacific Tea Firm may very well rest in these little rough hands."

Hsu Paofung looked fondly at his wife and turned to Wong Sankuo. He said in a low voice, "Ahua may be just what my son needs, Your Excellency. There are times when I feel that he hasn't yet altogether found himself. I was delighted when he told me he wanted to marry. Perhaps Ahua will be more help to him than I or his mother can be."

He looked thoughtfully at his son, and a worried, loving expression came over his face.

"Well, I wouldn't worry too much if I were you," said Sankuo, liking the man for his frankness. "I have talked with Weilin many times and I think highly of some of his opinions."

A moment later, dinner was announced, and the party, which included Anson's family and Hsu's married daughters and their husbands, proceeded to the main dining room, where two tables had been laid. Chuli looked with great interest at everything, and felt very much in her element in the disciplined and solvent atmosphere of this Hsu family, which recalled to her life in her own Kim family, which was far from being as wealthy, but which had the same quiet air of respectability and normalcy.

Paying great attention to ceremony, Chuli smiled and talked during much of the dinner with everyone. Hsu Paofung, who was in a very happy mood, also talked more than usual, gazing fondly at his son and Ahua from time to time.

Halfway through the dinner, Hsu said, "I was going to discuss this with you afterward, but I may as well bring it up now in everyone's hearing. The fact is, these young people have told me that they want to marry as soon as their school term is over. I have no real objections, and as I am leaving for Australia in the

summer, I thought it was not such a bad idea." He was flushed from the wine, and his eyes gleamed with warm regard for his guests. "The only thing which worries me is Weilin's education. As you know, he will not graduate with his class at the end of the term, as we hoped, and he will have to work hard this summer and take the examinations in the autumn to make up the courses he failed. Perhaps his marriage will interfere with his studies."

Weilin and Ahua had not expected Mr. Hsu to bring up the subject in the middle of dinner. They both looked with great, mute eyes at everyone, and Weilin felt a vibration shudder through his constricted chest.

"Then perhaps they should wait until the fall," said Chuli, smiling at everyone carefully. "There is no hurry, after all, is there, Weilin?"

Everyone laughed, and looked at him.

Weilin paled. "There is no need to wait," he said seriously and intensely, while everyone was looking at him. "It won't interfere with my studying."

After a moment, Hsu Paofung said indulgently, "Well, let me put it this way, then. Suppose we make Ahua responsible for Weilin's examinations? Then you may marry before I go to Australia. How is that?"

Everyone laughed again and Ahua's face turned as red as a rose. She tried to keep the tears from showing.

"Ahua!" Hsu Paofung said with high good humor, and raised his wine cup. "I hand over the responsibility of Weilin's autumn examinations to you! Will you drink to that?"

Ahua's face was so serious that it was plain to Sankuo that she did not know that Hsu spoke partly in fun. She raised her wine cup and drank steadily. She felt hot flashes on her cheeks. Everyone applauded, and Weilin's hand felt icy cold under the table.

"Your Excellency, I am counting a great deal on this son of mine," Hsu said to Sankuo when the laughter subsided.

"Ahua tells me that you have great plans for your firm," Chuli said.

"Yes, I have been experimenting with 'processed tea,' as they

call it in the West," replied Hsu. "As you know, the tea industry in this country is not organized to respond to the demands of the Western market because the West consumes 'blended tea' while we drink whole leaf tea. But there is no reason why we cannot produce a tea which is suitable for Western consumption. And if we are successful, we shall be able to compete with India, Ceylon, and Java in the international market."

"Doesn't blended tea involve mechanical processing?" Sankuo asked.

"Yes, and it is for this reason that I am going to Australia to see about a loan to purchase equipment," Hsu replied.

"Weilin tells me that you are planning to move your headquarters to Hong Kong," Sankuo said.

Hsu turned to his guest and said seriously, "Well, in business we have to plan for the worst while hoping for the best," he said.

Then they talked about other topics, and the dinner was not over until ten o'clock.

When they were going home, the moon was shining over the woods in Hsu Paofung's estate. From the front steps, they saw a vast expanse of treetops glistening in the eerie light. Behind them, the handsome white-painted building was gleaming bright. For a moment, everyone stood in hushed silence, admiring the scene. Then the car slid to the front of the house, and Hsu Paofung, with his arm over his son's shoulder, smiled and waved his guests off.

"Life is poignant, you know?" said Ahua thoughtfully as they drove off.

"Yes, it's poignant," said Sankuo.

## I 4

AND so for the second time Ah Yee traveled to Shanghai to represent the Kim family at a wedding. But this time, Ahua insisted that she should bring not only Old Nine, but his three

sisters as well, who should be her flower girls. The wedding of Hsu Weilin and Kim Ahua was going to be celebrated with all the ceremony and pomp the Hsu family could muster.

The Kims in Amoy were truly impressed by the connections Ahua was marrying into, and when Ah Yee arrived with her children, she was flabbergasted at the way things were being planned and money being spent. But she found Chuli and San-kuo somewhat tired, and Chuli could not help talking about Sima at great length.

Ah Yee listened, and put a sympathetic hand on Chuli's shoulder. "No, I am not shocked or surprised," she said softly, "and if you are still shocked that there are such goings on in the world at your age, Chuli, I must say you have been very lucky so far."

She spoke with a lisp. Her false teeth gave her much trouble and would not stay in place. "Don't take it so much to heart," she added. But she saw that what happened preyed very much on Chuli's mind, especially since Ahua's wedding was going to be such a contrast to the quiet wedding of her sister.

Having herself passed her first-year examinations with ease, Ahua devoted all her waking moments to the preparation of her wedding. She was the first to get up in the morning and the last to go to bed at night. She was busy, cutting Ah Yee's daughters' hair, trying out different ways to make their faces look "less horsey," and they all laughed and said she was still such a child, although Chuli and Ah Yee looked at her now with new respect for the wealthy family she was marrying into. Ahua kept saying that she would be very sorry to leave her aunt and uncle's home, although she was only going to be moving fifteen minutes away to the Hsu residence after she was married. Chuli also felt as if all had happened too quickly, before she even realized that her nieces were no longer children. But she took comfort in the thought that Zan was coming back home when summer was over.

Now Shanghai was already in the grips of sultry weather, and the sky was like a gigantic inverted china-blue bowl, sealing in the humidity and heat.

The Hsu family put Uncle Anson, Mrs. Hsu's brother, in charge of the wedding arrangements. Mrs. Hsu did little more, since the hot days began, than lie in bed and select dress material which clerks brought in bolts from silkshops, and Hsu Paofung himself was too busy with preparations for his departure to help Anson out.

But Anson acted with calm efficiency. He proceeded to organize a wedding which he thought must be commensurate with the position of the family, wealthy businessmen for three generations.

Days before the wedding, trucks bearing rented tables and chairs began arriving on the estate, and bringing cases of Coca-Cola, orange squash, Tiger beer, champagne, whisky, brandy, and Shao-hsing wine. Three gardeners were set to work on the grounds, planting flowers and making the lawn ready. Twenty extra servants were hired for the day of the wedding, and this did not include the staffs of two restaurants which were catered to serve the wedding tea and dinner. The gate on Bubbling Well Road was festooned with a gigantic floral and red satin decoration mounted on a bamboo frame with the two words HSU and KIM in gold paper cutouts in the center. The ping-pong room was turned into a pantry from which cake, ice cream, almond custard, redbean sherbet, cream gâteaux, steamed buns, curry puffs, fried shrimp, meat dumplings, egg rolls, and fried noodles would be served, while the small sitting room in which Weilin used to listen to phonograph records was turned into a bar. After the wedding ceremony, tents would be set up on the lawn and fifty tables would be laid. The wedding dinner for five hundred would consist of four cold hors d'oeuvres and four hot hors d'oeuvres, to be followed by shark's fins soup, sautéed double-luck shrimp, stuffed goose, sea cucumber with turtle meat, suckling pig with steamed buns, mushrooms with creamed hearts of Shantung cabbage, chicken with bird's nest, carp cooked in two ways, lucky noodles, sweet Eight-Treasure Pudding, sweet lotus seed tea, and steamed buns.

The main drawing room of the mansion was converted into a flower garden, with a platform garlanded with roses and carna-

tions and rows of folding chairs. Here, the wedding would take place.

Wong Sankuo found comfort in the elaborate wedding plans, as if in the Hsu family's deep belief in tradition, he were reminded of the continuity of something indestructible in the face of dissolving order in the nation. He respected Hsu Paofung for his integrity and hard-working spirit, and he envied all for whom life seemed like an endless present where nothing began and nothing left off, although individuals might die and be born. Into this stream of organized family life Ahua now was entering, and he saw her fitting happily into the scheme of things. Now he felt no more qualms about her marrying at seventeen. Indeed, it was a blessing to be married young, he thought.

The bridal procession of cars arrived at three o'clock in the afternoon. The gates had been thrown open to guests since noon, and a little crowd of passers-by had gathered on the pavement to watch the arrival of the bride.

As her car turned into the driveway, Ahua saw many people standing on the estate grounds, and they were all looking in her direction. She could hardly recognize the place, with so many cars parked on the sides of the driveway, and people walking along it, dressed in lace and satin and all made up.

"Are they all waiting for me?" she thought unbelievably. "Is this all for my sake?" and she tugged at her crisp nylon wedding dress, which scratched her at the back.

When the car pulled up to the front of the mansion, she saw that the whole Hsu family was waiting for her at the top of the steps, and scores of other guests were standing on either side, and they were all looking at her as if they knew a secret she did not know. "Why are they all looking at me like that?" she wondered. "Has something happened I don't know about?"

They were looking at her like that because she looked so very young in her ornate wedding dress, and it hurt to see how unperturbed she was. She stepped out of the car and walked up to the Hsu family with a bright smile on her face, as if she were

conscious that they had gone to a great deal of trouble for her, and she did not want to let them down.

"I feel just as if I were going to attend a very large party," Ahua thought. "I don't feel any different."

It was two o'clock in the morning when the last guest left, and Weilin and Ahua went upstairs to the third floor. Anson had been so busy with the elaborate wedding plans that he forgot all about the bridal room. Weilin's room was littered with his shirts and sweaters and books, and the single bed in it was not made.

Ahua walked to his bureau and looked at the things on it curiously. "Is this your comb?" she said, picking it up. "It can stand a wash!" and she looked at Weilin deeply in the eyes.

"Ahua, I thought they would never go," Weilin said. "I am going out of my mind with love for you. When we are not together I feel empty, as if I were only a hollow shell. I feel strange and stupid without you. Do you feel like that too?"

"And what's this? Your dirty socks?" Ahua said. "You mean to say that with all these servants about, they don't pick up your room for you?"

"They've all been so busy today they probably forgot," Weilin said, coming around the bed to her. "You aren't offended, are you?"

Ahua sat down on the bed, pushing some of his things aside, and held out her hand with a smile.

"Why doesn't this ring sparkle in the dark?" she said.

"I told you it wouldn't. Only when electric lights are shining on it. Are you sorry now you made me get it when you could have had a real diamond?"

"No, we fooled them, didn't we? Everybody thought it was real."

"You silly," Weilin said softly. "What were you trying to prove?"

"Only that I want you for yourself only, that is all. There's only the two of us, Weilin! Just the two of us real people in this world!"

"Is your heart beating as fast as mine?"

"Everybody must be listening to us."

"No, they have all gone to bed."

"Yes, but they're all lying awake, thinking dirty thoughts about us. I know they are."

"Don't cry."

"Draw the curtains, Weilin, please."

"It will be stifling."

"But there are so many moths beating against the window screen. They mustn't watch."

## 15

HSU PAOFUNG left for Australia the day after the wedding. Anson went to Hangchow.

Now the hot weather cut a wide swath across the country, scorching the earth and bleaching the sky, and in Shanghai, only when the sun set like a purple ball behind the sea was there a breath of cool air.

Shut in his father's air-conditioned study, Weilin padded around in shorts and bare feet, and tried to focus his eyes on his books. Every pore of his skin felt cold. When he opened the door at lunch time, the hot air hit him like a blast from a furnace. He got dressed and went to the Stock Exchange by himself, and when he came back, he lay prostrate and stared blankly at the ceiling, unable to speak, his eyes dark and round.

Watching him, Ahua said, "Do you think your father would mind very much if we went to Hangchow? You could study there even better than here. There at least we'd get a breeze from the lake."

"I don't think we should," Weilin said.

"I can't bear seeing you so miserable," said his bride, lying down over him. "We could stay at the Garden Hotel where we had such a lovely time. It would be so wonderful, just by ourselves!"

"I don't know," Weilin said worriedly, fondling her hair.

"A room in Hangchow for the summer! Is that asking too much of this family?" Ahua pleaded, sitting up on the bed. "And besides, after you finished studying every day, we could have such a good time. It isn't much fun for me to start married life this way, you know."

Seeing her face, Weilin said, "We'll ask Mother."

Immediately, they went downstairs to the second floor, where Mrs. Hsu lay in bed, the room darkened by Venetian blinds. Ahua pleaded their case with her, on the verge of tears.

"I suppose it would do no serious harm," Mrs. Hsu said indulgently. She could not refuse, seeing her face. "I don't think your father would really mind, as long as Weilin studies and passes his examinations in the fall. But he will be very angry if he doesn't, and then finds out that you've gone to Hangchow."

"Oh, please," Ahua begged. "I promise, I'll be responsible for him. We'll be very good. We'll take our books and everything."

"Very well then," Mrs. Hsu said with a smile. "Your Uncle Anson is there. I'll tell him to keep an eye on you."

Before she finished talking, Ahua pulled Weilin out of the room and dragged him upstairs. She began to throw clothes into suitcases, and soon laughing irrepressibly, she pulled him down the stairs as fast as she could. No, they wouldn't have supper first. They would eat on the train. No, please don't telephone to Anson to meet them. They would find a hotel and get in touch with him in the morning.

They escaped from Shanghai like thieves, and after they got on board the train, Ahua burst out with a great shout of triumph. She ordered fried rice and bought packages of dried beef slices and all sorts of fruits and sweets from the vendor, and they ate, stealing mirthful glances at each other. After the meal, Ahua's spirits soared. She kept reassuring Weilin that they were not doing wrong, but he was more serious and only gazed in mute adoration at his wife.

When they arrived in Hangchow four hours later, it was midnight, and the air was cool and fragrant. And when they went to the Garden Hotel, even Weilin had to admit that they

had been right to come. Now everything came back to him; the good times they had here this spring, the talks with Ahua on the lake, and the feeling which had suffused him, so peaceful and good, and he remembered that he knew what he wanted in life then.

The next morning, they rose conscientiously at eight o'clock, and after breakfast, took their books and went to the garden. Beside the lake there was a large weeping willow with branches hanging down to the ground in a circle, and they ducked under it and sat down and looked at each other for a long time. The sunlight coming through the leaves made their faces look perfectly green, and when a breeze moved the willow branches, sparkling reflections from the water flew across their faces.

They looked at each other deeply for a long time without speaking. They were safe at last. Nothing in the world could touch them now. The wrath of Weilin's father, the hurdles of autumn examinations, the humiliations this spring all retreated and nothing was important any more except themselves.

"I feel like a canary inside a green lace cage," Weilin said dreamily. "Peace and quiet. This is heaven."

He took a harmonica from his pocket and played, and as he did so, his weakened will, which had denied itself for so long in deference to the desires of his father, uncle, schoolmates, and chauffeur became intoxicated with itself, and he was carried away in a pessimistic ecstasy. It came to him that the world was an illusion from which even disillusion did not free him, for all was illusion anyway, that which his heart was seeking, that which he could not find. For a moment, he felt completely free. When he stopped playing, he felt as if he were in a delirium, more real than life.

"We are the wandering voices of the wind [he recited],  
Which moan for rest, and rest can never find;  
Lo! as the wind is, so is mortal life,  
A moan, a sigh, a sob, a storm, a strife."

When he looked up, he said, without passion and as if he were stating a simple fact, "Oh, Ahua, I love you so! You are

all I have in life. You are the meaning of my existence. If you should stop loving me, I would die."

"Oh, Weilin, why so sad?" she said, startled. She was embarrassed, and averted her eyes. She picked up a green lizard which was crawling on the gravel, and put it on his arm. It crawled under his sleeve and out again at the throat. And when she looked at him again, her heart was full. The indignity of their childhoods, the humiliation and loneliness they had endured all their lives, had finally all been washed away.

"Oh, how happy am I!" she said voicelessly.

He did not speak. A transformation came over his worried, haggard face.

After a few days in Hangchow, a change came over Ahua also. She was infected with the serenity of Weilin's spirit, and became very quiet also. She felt everything so deeply now that tears came easily to her eyes, when before she seldom ever cried.

She usually woke up before Weilin in the morning, and waited for him by the window, watching people clean the boats and go to market and come back with eggs and vegetables in their baskets. She went to the bathroom and washed herself and cut her nails and did all the things she had to do in secret, so that he should never see her looking ugly, and when she came back and found him still sleeping, she had not the heart to wake him. She watched him sleep. His hair was tousled and his mouth slightly open, and her heart was so full of love for him that she found it difficult to speak or think. She had lost her eloquence. He no longer had any melancholy spells, and Ahua was delighted, and felt that she was responsible for it. All these new feelings came to her now without going through the sifting channels of her brain. Now she knew what was right, as if answers produced themselves without effort from every pore of her body. All the probing and thinking and fine weighing and judgment of things which had absorbed her entire conscious life came to a stop. A new world opened to her, a world of which she was aware through her sensibilities and not through her intellect. But she knew that in every way it was commensurate with all

the dreams and hopes she ever had for herself. Now she even stopped to dream.

They made a rule: no studying in the afternoon. They usually lunched at the hotel at noon, near the open window, on fresh fish from the lake, steamed or in clear broth, an egg custard with mushrooms, and rice, or a simple dish of cold meat; they did not want complicated dinners until after dark. And then they went back to their room, when the sun was very hot and no one came out on the street, and let down the bamboo screens and lay in the slatted darkness with arms and legs entwined.

"Am I not making you a good wife, Weilin?" she said. "I never knew what a good wife I was going to be."

"You are my body and soul," he said.

"I'm glad we are married. It is so dignified to be married. I keep wondering if I'm having a baby already. I'd feel even more dignified if I were."

"You couldn't be having one yet."

"I'd like to find out how fertile I am."

"You're very fertile."

"Perhaps I'm so fertile I'll conceive just by looking at you."

"You chatter so much. You talk about the oddest things at the oddest moments."

"I can't help it. Sometimes I'm thinking about the most ridiculous things. I'm wondering what my poor sister is doing and feeling sorry for my poor Ah Yee, thinking about all the trouble she's had in life, and wondering how it was my father made her pregnant before she married, and whether she's known such happiness as I. I'm trying not to be quite as happy as I feel, because I want everyone I love to be equally happy, and so I try to subtract a little from my happiness. Are you listening to me?"

"I am."

"Weilin, is there any part of me you don't like?"

"I love you all."

"What do you think of my toes?"

"I haven't noticed your toes."

"You mean to say all this time you haven't looked at my toes? Will you please get up at once and look at them?"

"Oh, don't be so childish, Ahua."

"I want you to have a complete picture of me."

"All right, all right."

"You shouldn't make fun of me, Weilin, when I'm trying so hard for us to be perfect images to each other."

"Don't cry, darling. You are so intense. Don't cry. I'll look at your toes."

They usually got up at about four o'clock. Weilin liked to have a few cups of wine when the sun went down. They would go into one of the wineshops along the lake and have a few ounces of Hua-tiao, and ask the shopkeeper to cut a few slices of cold chicken or duck from the hooks hanging in front of the shop, and have it with peanuts and wedges of calcified eggs. Ahua discovered that she could drink a little and not feel dizzy, and that Weilin had a great capacity and was very fond of wine. After he had had a few cups, his face colored a little, and he could tell her wonderful stories, and talk in a brilliant, animated way which she had never known before. The contrast between this and the periods of depression he had in Shanghai made her sure that nothing they were doing could be wrong, and that consequently everything would turn out well for them when they went back.

One afternoon, Anson came to see them at the hotel, and was kept waiting for a long time in the corridor before Weilin opened the door a crack, and asked his uncle what he wanted. Anson saw Ahua lying in bed with her back toward the door. Embarrassed, he told Weilin to come to see him when he could, and left. He had satisfied himself that he was "keeping an eye" on the young couple.

But after his uncle left, Weilin was moody. He had been too proud to tell him, "Uncle, I am really studying although it may not look like it," and he was sure that a misunderstanding had arisen. He wanted to go to Anson immediately and explain, but Ahua told him not to.

When they went out for their wine, Ahua said, "Believe in ourselves, Weilin. I'll look after you."

Weilin brooded.

"Are you so unhappy?" she said.

"I'm not unhappy."

"Then what is the matter?"

"Uncle is bound to tell my father about my not going to the Stock Exchange when he comes back."

"But you hated it, didn't you?"

"Yes, but I had to learn. My father wanted me to get the experience of going there."

"We could go back if you're not happy about it."

"No, I'm perfectly happy."

"Are you sure?"

"Ahua, if I should fail my examinations—just supposing I should fail—would you despise me?"

"No, of course not. You know I don't think anything of things like that."

"And if I turned out to be no good for ordinary life and did nothing all my life except love you and enjoy life with you, would you be disappointed in me?"

"Of course not, if that's what you want to do."

"Really?"

"I believe everybody should do what he wants to do. What are people working for? In order to be where you are, Weilin, with money. I also believe that everyone must answer only to himself in the end. I used to care a lot what people thought. Now I trust only myself."

Weilin's face was white and drawn. Life was a dream, a sad dream, but Ahua was like the sun which burned the melancholy mists away. There exploded in him, like wild flowers in spring, buds of happiness and surging life.

"I feel as if I had been only half-conscious until now," he said, grasping both her hands. "Every drop of blood in my veins seems different now, this love for you penetrates my whole being. I breathe it, I eat it, I exhale it."

"Don't talk like that, you frighten me," she said.

"You're very good."

"Don't say I'm good."

"Why not?"

"I don't want you ever to judge me or use any adjective to describe me in any way, whether I'm good, bad, or indifferent. I'm just Ahua and you're just Weilin, and that's all. I couldn't bear it if you could stand aside and make comments about me."

"Not even to say you're good?"

"Not even to say I'm good. And now you've made us both unhappy, Weilin."

She rose and walked quickly out of the wineshop. They walked hand in hand to the lake and hired a boat for an hour's ride. By the time they came back, they were both happy again and feeling hungry, and they went into the town and had a very elegant dinner, and did not come back until both were a little tipsy, and made a lot of noise entering the hotel.

Each day was the same for them, and yet also different and meaningful and individual; it was like adding one more perfect pearl to a string of perfect pearls.

One night, Ahua woke up and found Weilin awake also. He was staring at the ceiling, and holding both his hands up, with the tips of his fingernails resting upon his thumbs.

"What are you doing?" she asked.

"I'm trying to see if I can feel my fingernails growing."

"Are you really? I used to measure my hair every day when I was little."

"I've done that, too."

"We're twins, Weilin. Let me put my hands on your head and see if I can feel your hair moving."

"I'll do the same to you."

Finally they fell asleep again in each other's arms.

When they were ready to go back to Shanghai, Weilin had gained five pounds and Ahua was very proud. They checked out of the hotel in the late afternoon, and walked hand in hand for the last time by the lake shore.

"Should we have our wine tonight?" Ahua said.

"No, I don't think so. It might muddle me up in the morning. My head feels neatly packed with everything in its proper shelf. I'm afraid to disarrange it."

"Shall we go to the lake then?"

"Let's do that after supper."

They took the midnight train back to Shanghai. From the station they were going to the college for Weilin's examinations directly and not return home until they were over with.

It was only four o'clock when they arrived in Shanghai and the streets were strange in the early morning. They felt clear-headed, fresh, and full of purpose. They got into a pedicab and it creaked along the empty streets. Finally they found an open food stall near a market place and got down. A big charcoal fire was going with a big black caldron on it sizzling with oil. A man was frying lengths of puffy pastry in them. Nearby a porridge shop opened to the rickshaw coolie and pedicab trade, and Ahua and Weilin sat down at tables on the street and ordered two scalding bowls of porridge and bought two lengths of fried pastry, which they broke into pieces and buried in the porridge. The food was scalding hot, and lovely going down the throat. After they ate they took a bus and from habit, got down at Bubbling Well Road, but they did not go in. They walked to Ahua's house and looked at the closed windows on the upper floor and smiled. Then they heard someone draw back the bolt of the gate, and they ran away. From there it was not far to the college, and when they arrived it was only seven o'clock. So they walked back again and sat down in the park. The benches were wet with dew, and Weilin took off his jacket and spread it on the seat for Ahua.

"I want you to know that no matter what happens, I don't mind," Ahua said.

Now the sun began to spread its light across the treetops, the leaves sieved it and let through fine rays like sharp needles. Weilin looked at his wrist watch and said, "It's eight o'clock."

"I'll wait here until you come out," she said.

"You'll get bored. I won't be through until noon."

"I won't get bored. I'll sit here and think about you and telepathize the answers to you. See, I'll go over all your books."

"There's half an hour to go," he said.

"You may as well go in."

"You're a pillar of strength," he said.

"I'm not."

Weilin got up, and Ahua got up too and handed him his jacket, but it was wet and he said he didn't want it. And so he walked away from her, and when he looked back at the gate of the school he saw Ahua pointing at him, and at last he understood that she meant for him to tuck in his shirt, and he did so and disappeared.

Weilin walked into the familiar buildings with a peaceful feeling. He was the first one to arrive; but soon seven others joined him, and they sat down in the classroom, and it was very quiet. The professor came in and they were given written tests. All went very well. After two hours they had a rest and when they went back again, Weilin heard some boys playing basketball in the gymnasium. Every time someone made a basket there was shouting. "21-7!" Whistles blew and people said "Foul!" "Basket!" and the echoes of their voices and their stamping feet had a strange resonance which annoyed him. "Foul!" "Good shot!" "28-14!" He glanced at the other people in the room, who were all bent over their desks, and writing as if their lives depended upon it. "I'm not like them," he thought. "Why are they so intense? Why do people play ball? In life isn't everything as meaningless as a ball game? How loathesome it all is!" Was this detestable world of sweat and competition really his world? His whole nature recoiled from it. A room by the lake, a room by the lake. He longed for peace and quiet, and liberation. He felt the heat prickling on his skin and peculiar sensations in his finger tips and nostrils and on his tongue. He did not know until the bell rang that it was noon.

## 16

Two days before Hsu Paofung's steamship arrived in Shanghai, the Shanghai Stock Exchange was so greatly set back by new Government defeats in the North that Hsu decided to cut his losses and pull out of the market altogether. He cabled to his brother-in-law, and Anson carried out his orders the following day.

When the two men met at the Bund the next day, Anson said briefly, "I did what you told me."

"Good," replied Hsu. Neither man would speak about this before they were home. But when they arrived, they strode into the study and shut the door behind them before the family even saw them.

"I did everything you instructed," Anson said once more, and produced a neatly written list of the stocks which had been sold and their prices. Hsu Paofung sat down behind his desk and studied it for a few minutes. He looked up with smiling eyes. "This is correct. It is the picture I had in mind."

"You caused quite a stir yesterday at the Exchange," Anson said.

"I believe in accepting my losses now rather than hanging on," Hsu replied. "The way the fighting is going, I believe I will be patting myself on the back that I pulled out in time."

Anson looked grave. "Did you have success in Australia?" he then asked.

Hsu smiled grimly. He said that he had succeeded in arranging a loan from the Australian Government and that everything was going according to plans in Hong Kong. "I am more sure than ever that we are making the right move," he said. "The next thing for me to do is to take our blended tea abroad and get it tested and reported on in the catalogues in London and Amsterdam. So far as this year's crops are concerned, they have already been picked, dried, rolled, and fermented. If our

tea is approved in London, all that remains to be done is for us to process and blend it. No matter who runs China next year, tea will continue to be picked and sold."

"When do you expect to go?"

"Just as soon as I can," replied Hsu, "and while I am away, you must start moving to Hong Kong, step by step. I don't think we need be in a hurry, but there is no need to delay, either." He could not keep a tremor of excitement from escaping in his voice. He had acted dramatically in the last forty-eight hours, and his eyes shone with a sense of accomplishment.

He was going to speak again when he heard a girlish voice singing upstairs.

The dew is heavy on the grass,

At last the sun is set.

Fill up, fill up the cups of jade,

The night's before us yet!

All night the dew will heavy lie,

Upon the grass and clover.

Too soon, too soon, the dew will dry,

Too soon the night be over!

Hsu stared at his brother-in-law. "Who the devil is that?" he demanded.

"I believe that is Ahua," Anson replied, looking at his shoes.

"Oh?" Suddenly an incongruous and absurd image came to Hsu's mind of his son enjoying the conjugal pleasures of his marriage. He could not pick up his train of thought again. He looked at his watch and saw that it was lunch time, and walked with Anson to the dining room.

There, his family had gathered, and Hsu looked at them with an unusual feeling of warmth. They all stood up to welcome him back, and even his wife came downstairs today. Over lunch, Hsu Paofung told them about his trip and about his success in Hong Kong and Australia, an unusual thing for him since he did not usually discuss business with his family.

When he stopped talking, he looked around expectantly and

waited for their response. His eyes finally came to rest on his son.

Weilin was looking into his rice bowl. When he did not look up and said nothing at all, a quick ball of irritation scudded across Hsu Paofung's breast. But he said brightly, "And you, Weilin? How have you spent the summer? Kept up with your studies?"

The boy looked up. "Yes, Father," he said obediently.

Seeing the lackluster eyes and the all-too-familiar look of despondence on his face, Hsu Paofung glowered.

"What is the matter? Can't you speak up like any ordinary young man?"

"Yes, Father," Weilin repeated, now more loudly.

This quickened the impatience in the father. He stared at his son as if he were someone he had never seen before, and Weilin lowered his eyes again, possessed of a fatalistic hopelessness which took hold of him in all its enchanting power. He said, "Father, I did not pass the new examinations."

Hsu tried to keep his voice unemotional. "You are telling me that you failed to graduate?"

"Yes, Father," Weilin said, possessed with a self-knowledge which was like a mountainous burden, crushing the jade bones of happiness he felt this summer.

"How many were there who had to make up courses this summer?"

"Eight, Father."

"And how many failed again?"

"I was the only one, Father."

"Why?"

Why? How could he possibly tell him? Because he was unique, that was why! Then that happiness with Ahua had been only a temporary respite from the burdens he had to carry in this life. He knew it was too good to last. He had always known that to deny himself of his desires and accept the limitations of others was his destiny in life.

All the sense of hope and accomplishment Hsu Paofung felt this morning drained away.

"What did you do with yourself this summer?" Hsu asked.

"Ahua and I went to Hangchow this summer," said Weilin honestly. He was bound to find out. "But that isn't why I failed."

"Whose idea was it for you to go to Hangchow?" his father demanded, the ire rising in him.

"It was my idea," Ahua cut in.

Hsu looked at the girl. She was sitting beside his son, wearing a simple, sleeveless dark green dress and she looked lovely. Her eyes were perfectly round, like dark marbles. That incongruous vision he had this morning came back to him.

"So you distracted him and filled his head up with nonsense until he had no mind left for studying any more!" he thundered all of a sudden. "Don't imagine that I don't know!"

No one had ever spoken to Ahua like this before. Her face flushed red immediately. "I did not distract him or fill his head up with nonsense!" she cried.

Hsu Paofung realized that he had spoken more harshly than he meant to. His face fell. "I'm greatly disappointed," he said after a moment. "I had hoped, Weilin, that by being married, you would realize you had responsibilities as an adult, and take yourself more seriously. Instead, this is the result. . . ."

"Father, my marriage had nothing to do with my failure. . . ." Weilin began.

But he did not finish. Abruptly, Hsu Paofung scraped back his chair and left the table. Weilin looked up just in time to see his father brush a tear away from his cheek. It was the first tear he had ever seen his father shed.

Long after Ahua thought she had shed all the tears she was capable of shedding that night, Weilin came upstairs from his father's study. The moon was shining eerily into the room. Their summer was like a wilted flower, its petals scattered on the ground after a storm.

Ahua lifted herself from the bed when Weilin came in, his face leaden.

He folded her into his arms.

"He's calmed down a lot now," he said. "But he wants me to go to Europe with him."

"What?"

"He says he wants to make a man out of me."

"When do we go?"

"You're not going," Weilin said, holding her with cold hands.

"What!"

"He says on this trip he wants to make a man out of me, he doesn't want any distracting influence."

"Did he call me that again?"

Ahua jumped out of his arms, and stared at him unbelievably. "But you're not going, are you?"

"I have to go. He can't bear it if I don't go."

"But you don't have to go," she cried, frightened and confused.

He spoke in a low, husky voice, with an inscrutable expression on his face. "We are not free in life. In life we are not free, Ahua."

"But why can't he leave us alone? Can't you tell him that you don't want to go? You don't want to go, do you?" Her piercing voice filled the room.

"Of course not," he said. "But I am chained to him. I am his son. Ahua, you are strong. He is weak and all involved."

Now she sat apart from him, and her eyes beseeched him.

"I cannot fight his will," he said. "As long as you and I understand each other, nothing we do matters. Can you understand that?"

"Tell him you won't go!" Ahua said, and her voice was hoarse with fright.

"I can't do that. I told you once that it would be this way. Do you see, my darling?"

"No, I don't see. When you failed your examinations, I didn't care. Are you going back on all we believed in, Weilin? Is that what's happening?"

"No, I'm not," he said sadly. "All I have in this world is you, you are my only consolation, you are all I have. As long as we

understand each other, nothing people can do to us can matter, don't you understand, my darling?"

She stared into the darkness, stark and silent. Then suddenly she began weeping wildly and loudly. "Oh, I cannot bear it!" she cried.

They were trying to force her to accept something terrible, and she could not accept it.

Weilin looked at her helplessly, and reached for her hand.

"Don't touch me!" she cried. And then, realizing what she had said, she threw herself into his arms.

"He's going to make a man out of you, and when you come back, you'll be different, Weilin. Don't go! Don't go!" she sobbed on his breast.

But he did not reply. His face was deadly white.

"How long will you be gone?" she asked at last.

"At least six months. We're going to London and Amsterdam, all over Europe."

"Six months!"

"Time will fly. We'll be together again before you know it, Ahua," he said sorrowfully.

"But you'll be changed when you come back, I know it! Once he makes a man out of you you'll come back different and you won't be my Weilin any more."

"I promise I won't change," he said, his teeth chattering. "I can't change. You are all I care about in life. Can't you see that nothing else matters? No matter what we have to do, where we have to go, as long as you and I understand each other, it is all right."

"When are you leaving?"

"Next week."

"So soon?"

"I'm sorry."

She stopped crying abruptly. She was angry and intimidated now. "To think that we went to Hangchow out of only the purest of reasons!" she said. "To think that I suggested going only out of my love for you, for no other reason, Weilin. . . ."

"I know, my darling, I know. Perhaps I should have graduated,

then he would have left us alone. Do you see, there is no way, one way or another they have us tied. . . .”

Ahua moved about the house like someone haunted during the next days, with tightly shut lips and disheveled hair. She packed for Weilin with the air of someone who was performing a great sacrifice, and developed a nervous twitching of the eyes. She felt that everyone in the household, including the servants, was laughing at her, and she tried to look as if she were above them all, drawing over her face a mask of preoccupation.

But in the end, she could bear it no longer, and ran crying back to her uncle and aunt to tell them all about it. She and Weilin had been so absorbed in each other since coming back from Hangchow that she had not even gone to see them, and Chuli had not been very pleased, thinking that Ahua was well married now, and no longer needed her.

Now she came back, looking like a wet doll.

“I suggested going to Hangchow out of the *purest* reasons in my heart, and he said I *distracted* Weilin and filled his head up with *nonsense!*” she repeated over and over. “I can’t understand why we are being punished like this!”

Chuli tried to comfort her, saying that a wife must get used to her husband’s going away occasionally on business, that San-kuo went to Nanking every week and life went on just the same.

“But Weilin and I are different, we aren’t like the rest of the people in the world, we can’t be expected to follow the normal conditions of life!” she cried. “We can’t be expected to lead an ordinary life!”

Chuli smiled an exasperated smile.

“It’s a conspiracy!” Ahua went on hysterically. “They are trying to bend us and twist us until we lose our original shapes and don’t know ourselves any more. I don’t see why they can’t leave us alone. I don’t see why we couldn’t stay in Hangchow forever if we want to. It isn’t as if the Hsus couldn’t afford it!”

But she saw that her aunt didn’t understand. Not even Weilin understood completely, she thought.

## 17

ON THE evening of his departure, Weilin and Ahua came to supper with the Wongs. Chuli invited Hsu Paofung also, but he declined, saying that he had many things to do at the last minute.

Ahua was silent throughout the dinner. She was wearing an old blouse and slacks, and she had neither combed her hair nor powdered her face, and she did not try to hide her unhappiness or care what they thought about her. They all told her that she should not behave as if this were a catastrophe, that after all, Weilin was only going on a business trip with his father, as any ordinary young man might do, and that she should try to understand and act more like a married woman.

"But I don't understand! I can't act the part of the understanding wife because I don't understand!" she said.

"You are hardly making it easy for Weilin," Chuli said seriously. "If your father-in-law sees you behaving like this, I don't wonder that he does not want to take you along. But if you put up a brave face and hide your feelings somewhat, he might change his opinions about you. Don't you think you should use some tact?"

"Tact? Hypocrisy! Why should I hide my feelings? I'm not a hypocrite, I can't pretend to smile when I don't feel like smiling or say 'oh, I'm terribly glad Weilin is going with you,' when I don't feel that way. I'm not that sort of person."

There was an hour before they had to go to the airport after dinner and Weilin suggested to Ahua that they go for a walk. Chuli was touched by the tender way he treated Ahua, and thought that he was the more mature of the two. His going abroad with his father was a sign of his awareness of his responsibilities in life, and she was sure that after he came back the young couple would go far in society.

They walked with arms around each other. Their shadows elongated and dwarfed under the yellow street lights.

"Don't we look like Siamese twins?" Weilin said. "We can hardly tell which is you and which is me."

"I can tell. You're the one that's going away, and I'm the one that's staying behind."

"You mustn't grow any taller while I'm away," Weilin said. "We're the same height."

"If I do, I'll write you and you grow the exact same amount."

"No, I've stopped growing, I think."

"Oh, Weilin, I can't bear it! I can't bear it!"

They stopped under a street light, and Weilin circled her waist with his arm and pulled her to him. He looked very handsome in his new suit and brown tie and smelled lightly of peppermint.

She could hear cars moving, and falling footsteps of passers-by.

"Ahua, you won't go to school and look at all the bright young men there who are so different from me and let them turn your head, will you?" he said suddenly.

"Oh, how can you bear even to say such things?"

"Men can't help falling in love with you. You're so sweet."

"I'll see no one at all until you come back. I'll hide in my room."

"Society is full of stupid-bright young men, who are different from me. You mustn't let them change your ideas about me. When I'm away you must be strong, and not let them influence you, you know the type I mean, those boys who play the game of life, and make baskets all the time." His eyes filled with abhorrence, deep and bitter.

"How can they change my ideas about you?" she said. "Do I ask whether you'll let other girls turn your head while you're abroad? Why, Weilin, if you doubt me, you're only hurting yourself."

"I'm sorry."

"See, our separation has already made us say such terrible

things." She took a handkerchief from his pocket and blew her nose.

"You aren't having a baby or anything, are you?"

"I can't understand why I'm not more fertile."

"You're very fertile."

"Maybe I'll have a baby while you're gone, and I'll call him Koko. Koko and I'll come to meet you at the airport when you come back, and when he sees you, he'll burst out crying."

"Why will he burst out crying?"

"Because you frighten him."

"Why do I frighten him?"

"Because he doesn't know you."

"I'll be back before you can have time to have a baby."

"Oh, Weilin, you mustn't die!"

"How will I die?"

"I don't know, but you mustn't die before you come back to me."

"I promise not to die before I come back to you."

"And you must promise not to let your father make a man out of you."

"I promise not to let him make a man out of me."

Ahua held Weilin's hand all the way to the airport. When they arrived, Chuli saw how well dressed the people were who had come to see the Hsus off, and she was sorry she had not made Ahua change into a dress before she came. She was the focus of attention walking beside Weilin, who was spruce and smart-looking.

"Ahua, your hair," Chuli said gently behind her, but the girl did not heed her. She had eyes for no one except Weilin, and looked as if the end of the world had come.

Everyone heard her saying, convulsively between chattering teeth, "And . . . and Weilin, Weilin, you mustn't change. You must come back exactly the way you are. You must wear this same tie and suit when you come back." Everyone smiled and Chuli was deeply embarrassed for her.

At last when it was time for them to part, Ahua fell back with a shocked expression on her face, as if she could not be-

lieve that it was actually happening. Hsu Paofung was waiting impatiently at the gate for his son, and looked sternly at her.

On the way back, Ahua sat between her aunt and uncle and said nothing.

"Later, you will think back upon all this and laugh at yourself, Ahua," Sankuo said softly. "You should be proud that your husband is finding a place for himself in the scheme of the family business. It shows he has a sense of responsibility."

"But you are all mistaken!" Ahua said, coming out of shock. "You are all mistaken about Weilin! I am the one who has the sense of responsibility about our marriage!"

When they dropped her off at the Hsus, Ahua went in without even saying good-by.

"I feel very badly for the poor child," said Sankuo. "But this is probably good for her."

"Did you feel that Hsu Paofung acted a bit cool to us?" Chuli said. "I felt as if he were not as cordial as he used to be."

"Well," said Sankuo with a wan smile—he had heard about Hsu Paofung pulling all his money out of the Stock Exchange—"it is perfectly natural."

"You mean he has lost faith in the Government?" Chuli said.

"With businessmen, it isn't a question of faith," said Sankuo with a shade of contempt. "It is only a question of dollars and cents."

After Weilin left, Ahua wandered about the Hsu house, tearless and aimlessly preoccupied with herself. Her days and nights were all mixed up, all her conscious and unconscious hours merged together so that she did not know whether she was dreaming or awake. She withdrew from the company of Weilin's cousins and mother, and kept to herself. Sometimes she wandered alone in the park in the hot sun, and often she stayed in her room. She thought that she could better keep the aura of Weilin about her if she were alone. One day she remembered that she had turned eighteen years old, but she did not even stop to contemplate this fact, as she would have in the old days. Nothing had a meaning any more except keeping the myth of

Weilin alive until he came back, and already he seemed like only a myth.

One night alone in her room she happened to catch sight of herself in the mirror, and she was shocked by her appearance. Her hair had not been washed for days, her face was streaky with tears, and there were ugly brackets around her mouth. "But this isn't me!" she said to herself. "I must keep up to standard even in Weilin's absence. I must not go to seed." She immediately washed her hair and set it very seriously, and worked over herself in a fever of energy until she was exhausted, and then she slept long sick hours full of dreams and longing. When she woke up in the morning, she told her mother-in-law that she wanted to go back to live with her uncle and aunt until Weilin came back, and Mrs. Hsu only smiled, and said that she must ask Chuli what she thought. But Ahua thought there would be no need to ask. She packed a few clothes and turned up at Wong Sankuo's house in a rickshaw half an hour later. Chuli was astounded, but so naturally did Ahua assume that she would be welcome that Chuli made haste to get a room ready for her, after being assured that Mrs. Hsu thought it would be all right. Zan had come back, Chuli said, and was staying in the room she and Sima used to occupy. He had gone to Peiping to visit some of his old friends, and would be back in a few days. Ahua was given the small room in back and she was perfectly satisfied with the arrangements.

## I 8

UPON returning from America with a degree of Doctor of Philosophy from Columbia University, Zan was welcomed by his parents as if he had been to war. Now when he came back from Peiping Chuli again gave him a hero's welcome and behaved as if she had not seen him for a long time. She had risen at dawn to cook him her traditional home-coming pig's knuckle

soup with noodles, with which she plied him when he stepped back into the house at ten. She made a lunch of four courses and then went to market to see what she could buy for dinner. She hid herself in the kitchen all afternoon, cooking, and at dinner, she was still so busy that she did not sit down at table herself, but from time to time ran into the dining room with a large spoon in her hand and asked, ready to fly back into the kitchen, "How does it taste, Zan? Is it too salty? Did the chicken turn out the way you like it?"

In her eyes, he was the best-looking, the cleverest, in short, the best of sons, and she found him, after four years, more "distinguished looking" than before. He had the regular facial features of the Kim family, but his expressions and gestures and manner of talking were like his father's. She told Ahua that when "the men are talking," women should be out of the way. Her husband and son were discussing political affairs and she believed that it was something profound, sacrosanct, and complicated which female ears could not and should not understand.

At last, she brought the last dish to the table, and sat down on the edge of her chair with her hands upon the table, poised to go back to the kitchen again if her son found anything lacking.

Zan said, "Now you eat, too, Mother." Beads of perspiration were pouring down her cheeks, her collar was unbuttoned, and her hands still greasy from cooking.

"No, never mind about me. I cannot eat when I cook," she said, and picked up her chopsticks and heaped portions of food on her son's plate. Then she sat, taking in the sight of him, scarcely daring to impose herself upon his dinner and talk with his father.

Chuli thought that her son had "mellowed" in the four years abroad. She remembered that he used to be rather quick-tempered and impatient, which was a sign of high intelligence, she had read somewhere once. But she noticed that he had changed. He no longer said, with a frown and a flutter of the hands, "You shouldn't have tired yourself out cooking all this food which we cannot finish," but "Thank you for this delicious dinner. I

really appreciate it." He was so courteous that he was almost like a stranger. When Zan interrupted himself to say, "Why, Mother, you are not eating at all. You look tired," Chuli immediately picked up her chopsticks and obeyed his wish for her to eat.

"Yes, I'm tired," she said, breathless, and wiped her forehead with the back of her hand.

Everything came back familiarly to Zan now, and it was strange after four years. He remembered the dinners at home which were almost a ritual, and his mother's special ways, which had not changed at all, and the wine and the jokes when he and Sima were both children. The meals sometimes deteriorated into a brawl at the end, with his mother putting aside her chopsticks and using her fingers to eat the pieces of chicken or pig's knuckles, abandoning herself to her "simple joys."

"A Doctor of Philosophy!" his mother said, for the hundredth time since he came back. "Don't tell me it takes brains alone. It takes hard work and determination, too!"

"And who can claim the credit for that?" his father answered, looking at his wife fondly. It choked Sankuo to see her so happy.

"Well, I don't claim all the credit for him, but one thing I must in all fairness say. Zan got his hard-working spirit and determination from my side of the family."

Zan and his father smiled at each other, and they indulged her. Tonight Chuli was the picture of a happy woman who knew that her family would never take advantage of her simplicity, and did not mind how many times she repeated herself.

Now Chuli strained herself, giving of herself, afraid that her son might lose interest in what she had to say. But whatever she did say, anything she ever did, there was only one motive—because of her mother's heart. In the past he did not always understand. But now he seemed to. And seeing his patient interest in her, she tried to hold him with talk. She went over the important events of the four years they had not been together without chronological order and without pause between sentences. She recalled how when he left the country there was an air raid before he arrived at the airport and they had been sep-

arated and she did not know that he had flown out of the country safely until a few days later. She told him about the trips Sankuo made alone to different cities while she stayed in Chungking, and once was trapped in an air-raid shelter for two days. And she told him about herself, her rheumatism and headaches. Now when she mentioned the word "doctor" she always specified whether it was a "medical doctor" or a "doctor of philosophy." She shifted from a small choice of more literary phrases to Amoy slang and to proverbs she learned as a child. She assumed the position of a patient, long-suffering woman who had to suppress many desires in deference to the will of others. From her lips came amazing words. "Well, my position is not always easy," she said. "You know sometimes your father is not the easiest man to live with . . ." she cast him a sly glance, "and you know my nature, I have always been the quiet type, and I bring burdens and work upon myself, but that is how I was made. I am too good. The medical doctor I went to see last year said I should not tire myself out, at my age, but I cannot stop and rest when there is work waiting to be finished. . . ."

Finally and inevitably, she brought herself to the subject of Sima and Mung Kaiming, a subject she and Zan had gone over in detail three times already since he returned.

But with a smile on his lips, Zan listened as his mother went into the story once more, and asked him again the same questions to which he had supplied answers already. And he obliged again with the same answers.

"Yes," Zan said. "Sima seems changed."

Chuli listened, with round, excited eyes, as if she had not known before. "Tell me, how is she changed?"

"Well," he replied, "she does not seem to be the same person any more. When I go to see her, she seems to make an effort to find things to say to me, and after all, we played together as children. It seems strange."

"And the apartment? What kind of apartment do they live in?" Chuli demanded.

"It is very small and dark," he said, and added, anticipating

her next question, "and Kaiming doesn't seem to help her with the housework at all. Of course I saw them both very little."

"Did she never invite you?" Chuli said.

"No, never once."

"And you say that you are not good friends with him?"

"No," replied Zan, "I don't know why he gave you the impression that we were good friends. I only met him a few times when I went to the Consulate to have my passport renewed. That time I gave him the compact to give to you only because he asked whether he could do anything for me since he was going back to Shanghai."

Chuli reacted as if she were hearing all this for the first time.

Then finally she asked, "What did Sima say to you over the telephone exactly?"

"Well," said Zan carefully, "I telephoned her to say that I was leaving, and asked whether I could come around and see her or if there was anything I could do for her, and she said no."

"Didn't she invite you to supper even then?"

"No. And she hesitated somewhat over the telephone and finally said, 'Tell them at home that I am so unhappy.'"

"And you didn't ask her why?"

"No, she didn't seem to want me to."

All this time, Sankuo had listened but said nothing. Now his face darkened again as the first time when he heard his son say this.

"I cannot understand why she doesn't write," Chuli said. "Does she harbor a grudge of some sort against us?"

Abruptly, Sankuo rose from the table and left the room.

Chuli watched him go, and now she pressed her hand on Zan's sleeve and whispered, "Your father"—she almost accused Zan of the relationship, for she took the position of the neutral observer now—"your father took a very strong view about the whole matter. You know that both spiritually and financially, we were very badly hurt. Both physically and mentally we have suffered from this. You know what our financial position is. Now

I begin to suspect that we were too hasty in our judgment of Mung Kaiming. But you must not tell your father I said so. Your father is always too good, but too easy with people. He has so many good qualities. But you understand him as well as I, and well," she gave a bob of her head, "this family has never been held together by financial security, as the Kim family is. We spend . . . we spend a lot of money, but he does not understand money. He is not extravagant on himself, nothing like that . . . oh, but sometimes I don't know where I am at."

Coming home again after being away for so long, Zan found the loving solitudes of his family uncomfortable and strange. He felt touched with pity at his mother's naive conviction that the world was coming to an end because Sima was not happily married. If he had not gone away, he thought, he would not have felt this, or thought it incongruous with the outside world. Now the innocent, happy atmosphere at home seemed not like the spontaneous thing which he believed it to be as a child, but the metamorphosis of reality miraculously worked by his father's artistic imagination. For his father was a creative artist. Some time in his father's life, Zan had always known, he had been reborn into a humanitarian world. Was it perhaps an intellectual consequence of this rebirth, that his moral ideals tended toward oversimplification?

But to understand this, to suspect, to notice and recognize—surely it was not intended for him to be aware of all this!

After dinner, Zan sat in the salon alone with Ahua, who had been very quiet all evening, absorbed in her private misery.

Looking at her, he said lightly, "I hear that we've been having histrionics on account of our husband leaving on a business trip to Europe." He blew a cloud of smoke at her, and she looked up at him with a sigh. His eyes seemed all seeing, he looked at her like an object of pity. Ahua and Zan might have met as children when he went with his mother to Amoy on holidays, but she had no recollection of him.

"Don't make fun of me," she said.

"Tell me about it then," Zan said. "The object of this great adoration, what is he like?"

"Oh, Weilin?" At the mention of his name, Ahua could not help breaking into a wide smile. She took her wedding picture from the bookcase and carried it reverently in both hands to the sofa. "You can't tell much about him just by his picture," she said anxiously. "But you can't help liking him if you meet him. He has a beautiful soul."

"A what?"

"A beautiful soul," she said.

"A beautiful soul?" He began to smile.

Seeing him, Ahua snatched the picture back from his hands. Her face turned rosy with humiliation. "He really does!"

"Tell me more," he said.

"I can't if you take that attitude."

"I'm not taking any attitude," he said, looking at her with wondrous eyes.

"You shouldn't speak to me in that condescending tone of voice. I'm a married woman."

"You know what you are?"

"What am I?"

"Emotionally immature."

"Who is emotionally immature?"

"Tell me, Ahua, do you do anything with yourself besides pine for your husband?"

"I go to college when it is open," she said.

"And what do you do when you want to amuse yourself?"

"I go to the movies. I like Esther Williams."

"Oh, God."

"Well, Weilin likes her and your mother does too. And we aren't ashamed to admit it. I'll never forget the time we saw 'Bathing Beauty.' She came out of the water from a dive with her hair all nice and curly, with flowers in it and everything, instead of matted and stringy like ordinary people. Weilin and I were both thrilled. It was soul-satisfying and aesthetically beautiful. It left nothing to be desired."

"Are you in the habit of talking this way all the time, Ahua?" he said.

"What way?"

"People don't say of each other that they have beautiful souls, or that they have aesthetically beautiful experiences."

"Well, I do."

"Your conversation consists utterly of large words, and yet I don't believe you are capable of any really deep feelings," he said with a smile.

"Why, I'm capable of *very* deep feelings!" Ahua cried. She stood up angrily. "What do you mean by insulting me like this!"

She ran from the room. How I hate the conceit of him! she thought. How dare he accuse me of such things!

At last he was alone, and a pale little face with large brown eyes and straight brown hair floated before his eyes in the dark. She was wearing a navy blue suit with a white round collar, bought at Bendel's during the summer sale, and standing in that living room which was cluttered with cupboards filled with Chinese antique snuffboxes, and sofas and cushions which matched the drapery. It was twilight and under the windows cars were sliding like eels along Park Avenue. It was early summer, and the air was very dry. From downstairs in the duplex apartment came the blurred sound of her father the dentist's drill and the scent of the oil of the cloves, the flavor of the mouthwash his patients used. Everything seemed to be crying out with pain, and the dentist could not keep the scent of his trade from this part of the apartment, although he tried and his wife tried and their daughter tried.

He remembered the bitter words he flung at her out of his anguish; he had wanted to hurt her deliberately. "Yes, we all have our place in your liberal life, the snuffboxes behind the cupboards and the Ming porcelain in the foyer and me, the educated Chinese of good family at your parties, and the masses of Chinese orphans who are acceptable as objects of charity and pity in your movies. Why, you wouldn't even leave this Park Avenue to go uptown except armed with the excuse of

seeking higher education there. You wouldn't be found dead *living* on 116th Street and Broadway, so why use such a grandiose word as love when you talk about us?"

"How could you be so cruel?" said the white face with sparkling eyes. She was not even pretty, she had bad teeth and mousy-colored hair. Then she suddenly said, "It satisfies your twisted Asian ego, doesn't it, that I'm doing a Madame Butterfly in reverse, that here I am, begging for you not to leave me, and you are going away just the same. Liberal life my eye! You are taking unfair advantage of my whiteness!"

She was what they called a bluestocking, a scholar at Barnard, and she had such childish hands, with such badly trimmed nails. From downstairs the dentist plied his drill and said, "Rinse" and "Spit it out" gently.

"All right, we're even," he said. And by making it even they had engaged themselves with each other again when they had tried to do the reverse. They had both felt it like an electric shock.

"All right then, let's go," he said, and she obeyed him. They were standing in that acid little compression of air outside her apartment waiting for the elevator. Under the lights she looked ashen and small and helpless, and it was hard to believe that this mousy little creature had so much passion and was also the most intelligent girl he had ever met.

"Where are we going?" she asked.

"To my room."

"Oh, Zan, you couldn't be so cruel?"

"Don't you want to come?"

She shook the tears from her eyes.

"Then why did you let my shoulder touch your hair?"

"I didn't mean to."

"You should be more careful."

"Oh, Zan," she said. "I am so tired I haven't the strength to argue any more. When are you going?"

"Tuesday."

"Good, good," she said. "Good."

## 19

ONE morning, Bee got up before daybreak and lighted a fire in her stove. She warmed up the leftover gruel from the night before and chomped it down with the last of the pickled cabbage and the head of a salted fish. She ate standing up, watching the sun come up over Fox Head Mountain, and when it spread a gray light over the hills, she hurriedly put out the fire and rinsed her bowl and chopsticks. She had rolled her bedding up tightly, and made a bundle of her clothes and a few pieces of crockery, and now she carried these out of the hut. She came back and shut all the windows and locked the door securely behind her. With a bundle in each hand, she began to walk down Fox Head Mountain, with a frown on her thin, dark face. She had better get started before the sun grew too hot over the hills, she thought.

No, she thought, she could not live here now, with her father gone. At night it was so dark that you could not even see your own hand. She used to keep her lamp lighted for a while when her father was alive, doing a bit of sewing and weaving straw sandals after supper. Now she was just by herself and it was spooky and lonely at night. Whenever she closed her eyes she would try to imagine that those pretty lights she saw in Shanghai were before her eyes again. She had to admit that she had not thought about much else since she came back from there. She had always been crazy for pretty lights. When the Japanese soldiers came ten years ago, everyone had been afraid but she had crept out at night to see the pretty fire of cannons, flashing in the dark and lighting up the hills by sudden spurts. There were airplanes, too, and when Nanchang was bombed, she used to sit out all night, looking at the rosy and glowing sky, and she thought nothing could be prettier. She had never forgotten any part of it, and she thought she never would.

But that was a long time ago, and now what did she do with herself but think about Shanghai all the time? She drew in a deep breath and said—she had gotten the habit of speaking to herself now since her father died, “Well, here I go! Now, Bee, make sure you haven’t forgotten anything. Did you take your umbrella? You told the landlord already you were going. No, a woman cannot work on the land alone. And your money? Where’s your money?”

She laid her bundles down on the road for a moment, and making sure that no one was in sight, pulled up her short jacket and felt her money belt around her waist. She loosened the string and tied it again, making two fast knots, and then she went on her way again.

“Mung Kaiming!” she thought, shaking her head. “Have to give him credit for having a heart! Asking his friend to give me a hundred American dollars, just for nothing! To tell the truth, I have no claim over him. Isn’t he all the way the other side of the world? How was I going to catch him even if I wanted to? The money came just in time, too, when Father was so ill. Spent a small half of it buying him a decent coffin, I did! And still have a quite a bit left over.” She looked around the mountains for the last time, and sighed. “Can’t say I blame Kaiming for wanting to leave Fox Head,” she thought, “once he’s seen something better. Look at me! Well, Bee, maybe you’re crazy.”

To reassure herself, she decided to start from the very beginning and relive her trip to Shanghai this winter, from the time when her friend came over the hills calling, “Bee! I have news for you!” to how her father said she must go to Shanghai to find out if it was indeed Mung Kaiming who had gotten married again. She relived her long journey by boat and train, how frightened she had been, and the scene of her arrival in Shanghai and how she hesitated in front of the big house for a long time, trying to get up enough courage to go in. Every detail was sharp in her mind, as if she had gone only yesterday.

When she came to the part where Yuma opened the gate and asked her why she was standing there, and how she looked up and saw the kind face of the mistress of the house leaning

out of the upstairs window, Bee was really carried away. This was the part she liked best. She got herself inside that big house now and forgot that she was walking down the mountain road. Such beautiful things there were in that house! And she with her big feet stamping in! She recalled how that mistress spoke to her, what she wore, and how that Yuma hung around, listening to every word, and how she herself answered back. Then she came to the part where she was invited to sit down and eat, and how the table was spread with chicken, pork, fish, and vegetables, all cooked in such a delicate way. Her mouth watered just to think of it. How kind that lady was, not at all frightening! But then everybody in that house was kind, especially Yuma, who chatted with her in the kitchen the next day, telling her how many servants were employed in the household and everything. "It's true, the Master and Mistress of this house are kindhearted people," Yuma had said. "You won't find you are so well treated in every household, and we working people have to take what comes our way." And wasn't she right! Yuma herself was so well dressed, white cotton jacket, ironed and starched, black artificial silk trousers, with a white apron which came to the knees, and shoes and socks as clean as she ever did see. All the servants in that house had been dressed better than she, and she had been afraid that they would laugh at her, but they never did. And what did they have to eat in the kitchen!

"Well, here I go!" Bee thought, reassured. And this time when she arrived, she would not act like a clumsy melon. She would march right up to the house and knock at the gate and ask to see that old Yuma.

"Older Sister Yu!" she would say, "I have come to Shanghai to stay!" A woman like Yuma was bound to know of households where a servant was needed, where the master and mistress were kind, and not mean. She would not probably find a job right away, but there was no hurry. Didn't she have almost seventy gold dollars in her belt? The important thing was the master and mistress must be kind. Bee allowed herself to think on and on. She knew that she was floating on a cloud,

but it did no harm to wish. Three times a day, she would eat better in the city than she did at Fox Head, all the scraps of meat and fish left over from the dining room, and all the hard rice she wanted. And in the winter she would sit in a warm, dry kitchen and chat with the other servants before going to sleep. The electric lights went *click!* to go on, and *click!* to go off, just like magic. Folks always said there was a living to make in big cities. Last time the famine came, didn't those two sisters from Fox Head go to Shanghai and become servants and come home at harvest festival rich, wearing silk and with rouge on their cheeks?

She was so engrossed in her daydreams that she stumbled over a pebble on the road. This made her pluck herself out of the clouds, and she admonished herself sharply. "Serves you right!" But, *ah-yo!* she thought. Anything would be better than staying on Fox Head all by herself!

By this time, Bee had descended to the valley. She would arrive at Lake Poyang by noon, judging from the sun, and if a boat came right along, she should be in Kiukiang this time tomorrow.

When Bee came to the lake, she was feeling hungry. She took two dry wheatcakes from her bundle, and bought a large bowl of hot tea from the man who had a stall by the boat station. Her spirits were soaring. Feeling as if it were somebody's birthday or New Year's Day, she decided to buy three hard-boiled eggs as well from the man. She ate one and tucked the other two into the bundle of her clothes. She would eat them tonight, when she was on the boat. A pair of hard-boiled eggs would sit in her stomach like stones all night, and make her feel heavy and full. The thought of eating three eggs in a day when she sometimes didn't have one for months made her feel excited. "I'm on my way!" she thought to herself dangerously.

When the steamer appeared on the lake, Bee was the first one to see it. It was a beautiful sight, that steamer coming nearer and nearer. It was coming to carry her to a world of pretty lights and never-to-be-believed dreams of comfort and

ease, thanks to Mung Kaiming. She felt so happy that it was almost a sin.

She was the first one to jump on board when the steamer tied up at the station.

## 20

ON HIS way back from Nanking to Shanghai, Wong Sankuo recalled the smile on the face of the Minister of Foreign Affairs.

"Did you not have receipts when you made the payments?" he asked with polite sympathy.

"Of course I did. The receipts are in perfect order."

"But to whom were the payments made?"

"To the lawyer in Nanchang who represented her."

"You'd never met him before?"

"Of course not." Sankuo had been aware that there were insinuations behind the questions, but he did not heed them. "I cabled the lawyer and he came to Shanghai with the letters to prove it. It was a swindle. Mung Kaiming suggested the amount which should be paid for the divorce settlement, and never intended to give his first wife anything but a hundred dollars. The lawyer got fifteen per cent. He kept the rest."

The Minister of Foreign Affairs looked bland. "Naturally, Mung will have to be recalled to give an account of himself," he said. "We would do so in any case if it came to our attention through regular channels."

"I believe the man is morally unworthy of holding a post in the Foreign Service," Wong Sankuo said with indignation.

"I agree entirely," replied his friend evenly. "I shall send a cable off to New York at once."

Wong Sankuo's eyes bore the strain of the last few days. It had never occurred to him that he was not answerable for

everything that happened to his family. Before he arrived, he collected his thoughts, and prepared what he must say to them.

But when his car drew up before the house, they all came out on the steps to meet him, and Sankuo saw by their faces that they were all waiting to hear the news from him: had he really done it? Ahua and Chuli were standing together, the girl's face round, the eyes wide-awake and confused. With time, one's face changed, he thought. Things no longer shocked one so easily, one becomes no longer timid but one's voice gains in authority. One wills no more than he can perform and demands of life no more than what he can get. This was the difference between Ahua's and Chuli's faces. Zan was also standing there, waiting for him, quizzical, remote, strange.

Sankuo felt a deep sense of responsibility for them all, and he hoped that they would be reasonable with him.

Yes, life was hard! Sankuo thought. Survival itself was a struggle, and it was too bad if a person could not defend himself. But was he such an impractical idealist, who had brought his children up too soft, and to place the wrong values on things in life? He thought not!

He said curtly as he came up the steps, "It is done. The Foreign Minister sent a cable. He is being recalled. In Nanking he will have to give an account of himself and be dealt with accordingly."

"What!" cried Chuli. The accomplished fact shocked her, although they had gone over every aspect of the matter before.

With a great deal of self-control, Wong Sankuo walked into the house without saying more, and in the salon, he turned around and faced his family.

"What will happen if as a result of this we bring the man's career to ruin?" Chuli asked.

"If it is ruined the man brought it upon his own head," Sankuo replied with cold scorn. "If he is not guilty he will acquit himself in Nanking, that is all."

"And what will happen to Sima?" Chuli said.

All at once Sankuo let loose the feelings which had accumu-

lated in him. "Can you believe that Mung Kaiming can do Sima any good? Didn't she tell Zan that she was unhappy?"

His son looked at him steadily while he spoke. What was this they were doing? Something extraordinary? or something people under similar circumstances would do as a matter of course?

"What is the formal charge against Kaiming?" Zan asked.

"He is a swindler," Sankuo said. He looked at his son coldly. His son's voice was all too disinterested for him.

"Do you see, our lives are always in our hands?" Sankuo said suddenly. "Whatever happens, we impose our character on our actions and must take the responsibility for them!"

"It may not be as simple as that," Chuli said, sitting down. "When a man and a woman are married and expecting a baby, it is not easy for an outsider to know what is going on between them. We may have hurt the poor girl more than helped."

"Don't you think that I have thought about it all?" Sankuo said angrily. He was not angry at her, but at the harshness of the thing he had done.

"But what will you do when Sima comes back?" Chuli asked, as if she had not agreed to set the course of events in motion before.

"Her home is waiting for her when she comes back," Sankuo replied.

"And her husband?" Chuli said hysterically, carried away by the realization that what they had done was beyond recourse. "Are you planning to take him under your roof, too, Mr. Hao-hao?"

He whirled swiftly and stared at her with furious eyes. This he could not take from her. "And is it such a crime to believe in the goodness of man?" he asked, his face turning gray and rocklike. "That man shall not set foot in this house again if I can help it," he added, and strode from the room.

What had it cost him to make the decision to tell the Minister of Foreign Affairs, to do this thing which was so completely against his nature! She, his wife, knew all.

And yet Chuli felt so exasperated that she said something more when she knew it would have been wisest to keep quiet

at the moment. She turned to her son and said, "But don't you see, Kaiming has her wholly in his power. It will not be easy for her to find courage to set herself against her husband. You must not be surprised if she thinks him more precious than her life or honor. . . ."

"But she is unhappy!" Sankuo shouted from his study. "She is not happy with him!"

Chuli went right on. "It may be that Sima has known about this all along, and that is why she acts so strangely toward us all."

And then Sankuo did not answer back from his study.

All at once, Chuli ran into the study, and threw her arms around her husband, feeling a dreadful anguish for him who felt more deeply than most people everything about life. He had been looking out of the window, blinking back tears, and she drew him to her heart and kissed him for a long time, a kiss seasoned with the bitterness of the world they had to live in.

Chuli knew from her soul that from now on they would know no more peace. After supper she told her son and Ahua that when Sima came back, and she may be expected soon now, big with child, in no case must she find Bee at home. Things were bad enough without her sheltering the two wives of Mung Kaiming under the same roof. And when she said this, her voice was high-pitched and wild, as if nothing like this could happen if this were her own Kim family. A man like Mung Kaiming would not likely fool her father the merchant.

Sick with dislike, Chuli had Bee come in and told her that she must roll up her bedding and find somewhere else to stay. Bee listened with a dumb expression on her face. Far into the night they plotted, and finally, Yuma offered to take the woman to Zawkatu. A relative of hers owned a grain shop there, and might be willing to let her sleep in a corner of the shop until she found a job. In fact there was an employment agency just opposite the grain shop.

The small black eyes in the narrow dark face blinked. The lips curled up, revealing bad teeth.

"Oh, I must be mad!" thought Zan. "I smell cloves everywhere."

"Is your relative there now?" Chuli said, impatient.

"Oh, he is sure to be there now," Yuma said.

"Then take her, take her."

"I'll take her," Zan said softly. "I will take you to the employment agency and be your guarantor. Do you know what a guarantor is?"

"No, sir."

"That is someone who is willing to answer for you if you get into trouble with your employers," explained Yuma. "You country bumpkin, quickly thank the Young Master for being so kind." Even the old woman was losing her patience.

Bee started to make a bow, but Zan stopped her.

"Come, get your things, let's go," he said, cigarette between his lips. "You want to come along, Ahua?" he looked at her and smiled a little.

The girl had been too upset to eat supper, and was watching him with great haunted eyes. "A walk will do you good."

When Bee came back with her bundles, Zan took them from her hands and beckoned Ahua, and she came without a word.

They walked into the night together.

Bordering upon a creek, the wooden houses and sheds were crowded together and lines of washing crisscrossed and it was impossible to tell where house ended and street began. Here shops never closed and people seemed never to go to sleep. Beside a coffin shop where thick pieces of lumber were stacked on the street, there was the dark hole of a grain shop owned by Yuma's relative. A swarm of children followed the visitors to the shop and stood listening.

Zan went inside and found the old man who knew him. After a while, he came out and said to Bee, "Yu Laupan has consented to let you spread your bedding here for a few days."

He took her across the street to an open-front house where a fat woman sat in front of the door. Zan explained the situation to the woman. Everyone on the street was listening.

"What can you do?" he asked Bee softly. "Can you cook? Have you worked in a city before?"

The little black eyes were like a squirrel's. Everyone was waiting.

"No, no." Bee was ashamed.

"Can you wash and iron?"

"Well, sir, I wash, but I never ironed. In Fox Head we don't iron. I can sweep and scrub, though. I can mind babies." She looked up brightly and grinned and he saw her bad teeth again.

"Huh! Who would trust you with their darling baby!" sneered the fat woman. The scent of cloves mixed with the smell of refuse which rose from the stagnant creek, and Zan knew that he would for the rest of his life be kindly disposed to women with bad teeth.

He whispered, "Why don't you go back to the mountain? Why did you come to Shanghai?"

"I want to find work. In a big city like this there must be work for me to do, clumsy though I am."

"But if you cannot find work, will you go back to the mountain?"

Bee shook her head. "No, sir. I came to Shanghai, I want to find a job in a good household like Yuma. I can afford to wait. I have some money. I am not going back."

"Why?"

"It is lonely there."

"Do you know that in times like this it is not easy to find work, especially for someone like you?"

"I'll wait. Something will turn up. I'll come here every day and one day some lady will come in and point me out and say, 'I'll take that one.'"

"Is that what you want?"

"That is what I want."

That was her dream. Zan turned and spoke to the fat woman and told her that he was her guarantor.

"Now remember if you get into difficulties you come to me. You know where to find me."

"Yes, I know where to find you."

He pressed some money into her hands, and then left her.

Ahua followed him silently as they threaded their way through the slimy streets until they came to the creek. She said, "Zan, wait!"

He turned around and saw her round face and short hair curled softly over her forehead. He smiled. He had forgotten her.

He drew a cigarette from his pocket and lit it. The night was quiet and the air was stinking and full of mosquitoes. In the daytime the creek was like a cesspool, with everything dumped into it and vegetation growing in it, nourished from decayed rubbish.

Ahua said, "I feel worse about your parents than for Sima. They are so deeply hurt. They seem so simple."

"Yes, my mother is simple," said Zan, "but also very wise."

"And your father?"

"It is a deceptive kind of innocence which he has."

"Why is it deceptive?"

"It is an illusion made up to enable him to endure reality. For some people, life must be idealized or else they cannot go on living. To know reality is to lose the meaning of life."

"But that cannot be true! You don't mean that life is a complete disillusion?"

"My dear child, this isn't the end of the world."

"What?"

"Do you think this is all that is ever going to happen to you?" He frowned, looking at her.

"But isn't it bad enough? To think that this family has been played for fools! I cannot believe it. What is the matter with us? Is there something the matter with us? Eight thousand dollars! That is a lot of money."

"It is the price of an expensive car. But it isn't the money."

"You mean to say that what has happened doesn't matter?"

They walked on, their footsteps resonant on the pavement. They had come back to the quiet, broad boulevards.

"My dear child, do you realize that in this year of our Lord 1948, the Chinese people are in danger of being completely enslaved? That the whole of North China is in danger of being cut off completely, and that in Mukden and Changchun, the very large garrisons of our best soldiers have been rotting in idleness and on low rations for almost a year, while some of their commanding officers are flying into Tientsin with the gold meant for the defense of the cities to speculate in the market?"

"I didn't know that."

"And do you know that unless these soldiers are relieved before winter sets in, they will be completely annihilated, and then the Communist Army will be free to push down toward the Yangtze Valley? And do you know that with great hulla-baloo the Government has converted the national currency from silver into gold standard and the people are being asked to hand over all their money, while the privileged families in this country are already doing their dirty work to do the gold yuan in. . . . Have you ever thought about any of these questions, Mrs. Hsu?"

"I don't read the newspapers much," she whispered.

"Well, you should."

"Zan, where is Bonn?"

"Bonn? Why?" He stopped walking and looked at her.

"I had a letter from Weilin today, from Bonn."

He stared at her for a moment, and suddenly the scent of cloves disappeared and the bad teeth. "You mean to say you don't know where Bonn is?"

"You needn't tell me if you don't want to."

He blew a cloud of smoke into the air, and put his hands in his pockets, and laughed.

"You're so pleased with yourself, aren't you? The great Zan, never involved, always above everything."

"I know where Bonn is."

She ran. When he came up to the house she slammed the gate shut in his face, and ran inside.

He walked into the city, bewildered and melancholy. The world was gone. He felt empty and gutted inside. Four years ago when he left this country after two years of military service, he had been sure that he was competent to meet any challenge life had to offer. The world was a solid one then, words had real meaning, his ambitions were honorable and the outcome of everything was sure to be right in the end.

Now all was different. He thought of himself before as Ahua was now, knowing no more of life than the amorphous emotions which were called up by large words which she fed herself in her hunger for experience of any kind, in her yearning for a larger reality. He understood her so well, the special world brimful of meanings which she lived in, that desire for the infinite from life which he also had had. He often heard her raving and ranting in her sleep. "Weilin, *don't* go!" she cried out. But Weilin had gone.

A teaching post awaited him at Taitung University this autumn. What was he qualified to teach? he wondered with great astonishment.

## 21

THE air hung heavy in New York on a long, hot afternoon. Sima pushed up the window of her living room, and sat watching the young people play tennis on the roof of International House for a long time. "It isn't so long ago since I was slim and carefree, too," she thought, but it seemed like centuries ago. She felt as if she were sinking a little deeper every day into a miry bed of mud, something was dragging her in, until at last she would be completely submerged and no longer struggle. Already, she felt a cowl-like peace. Could anything matter

any more, except Kaiming and herself and between them, the unborn child?

She realized that her uncle had written to her in great pain, and that they all suffered much on her account at home. But strangely, she could not feel anything. "Your home will be waiting for you when you come back," her uncle said. She smiled a cold smile, cynical, like Kai's.

"How can I be so unhappy, and yet so loyal to Kai, and feel nothing for the pair of good people who brought me up?" she thought. "I have changed."

At last she was tired of looking out of the window, and walked slowly to the sofa and sat down. How slovenly she had become, she thought, and how untidy this apartment was! She used to be as neat as a pin, and scold Ahua all the time for not picking up her things. Now she had stopped picking up after Kaiming, and had become untidy herself. The corner of her mouth lifted again in a crooked little smile.

She fell asleep on the sofa, and dreamed about the days in Shanghai before they married. How happy they had been, rushing about, shopping, and having to make things ready at such short notice! They had to make the tailor hurry with her dresses and the poor fellow was in some temper!

When she opened her eyes and saw Kaiming, she opened her arms and hugged him and they remained this way for a long time, without speaking. He was not good to look upon these days, with his long hair and stubby beard and in his wrinkled suit. The white hairs which she thought were so attractive before she married had become bold strokes now across his head.

"Have you eaten?" she said softly at last. "It must be almost eight o'clock. I waited for you and then fell asleep."

They walked to the tiny kitchen, where earlier she had set out their dinner plates on the little table. She filled a glass with brandy and set it before him, and she brought the pot roast of pork to the table, and filled the bowls with rice. She was proud of her cooking, and even now hoped that he would praise it, although there was so much else on his mind.

Kaiming sat down and took a silent drink. He said, with hand over forehead, "Can you get packed in a day? We leave day after tomorrow for Shanghai."

"Day after tomorrow!" she cried. She should be used to surprises now, but she still let him frighten her.

"I booked our seats already," he said. "They lost no time in sending our passage money. We fly."

"But I thought you said that we could take our time about going back. They cannot drag you back against your wish, you said." She had formed the habit of quoting him back to answer him. She had memorized a large and elaborate network of reasons why Kaiming was so angry at her uncle: how her uncle had abused his official privilege by having him recalled, how it was that a rich and successful man like Wong Sankuo could not have any sympathy with the rest of the world who were poor. Sometimes she seethed with outrage, too, at her uncle for what he had done to them.

"Why are we going back so suddenly?" she asked, sitting down. She was careful. She had learned that with Kaiming there were always special reasons for everything.

For a long time, he drank and did not answer, and did not touch the food. But she began to eat. She had to eat, come what may, she thought blindly. She was hungry.

"You must trust me that it is for the best," he said at last.

She went right on eating. "I do trust you," she said. "But you must trust me also."

"Isn't it enough that although your uncle has done me in, I have said nothing . . . no one in the world has a hold over me now but you, Sima, yet you plague me with questions. Why, why, why!"

"If you don't tell me everything and let me find out in surprise every time, how can I help asking questions?" she said, chewing hungrily. It was all like a play, the things they said to each other, and one day she would wake up and find it never happened. "I still don't understand why you took the money that was going to that . . . other woman." She felt ashamed every time she had to bring up the other's name.

"I tell you I borrowed that money to pay back a debt here. Is it a crime to borrow money now? Do I deserve to be pulled down like this? Your uncle has destroyed me," he said.

She looked up at him. "But what debt is this?" she asked, her voice clipped and even. "Is this still another debt that you have not mentioned?"

"Of course it is 'still another debt,'" he snapped.

Her heart stood still. "You mean that you owed more than the four thousand you told us about when we married?"

"I owed more than four thousand," he said.

"But if you needed money so urgently, why didn't you tell me?" she inquired, swallowing. "Openly and honestly."

Kaiming smiled sarcastically. "What could you have done? A lot of good it does to sound so righteous. If I had been so open and honest as you want you might like it even better now, with your husband in jail!"

Sima felt herself sinking and sinking. "In jail?" she whispered. "For what?"

"For not living up to my part of a contract I signed with a credit company," he replied contritely. "Before I married you, I borrowed money from a finance company and agreed to pay them back by installments plus interest. When I fell back in the payments they had two alternatives—to go to the Consulate and hold back my salary or get a court injunction and . . ."

"But how did you get in so much debt?" she cut in whitely. "What did you need to borrow so much money for? How much did you owe altogether anyway?"

"What did you need to borrow so much money for?" he mocked her, and got up and walked back to the sitting room and lit a cigarette. "What a good question! What a prize question!"

She came to the door, and stood there, watching him.

He looked at her coldly. He should be used to it now, and yet he still found it hard to believe that a person should care so much for him.

"Damn it! Why do you think?" he cried. "Do you think I enjoy being in debt? What did I borrow money for except in

the hope that I would make some money with it? Do you think that I don't want the same things other men want in life? Do you think I like to see you suffer? Oh, yes, use all the high-sounding words you like, be idealistic and deceive yourself! Or are you too stupid to see that without money, a man doesn't have a chance in this world?"

Yes, scold me! Sima thought. It is better than being sarcastic. She did not mind being called stupid. She sat down beside him, unseeing and dry-eyed. She did not understand what he was talking about, but sometimes it was better not to understand.

"Just after the war was over they needed everything in China," he said more softly, and took her hand, and stroked it and stroked it. "They wanted everything, old clothes, shoes, any kind of mass-produced goods which could be shipped over. A friend and I borrowed some money and bought a lot of junk, substandard stuff, war surplus, rejects which had been sitting in warehouses for years, things like that. We were going to make several hundred per cent profit. It was a sure thing. It would have set me up once and for all. Well, I never saw a cent of the returns. This so-called friend skipped out and left me to face the creditors. I got in deeper and deeper. There is no equality in this world, Sima, a man cannot even borrow money without being exploited, in a society which is built upon safeguarding the interests of the capitalists."

"Well, you could have told me all that," she said. Her voice sounded strange and unreal. "You could have told my family all that, even."

"Hell!" he said.

She could not answer him. She felt safer when he was angry, and although he did not make sense, somehow it was better that he did not make sense. It was all part of a dream they two lived in, which had nothing to do with anything else in the world.

"And now why are we leaving in such a hurry?" she said at last.

"I give you three guesses."

She snatched back her hand. "How much do you still owe?"

"You're getting quick-witted, my girl," he said with a slick smile.

"I am learning," she said, and got up, feeling sick suddenly.

Sometimes she could not bear to be in the same room with him. And yet when he was not there, she was like a sick animal, dreading every moment until he came back. Were they not joined in every way, so that what he suffered she must pay for, and whatever he did, she was to blame too? So why judge him and make herself ill?

Kaiming sat on the sofa and did not move. After awhile, she heard him call her. "Sima? Sima?" He sounded like a child, and she could not help answering. "Here I am," she said.

Then Kaiming came, and stood at the door of the kitchen. He saw her, weeping into her hands near the window. City lights were blinking softly in the distance and a strange, disturbing feeling swept over him all at once, weakening and threatening.

"What are you doing in the dark?" he said gently, and went to her and took her in his arms. He shut his eyes and kissed her on the head. "Sima," he whispered. "Forget everything except this, that you and I belong together and that is all that matters. Do you understand? Now do you understand how it feels to be pushed into a corner? Yes?"

She sobbed softly in his arms.

"This is not much like what you expected married life to be," he said, "is it? But I promise you, if I have hurt you before, I will never intentionally hurt you again, Sima." He could scarcely understand himself, but he felt a strange upheaval inside.

For a long time now, she had not let him touch her, but tonight she could withhold nothing from him, it was as if they had nothing left if not each other.

She lay most of the night semiconscious, scarcely knowing what he was doing to her. Finally day broke, and she turned over and tried to wake him. He was sleeping soundly, and she watched him, wondering how a man with so much on his mind could still sleep and snore like this.

Gently, she touched his face and whispered to him. He grunted. "What is the matter? Why did you wake me?"

He would have her lie down again and sleep some more with him, but she had to remind him that there was much to do. And then he got up, and this morning, she succeeded in persuading him to put on a fresh white shirt. While he was dressing, she threw a robe over herself and went to the kitchen to make his breakfast.

He came in soon, looking fresh today, and good-looking. He sat down and waited for his breakfast, and each time she carried the food to the table, he tried to grab her and make her sit on his lap.

"What a good little housewife you are!" he laughed roguishly.

"And indeed I need to be," she replied evenly.

At last he ate and went out, and she crept back into bed and pulled the covers up over head and lay there all morning, afraid to get up lest the child drop from her. Maybe after she gave birth to the baby, she thought, he would love her as much as she loved him.

## 22

WHEN Sima saw the China Sea glimmering in the sunlight from the airplane a few days later, she sucked in a long breath to steady herself. It struck her deeply that she had left this city as a bride, with a dozen people to see her off, and now had to sneak back like this, not much later, like a thief.

At the airport there were two men to meet them, friends of Kaiming's, whom she disliked on sight. They seemed like hooligans, unkempt and seedy, and looked at her with open curiosity. But when Kaiming saw them all three seemed to go crazy with joy, laughing and shouting. She stood a little to one side, and tried to put a smile on her face.

It was strange, she thought, she had not minded leaving her family to go abroad, but arriving in the city and not letting them know that she was back took more courage. All she belonged to once she must part with from now on, and throw in her lot with Kaiming.

As for what was going to happen, Kaiming had said repeatedly, "You must trust me, don't worry," and so she should. He had found a place for them to stay, with these friends of his, of whom she had never heard mention before.

She ached for a rest, for a bath, and a clean bed to sleep in. She felt dizzy and woolly, she had not slept or eaten well at all during the long flight.

The taxi was carrying them to a part of the city way across the other side from where her uncle's house was, in the old Japanese Concession. The streets were crowded with dilapidated houses and small, cheap shops. Finally, the car stopped in front of a cement-paved alley, with rows of narrow brick houses on either side. Children were playing and women were washing clothes in the crowded alley, and lines of clothes crisscrossed on the roof tops.

Kaiming's friends turned into a house, and Sima followed. There was a long, narrow room with a few pieces of living-room furniture, but everything was topsy-turvy; men's shoes lay upturned under the sofa and there were piles of newspaper everywhere. The table, which she took to be the dining table, was piled high with magazines and empty bottles and cigarette boxes and several bowls in which there had been food. It was a comfortable enough room, she saw, if it was tidied up, and behind must be the kitchen.

The three men set down her suitcases—her trunks were coming by steamer—and sat down to talk. Kaiming seemed genuinely happy to be with his friends, and she saw that the little lines of worry had disappeared from his face. He was talking now, gay and carefree, and she told herself that she must leave everything in his hands.

After awhile, she went behind the sitting room and groped upstairs. On the landing at the stairwell, there was a door and

she opened it and saw a small room strewn with men's clothing. She went on up to the second floor, and here, there were two rooms and a bathroom leading from the corridor. One of the rooms was again strewn with men's things, but the other room seemed to have been made ready for them. There were a bed, a wardrobe, and a chest, and the room seemed clean enough, although it was bare-looking.

She sank down upon the bed with a sigh. But as soon as she put her head on the pillow, a stagnant smell rose to her nostrils. She lifted the faded rayon spread—that had to be washed, she saw at once—and underneath there was the rotting carcass of a mattress which exuded the stale, sick smell. She sat upright, and stared stonily about the room. She saw a cockroach creep out of a crack in the wardrobe, and all of a sudden, a dull, numb spot of anger formed in her breast. How could Kaiming bring me to a place like this, and yet be so gay, laughing and talking with those friends of his downstairs as if he hadn't a care in the world? From the glimpse she had of the bathroom, she had seen already that the basin was black and the floor was spread with newspaper and it stank of urine. She got up and opened the wardrobe and the drawers in the chest. Everything gave off a moldy smell—she did not like to think how long it was since this place had been given a good scrub. Now she saw that things were going to be much harder than she had imagined. This place was good for a brief stay only.

While she stood there thinking, the men came upstairs.

"You look so tired, Sima, are you feeling well?" Kaiming said, his face still flushed from the excitement of meeting his friends.

"I am all right," she said, for the strangers were standing a little behind Kaiming, listening. "I expect I'll feel better after I have had a rest."

"This house is nothing like the Minister's house you lived in," one of the young men said with a grin. "No doubt you were looking for the comforts you are used to in a rich man's house!"

She looked up, her eyes dry and hot. "You are quite right,"

she said evenly, "that's exactly what I was looking for." She did not like the way the young man looked at her, and least of all, that he should interfere when she and Kaiming were talking.

"Lie down for awhile, then," said Kaiming. "Do you want to eat? Are you hungry?"

She shook her head.

"Then have a rest," he said. "We are going out to lunch."

"All right," she said, and the three trooped downstairs. "Only carry up the suitcases before you go."

They did not hear her. She was suddenly alone in this strange house. A thought flashed across her mind: was she going to share the bathroom with those two seedy-looking men?

Finally, she lay down again, in spite of the stinking mattress, and fell asleep.

When she woke up, she did not know what hour it was. She felt faint and groggy and remembered that she had not eaten that day. Kaiming was back now—she could hear him talking downstairs, and she called him. But he did not hear her, and so she got up, and went downstairs. All three stared up at her when she came in, as if she were interrupting their conversation.

"We brought you back some noodles," said Kaiming.

She went to the kitchen and found a bowl of soup noodles with a pork chop on top, half of it consisting of gray fat. The sight of it made her stomach flip over. She lifted the pork chop from the bowl and took a sip of soup. It was cold and tasteless, with more soy sauce in it than anything, and she put the bowl down again. There was a brick stove in the kitchen, choked full of rubbish; it did not appear as if the men did any cooking at all. What ever would she do after the baby was born? A baby needed to have warm food and hot water and clean bedding.

The first thing she did the next mornig when she woke up from an exhausted sleep was to go out and buy a small electric stove, which she plugged into the socket in her room. "Now I can boil water and make tea, and even cook a little something without having to go out and eat," she thought. She had bought a saucepan too, and some rice and eggs and salt. As she worked, Kaiming and his friends' voices drifted upstairs. They were in

such high spirits downstairs, talking about the Government officials and how one day these people would go and men like themselves, sons of poor families, would have things their way. That will be the day! she thought. Yes, they were making grand plans downstairs.

Tears spurted to her eyes suddenly. Mung Kaiming, think of your wife and unborn child first! What do I care who runs the country!

From then on, the three men were inseparable, and Sima hardly had a chance to be alone with Kaiming any more. Neither of the other two seemed to have to go to work anywhere, and the three went everywhere together.

But one day, she could not control herself any longer, and blurted out in front of his friends, "Kaiming, when are you going to Nanking?"

"When am I going to Nanking?" Kaiming said with great surprise. The friends looked at her, and all three burst out laughing as if she had asked a very foolish question.

Sima was angry. "Aren't you supposed to go and report to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs?" she pursued in spite of their laughter.

"What for?" Kaiming said. "The Ministry of Foreign Affairs will be coming to report to me fairly soon!"

She went upstairs. So he wasn't going to Nanking. What were they going to do, then? No, she was not going to ask him. If he was so blind that he could not see that she was going to give birth to his child soon, and needed to have a clean place to live in, why tell him? And why worry? In any case, she had paid with her soul already to be loyal to him. What difference could it make any more what they did from now on? If she had lost her wits, good and well.

But soon Kaiming came tramping up the stairs. "What is the matter?" he said, standing at the door.

"The baby is due soon," she said.

"Don't worry," he said. "You aren't the first woman ever to give birth to a child."

They stared at each other uncertainly, and Sima saw that in spite of his high spirits and loud talk, he knew as little as she did what was going to happen to them next. Her heart beat dully within her. Any time at all, she could walk out and go to her aunt's house and put an end to much of her suffering. But she remained where she was as if rooted.

## 23

AT LAST they got a midwife for her.

Sima woke up in the middle of the night, and shook Kaiming awake. Then he went and woke up his friends, and the three dashed out together and came back an hour later with a stern-looking woman who wore a white coat and carried a bag. She looked competent enough, and Sima felt relieved. "Here is a woman," she thought. "How I have longed to have a woman to talk to!" She remembered that in Amoy, most of the women had their babies at home, too, but then there were always so many of the family around who knew what to do. They made the baby's clothes from the clothing of bigger children, which had been washed many times and so would not chafe a baby's skin . . . but it did not seem as if she were really going to have a baby. Perhaps she was carrying a stone in her belly, and the sooner she got rid of it, the better.

The sheets smelled musky, and the room was filthy. The midwife looked at the girl who lay writhing on the moldy bed, her clothes sweat-drenched, and she thought, "This must be some illegitimate baby I am bringing into the world. Nothing has been made ready for it," and felt very little sympathy for her.

Kaiming sat down on the sofa downstairs, and did not stir for a long time. The sky grew gray, and nothing could be heard from upstairs. What a time this was to become a father! he thought. Everything seemed hopeless to him all of a sudden. He could no longer fool himself, he thought. What am I going to do now?

They had been back three weeks, and he was convinced that he was right in not going to Nanking to report. If there was the slightest chance that somehow he could square himself with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, he would do it, no matter how humiliating it might be, for Sima's sake. How hard he had worked to gain a toe hold in the official circle! If somehow he could turn what had happened to his advantage, then he might even throw himself over to the Left. He had nothing to lose. His friends talked big and intimated to him that they had connections with the right people, but he doubted very much whether it was true. He knew very well that they were playing up to him because they hoped that he would open up some opportunity for them. To be involved, even in something so unpleasant as his situation, was better than not being involved at all. He understood his friends, and he did not dislike them. This was the way it was with them all. They might talk politics a great deal, but they were too worldly-wise to deceive themselves. If the Leftists should come to power one day, how could they behave any different from the Kuomintang officials? Love of power, corruption, greed, the order of the world would not change. Only it felt good sometimes to talk big and imagine that things could be different.

"Ah, I should never have gotten myself tangled up with Sima," he thought. "But how was I to know that things would turn out this way? I suppose people like me should never marry in the first place."

He covered his face with his hands. Poor thing, he thought. Why did she have to pick on me to marry?

After some time, he heard a door open upstairs and someone calling him. He crept on tiptoes up the stairs. The door was open a crack, and two sharp eyes were staring at him in the darkness.

"Fetch me some towels or sheets!" the midwife said, in a very bad temper.

He went to the bathroom and brought her a sour-looking face cloth, stiff and yellow. She threw it down and said, "Ack! Not this! I have never seen such a filthy house!"

"There are no others," he said.

"Then go out and buy some!" the midwife said angrily.

The warm, sick smell of the room rushed at his nostrils. Behind the midwife he saw his wife lying in bed, silent and with terrified eyes. Every trace of sweetness and youth had gone from her face. She had become ugly, like all the ugly people he knew, and like himself.

"Go on! What are you waiting for?" the midwife said and slammed the door.

He ran downstairs and dashed into the street.

About half an hour later, he came back with a large bundle under his arms, and crept upstairs with it. The midwife took the parcel and gave him a scornful look, and he went downstairs again and sank down on the sofa and lit a cigarette. His friends had bought breakfast and were slurping their congee at the table. From upstairs, wild, savage screams began to come.

All at once, Kaiming wished his friends to be gone. He did not want them to be there, listening. After breakfast, his friends dressed and went out, and he lay still on the sofa, feeling sick and frightened. What was life and death? When his parents died when he was a small boy, he had not even shed a tear. Why then should he feel this way now about Sima? The pressure of everything seemed almost too much for him to bear. He thought of going out and not coming back until it should be all over, but he did not. "Oh, Sima, don't let anything happen to you!" he prayed.

At dusk the midwife came downstairs and said with a pinched face, "It is all over. She has given you a daughter."

He could not believe his ears. He had been half-preparing for her to die. He rushed up to her room and with trembling hands, pushed open the door. Sima was lying with eyes closed. Her hair was drenched with sweat and matted on her head, and she looked more peaceful than this morning. He tiptoed to her bedside and bent over and looked at her closely. He wiped a little slime from the corners of her nose, and called her. But she was sleeping heavily, and did not awake.

Then he saw his baby lying in a bundle beside his wife. He

picked it up carefully and took it to the window. The baby was also asleep, its dark face tilted to one side, and even purring a little, like a kitten. He felt a soreness in his throat. When he sat down at last beside the bed, he began to sob. The tears rushed at him like a tide. Then he broke off abruptly, feeling ashamed of himself. Now it seemed absurd to have been so worried about her. He gathered the bloody towels which were lying on the floor and threw them into the bathtub and went downstairs again and sat down. His friends had not come back yet. He gathered up some of the dishes lying on the table and carried them to the kitchen, and emptied the ash trays. Then he came back and sat down and did not know what else to do. Nothing had changed. All his troubles came back to him, clearer than ever. And now there was the baby, too, he thought.

Then his friends came back, and when they heard the news, they insisted that he must treat them to dinner and a bottle of wine. Greatly cheered, he ran upstairs again to look at his wife, and found her still sleeping, so he came down and went out with his friends.

When Sima woke up, the room was dark, and for a moment she did not know where she was. It felt as if she had gone on a long voyage and just come back. She noticed a baby lying beside her, but she was not curious about it and did not pay any attention to it. Everything was very quiet and very dark and she was not sure what had happened. She called, "Kaiming!" many times, but she seemed to be all alone in the house.

So she lay on her bed very still, moistening her lips with her tongue, and listening to the footsteps outside. She wondered what time it was, and when Kaiming and his friends would come back. It seemed as if she had been drained of emotion as well as physical strength, and so she was not even angry that Kaiming was not there. She did not feel anything at all.

It must have been two hours later when she heard the men come back. They seemed to be in high spirits and trooped up the stairs and into the room. The two men had bought presents

for the baby, a pair of satin shoes and a soft bonnet with a cluster of ribbons on top. They gave these to her and she thanked them for being so thoughtful.

Then Kaiming came to the side of the bed, holding something behind his back. Sima looked at him in the light of the lamp. It seemed as if she were seeing him for the first time. His face was ravaged and claylike, and his hair was so long, and his clothes so untidy. A dreadful pity moved her heart.

"I have something for you," he said.

She looked at him passionlessly. "What is it?"

He produced from his back an expensive-looking camera. She looked at it bloodlessly for a moment, and a great feeling of soreness came over her.

"Great use I have for a camera!" she said after a moment, and finally, she turned her face to the wall, and the tears came out. "Why? Why am I like this?" she thought.

Kaiming stood watching helplessly. "Well, I'm going to take pictures of our daughter," he said.

She was shaking so hard that she could not answer him, and she would not turn her head back to look at him.

## 24

SIMA thought that it was strange. She had not been afraid before the baby was born, but now that the worst was over, she felt terrified at what she had gone through. Try though she did, she could not summon again her old courage. It was as if she could think and see again after the baby was born. Although Kaiming was now often by her side, helpful and attentive, she was not satisfied, as once she would have been. Lying in bed, feeling so weak that she could not even pry herself from her mattress, she wondered that she had loved with such wild passion only a little while ago. She wondered at herself for allowing Kaiming to bring her to these surroundings, and for turning her

back to her family, who must be very anxious about her whereabouts now. She could not even feel angry any more with Kaiming, it was as though she were no longer capable of emotion, and she was frightened.

One morning, Kaiming was standing by the window, playing with the new camera. The sun streaming in through the dirty glass struck his face and she looked at him for a long time without his knowing it, and she saw him with all his faults as well as his good qualities. He was closer to forty than thirty, this husband of hers, and where did he stand in the eyes of other men? What were they doing here with these two young men, who had no jobs, and seemed like no more than hoodlums? A great wave of pity brought tears to her eyes. All Kaiming had done in life he did because he wanted to live the same life as other people. Why did he have to struggle so hard when some people did not have to struggle much at all? Why were they so unlucky?

Finally, she said, "Kaiming, would you mind very much if we sent word to my sister, to tell her that I am back and have had a baby . . . I know they must all be anxious for what has become of me."

He looked up quickly, and to her surprise, said agreeably, "Why, no, I don't mind."

"I thought you were dead set against my family," she said sullenly.

"Why should I be?" he said with his usual surly smile. "I feel sorry for the Wongs. Wong Sankuo's days as Minister are numbered, you may be sure," he added, shaking his finger at her.

She made no reply to this. It was better not to antagonize him. "Then will you send word to say that I have longed every day to see them, and tell them to forgive me?" Tears started in her eyes.

"I'll go myself," Kaiming said, and he put the camera down. His face became serious and set. "I've always wanted to see what the inside of Hsu Paofung's estate is like."

Sima gasped. What idea had entered his mind now? His mind seemed to work on a different level from other people's minds,

and she could never be sure what he was thinking and how he reasoned. But it was clear that she had planted an idea in Kaiming's mind, and she was sorry and afraid.

"No, Ahua is living at home!" she cried out sharply.

"Well, then, I'll send one of my friends," he said and shrugged, and he saw her heave a sigh of relief. "What are you looking at me like that for, Sima?" he said and left the room without waiting for a reply.

Kaiming's friend Li Huan was received by the Wong family like a long-lost friend as soon as he gave his message, and was pulled inside into the salon.

"We have been going crazy with worry!" Chuli cried. "We cabled to New York and were told that they had left. We inquired everywhere. And now you say that Sima has been here in Shanghai all this time and has given birth to a baby? Can it be true?"

"She sent me to say to her sister that she would like to see her," Li Huan said, somewhat intimidated by the presence of the Minister of Education, who was looking at him steadily.

"Ahua is at school," Chuli cried. "But you must wait and when she comes back we will go with you."

And then she wanted him to tell her everything, but Li Huan was careful, and did not give much information. After a while, Chuli got up and went to the kitchen to make soup. Soup, good, nourishing soup a nursing mother must have, and there was time to make it before Ahua came back. Her pulse was racing. She was tense and confused.

She was standing at the doorstep with a thermos of chicken soup and a basket of fruit when Ahua came up to the house.

"Get into the car," she said. "We are going to see Sima." She turned to Li Huan. "Take me to her!" she commanded.

Wong Sankuo stood at the door. He did not like the looks of this young fellow at all, nor did he like the idea of Chuli and Ahua going off with him by themselves. But Zan was not at home, and he would not go with them. If he was to meet Mung Kaiming again face to face, it must be at a place he chose and

under different circumstances. He had noticed that the young man had said Sima asked for Ahua only, and not the rest of them. But he knew that Chuli could not be stopped now.

Chuli's eyes grew wider and wider as the car carried them all the way across the city and far into the desolate quarters. So this is the sort of place! Imagine Sima! Imagine this! Suspicion and dread mounted in her.

Finally, the car stopped, and she followed the young man into the alley, and saw Mung Kaiming standing at the door. Mung Kaiming, I have accounts to settle with you, but not here and now! she thought, and told herself to be calm.

Kaiming towered over her as she came up and said, with a polite enough smile, "Come in."

"Where is Sima?" she demanded.

He stepped inside, and pointed upstairs. Chuli brushed past him and Ahua followed, pale and silent. Chuli had already seen all. Dust lay in balls on the floors of this house. Things were strewn everywhere. She almost stumbled on the dark stairs, and when she went past the bathroom, she smelled a nauseating odor. Finally, she opened the door of Sima's room.

The girl was propped up in bed, wearing some sort of gray shirt. All the features of her face seemed smaller, buried in puffy, unnatural-looking cheeks, and her hair was bunched out in all directions. Her eyes seemed to have grown darker and older, and her color was not good.

Chuli's heart was sore.

"You are a plucky girl, Sima," she said as she came in, "coming back and having your baby without letting us know!"

Sima was unable to speak. Her aunt and sister seemed to come from another world, in their fine clothes and with such shocked expressions on their faces. What was there to be shocked about? she thought. What did they know of what she went through? She wondered that once she had been so close to them.

"How could you not have let us know?" Chuli went on. "Supposing something had happened to you? We were nearly crazy with worry, not knowing where you were!" She set the thermos of chicken soup and the basket of fruit on the table, and pulled

a chair to the side of the bed. "We were waiting for you, everything was ready for your confinement . . ."

Everything Kaiming ever said about her family came back to Sima now. It was true, they had no idea what other people must suffer, she thought.

"Did you expect me to come without Kaiming?" Sima cut in. The words flew from her lips before she knew it. "Did you think that I could stop loving him as soon as you had turned your backs on him? I cannot marry and unmarry just like that."

Chuli was stunned. "I know you have had much to strive against these last few months," she said, "but you must know that your uncle and I did nothing if not for your sake."

"Then how could you do this to Kaiming?" Sima said with a shaking voice, and looked at her aunt with great eyes. "Couldn't you see that whatever he did, there must have been a good reason? Could you not have written and asked, instead of using your influence and having him recalled?"

Chuli stiffened with surprise and chagrin. She had rushed here, all pity, ready to shower her affection and sympathy upon her. She had not expected to be lectured.

At last she said coldly, matching pride with pride, "If we did what we did, it was no more than what your husband deserves. Surely you see that, or have you lost your wits completely, Sima?"

Sima's lips began to quiver. Still, she said in a haughty, indifferent voice. "You were the ones who married him to me."

"Well, you must remember, Sima," Chuli answered slowly, "no one forced him on you."

"No, no one forced him on me," said the girl, "from the moment I met Kaiming, he was dearer to me than everything on earth, and so he still is."

Chuli stared back at the burning eyes. "You must realize that it was not easy for us," she said coldly. "Yet this was the only course we could take." She bit her lip. "Defend your husband, will you? Then I must defend mine."

Sima burst out wildly, "Then you overlooked me, Aunt! You overlooked what you would do to me!" Angry red patches came over her pasty cheeks.

Chuli was stunned. She sat speechless, cold with rage, and stared scornfully at her niece, who did not speak again. Have I come all this way to be scolded by you, Sima? she thought.

The silence was broken only when Ahua spoke. "Did you have a bad time with the baby?" she said in a timid voice.

"Kaiming got a midwife for me," Sima replied curtly.

Chuli's eyes moved toward the baby which lay on the bed.

"Well, you should get a crib for her," she said. "It is not good for either of you to sleep in the same bed." She could not help herself. The car was waiting outside to take them home.

"Well, not every baby needs a crib," said Sima, and her face was pale, and green-streaked with emotion.

Chuli's eyes grew large. This is not Sima speaking, surely. This is not the Sima who is so thoughtful and good.

"Oh?" said Chuli after a moment. "I did not realize that we offended you so much when we put you in your crib as a child." This was crazy. This could not be happening.

Sima bit her lips. "I have said much already which I don't mean," she thought. "Why am I like this? Why have I no feeling any more for this woman who has been like a mother to me?"

"Well, let us have a look at this baby who does not need a crib, then," said Chuli after a long while. Twice already, she and Ahua had spoken to break the awful silence, while this girl, who was so sick, and who needed so much help, remained as silent as stone. Ah! how have you the heart to do this to me, Sima! Chuli cried silently. But I am older, I haven't the heart to do this to you.

Sima then gave the baby to her, pride shining in her eyes, and the moment Chuli felt the warm bundle in her arms, her tears came, hot and quick.

"Oh, my goodness!" she cried, "this is no way to swaddle a baby, for heaven's sake!" She loosened the blanket and found that the baby was lying on a mess of diarrhea, and that her skin was sore and red. Before she knew it, she was ripping the baby's diaper from under her, and grabbing a towel from the bed and cleaning her up and wrapping her up tightly and

properly again, the Amoy way. Then she held it close to her face and rocked it, tears rolling down her face. "Poor little thing! Poor little smelly thing! How long have you had this diarrhea? Your mother probably hasn't been feeding you properly. Does she give you enough milk, poor thing?"

"I have some milk," Sima said, watching. Now she spoke softly. "But not enough. She has been taking congee, too, which Kaiming brings back for her."

Chuli raised her flushed, wet face. "What?" she cried angrily. "You have been giving this baby of a few days congee bought from the street? Oh, my poor little thing! No wonder your poor tummy is running. Your mother has really lost her wits, I believe! She is so completely bewitched by your father she doesn't know what is right or wrong any more. Now I don't mind her being rude to me, and scolding me, for I am an old woman now and she has no more use for me. But she should treat you better, you poor little thing. I didn't know that I loved a child with such a hard heart, who used to be so tender and good to me. . . ."

"Oh, Aunt!" Sima cried at last.

Chuli looked up with questioning eyes.

"Oh, Aunt, please tell me what to do," Sima was begging at last. "The baby cries and cries."

"Of course she cries and cries," Chuli snapped. "You haven't been taking proper care of her. Don't you know that a tender life like this is like a blossom in the wind, you have to be gentle and good to it. . . . Even if you had lost all your wits, Sima, and ceased to care any more for any of us, at least you should be fair to your own child. . . ."

Now Sima burst into tears. Her whole body began to shake. Ahua, standing at the foot of the bed, gazed with very round eyes at her, as if she could not believe that this was happening.

Chuli went on scolding. "If you don't have enough milk, can't you buy milk powder and mix it for the baby? And if you want to give her congee, can't you make a little thin rice soup in your kitchen, instead of buying it from the street? You

don't know who or what has been in the food bought from the street."

Sima gave way completely. "I'm not able to get up. I feel groggy when I try. . . ."

"What is that husband of yours good for, then?" Chuli cried.

"The stove downstairs is all stopped up," Sima said, almost choking. "I used to cook a little on that stove there."

"That little stove? How can anyone cook on that toy?" Chuli put the baby down and got up. "Well, I'll go downstairs and see whether the stove is stopped up or not. For the baby's sake, not yours." Chuli could not look at the girl cry any more. She could not sit in the room another moment. "There's soup in that thermos for you, Sima," she said unwillingly. "Pour a cup for your sister, Ahua. I bet it's the first decent food you'll have tasted in a long time, huh?"

When she came downstairs, she walked right into Kaiming in the dark hallway, and she said, shaking her finger at him, "I am angry! I wasn't going to speak to you, Mung So-and-So, but for the sake of that sick baby upstairs, I cannot keep quiet. Are you all out of your minds in this house? God have mercy on your soul, Mung Kaiming, if anything happens to that baby!"

Kaiming merely looked at her.

"Where is this stove which is all stopped up?" Chuli demanded. Her heart was beating fast. "Give me some newspaper and a basin. I'll show you whether it is stopped up!"

Blinded by tears, she walked to the kitchen. Her heart was thumping so loudly that she did not know what she was doing. She picked up a stick and started to dig at the rubbish in the choked-up stove. She worked blindly and with great fury. She had come, ready to forget the past, the car was waiting outside. What was she going to tell Sankuo?

The men had come to the kitchen and were watching her.

"Mind you don't get your hands dirty," one of the young men said with a smile on his face.

"I am not afraid of getting them dirty!" Chuli cried furiously,

and tears steamed her spectacles and she cut herself on the hand.

Sima continued to cry for a long time after Chuli went. Ahua sat down beside the bed and watched her sister, alarmed and afraid and not knowing what to say. Then quite abruptly, as if it had just occurred to her, Sima stopped crying and said, in an almost normal voice, "This is the first time we've seen each other since you were married, Ahua. Let me look at you."

Ahua met her sister's eyes.

"Imagine," Sima said, "you're a married woman now, and I'm a mother. You've grown so pretty. What is Weilin like?"

"He's just like me," Ahua said miserably.

"And do you love him the way I love Kai?" Sima asked tenderly.

"Why, I love Weilin with all my heart!" Ahua said.

But her sister seemed incapable of believing that anyone could love a man as deeply as she loved Kaiming, and she smiled the smile of someone who knew better. It was a smile which Ahua recognized, and she thought, "How strange it is that people never change. They may go through great experiences and yet it never makes them wiser or greater."

"Did it hurt a lot when you had the baby, Sima?" she asked again.

"It did," Sima said, and now her face was turned in, the way it was when she was pleased with herself sometimes. "How I perspired!"

"You need a bath," Ahua said. "You smell."

Then Sima looked at her quickly, almost as if she pitied her, and said, "I've been dying for a bath. But I can't even get up. I feel so weak."

"Do you want me to give you a sponge bath?" Ahua said.

"Oh, would you? We can heat up a little water on the stove!" Sima said, and now she was almost as she was before.

Ahua locked the door, and put the kettle on the stove. When she carried the basin to the bed, her sister had taken off her clothes. Ahua gasped at the sight of her body. The breasts

were covered with fine networks of blue veins and the skin of her belly was wrinkled and the navel caved in like an old man's toothless mouth. Shiny lesions of the muscles under the skin shone like silver leeches on the sides of her thighs.

Tears spurted from Ahua's eyes. "I'll be very careful. I won't hurt you," she said.

"I'm still bleeding," Sima said, with the same proud expression on her face Ahua had seen. "The midwife had to take seven stitches."

"You're very brave, Sima," Ahua said sadly. To herself, she thought, "How she must have suffered, while I have suffered nothing compared to her!" She felt her sister's eyes watching her all the while she sponged her body up and down, and it was as if Sima were exhibiting herself to her in all her foolish ignorance, and yet it was she, Ahua, who felt ignorant and intimidated.

When Chuli came back she found the door locked. She rattled and rattled it.

"Wait a minute, Aunt," Ahua said.

Chuli was blind with fury. "So the sisters have locked me out!" she thought. She spun around and went downstairs, stumbling as she went, and without thinking, marched out of the house and into the car without waiting for Ahua. Her cheeks were burning. She could hardly see for her tears.

When she arrived at home Zan had returned. "Where's Ahua?" he cried.

"Why, she's still there, I suppose," she said, angry and confused.

"What! . . ." Sankuo began, and then saw her face. Without waiting to hear what had happened, Zan dashed out and told the chauffeur to take him to where he had just come from.

It was a long while before Chuli could speak. And after she told him, Sankuo said thickly, "Did she not once ask for me?"

"I tell you she is completely bewitched by him. Her heart has turned so cold."

"And the baby?" he pursued. "What is she like?"

"The baby has diarrhea. She has been giving her congee bought from street vendors, Sankuo. Sima's face was puffed out, like this, and pasty." Her hand closed over Sankuo's, cold with dread.

"But doesn't she understand that what we did was for her sake?" he said again. It was not like him to repeat himself.

"I had better not tell you what she said, you would be too angry," Chuli replied.

And then she sank into a stupor, and was too exhausted to say any more. Sankuo stroked her cut hand gently. Poor simple-minded soul! Cleaning out that scoundrel's stove and cutting herself!

Sankuo had the feeling that he was trapped. How was it that he seemed to have imprisoned himself by his action this time, when in every crisis he had turned it into his own by imposing his character upon his actions?

"Oh, Zan!" Ahua cried, when she saw him get out of the car at the mouth of the alley. She was just wondering how to get home. She ran to him and grasped his hands. "Oh, Zan! You should have seen her! She was so pitiful! She has bruises all over her body, and yet she talked to me as if I were the odd one, as if I should be lying there in bed too, as if she were the only one, the only one in the world who was really living!" She was shaking.

"You'd better have something to eat," he said. "You look positively copper green."

She could not stop talking. "She loves him blindly! She will do anything for him because she loves him blindly!" she said. "She was like someone under a spell!"

He walked with her away from the alley. Her face and her eyes were perfectly round, and she was still holding his hand. Across the street there was a restaurant, and he steered her toward it. "Ahua, you are like someone shut in a room and seeing the world through one window or another," he said softly, "and seeing only a small portion of it each time. Some-

day the walls will be broken down and you will see the entire world, of which everything is only a part."

She found herself climbing the stairs to the restaurant on the second floor. "Oh, how can you think about food at a time like this?" she cried.

"Sit down, the world isn't coming to an end," he said.

"You're always saying that," she said.

She turned her eyes away from him and looked out of the window. A line of trucks drove into the street. Soldiers with drawn bayonets jumped down, and in a moment they dragged a man from a shop and pushed him into one of the open trucks. The man's feet and hands were tied and he was kicked to a kneeling position.

"Maybe the world is coming to an end after all," Zan said.

"What are they doing?"

"They're probably going to drive him off somewhere and shoot him," he said.

"What did he do?" Ahua said, and he saw her face light up with morbid curiosity.

"Probably he is a speculator."

The street below was in an uproar. People packed the sidewalks and traffic came to a standstill. An officer standing on one of the trucks began speaking through a loud-speaker, lecturing to the crowd about the crime of concealing foreign currency.

"Oh, God, I think they're going to shoot him right here!" Zan said. "Don't watch!"

She leaned still further out of the window, her eyes bright and intense. "I want to see," she said feverishly.

The crowd increased to several hundred people. The officer continued to speak for several more minutes. Then some soldiers climbed on the truck, blindfolded the prisoner, who had been kneeling very still, without any expression on his face, and fired a dozen shots into him. The man let out a ghostly, high-pitched whine and fell forward almost at once.

Immediately, the trucks started to move and in a few moments it was all over. Not a trace of what had happened was left.

Ahua withdrew her head from the window and looked at Zan crazily. "It was so simple," she said.

"What did you expect?"

She pitched forward over the table and fainted.

Zan decided to take Ahua straight home after she was revived without going to see Sima himself. They did not speak all the way home. She sat in a corner of the car, chewing her handkerchief, oblivious of him. All she had seen and felt that day was plain on her face, her sense of disbelief, her shock, and her struggle to understand what it was all about. He watched her, feeling that he understood her completely.

"I wish Weilin were back," she said when they arrived.

"I wish so too," he said, and they looked at each other for a moment before going into the house. Yes, the world is spinning and spinning, Zan thought. It was hard to believe, in the half dark of the evening, all that had happened.

## 25

AFTER her family left, Sima lay for a long time thinking, and finally dozed off to sleep. When she woke up again, she could not tell what time it was. She felt a pain in her stomach, and very groggy in the head. It seemed to her as if she had been lying in bed for more days than she could remember. Sometimes, lying awake, she imagined that she was sleeping and dreaming, and sometimes in her sleep, she dreamed that she was awake and feeding the baby. In the background of everything the sound of her baby's crying never stopped, and she could not tell any more whether it was real or imagined.

One morning, she woke up and saw that the sun was streaming into the room. Her baby's face was covered with a hideous rash, the eyes were stuck together, and she was breathing through her mouth. Sima undid the towels and discovered that

her whole body was covered with spots too, and she was frightened.

A stab of pity for the little creature stung her heart. She had not felt anything for it before now. She closed her eyes to steady herself, and after a few moments, with great effort she pried herself from the mattress. The room swam around her, and she steadied herself on the end of the bed. Then with a lunge she made for the electric stove. Kaiming had left the kettle full and she turned the stove on. While she waited for the water to heat, she saw herself in the mirror in the wardrobe, and could not believe that it was she at all. The eyelids and lips were puffed out and thick, and her hair stood out in every direction. The room spun and spun, and she bit her lips to keep her knees from sagging. Finally, she heard the kettle sing, and she poured the water into the basin, and inched with it back to the bed. She sank down into it, and picking up the sleeping baby, dipped her bottom gently into the water.

The baby let out a piercing scream. Her arms and legs jerked out all of a sudden, and Sima quickly lifted her out again. Frightened and dazed, she fell back on the mattress with the screaming baby, and they cried together for a long time and could not stop. The baby's skin was scalded and turned beet red.

It was quite a while before Sima realized that Kaiming had come to the door. He was standing there, watching, and when she turned to him he said, "Between the two of you it is enough to drive a man crazy. Can't you stop bawling? I hardly slept a wink all night with all this crying going on."

A white-hot sensation passed through Sima's whole body. Her tears dried up abruptly. "Do you think I have slept?" she replied.

He stood watching for another moment, and then with a dour expression on his face, went out again.

Suddenly, Sima felt strong again. She did not know from where her strength came. It flooded her body. Her mind became very clear. She listened for the men to go downstairs, and then she floated to the wardrobe and found a dress and a pair of

shoes and put them on. She felt as if she could fly. Then she took a blanket and wrapped up the screaming baby, and after awhile, she went to the door and listened. They had gone out to eat. She took her baby in her arms, and started toward the stairs. Her legs moved as if they did not belong to her, but each time she put her foot down, something inside of her seemed to drag and tear. When she was downstairs, she could feel no sensation in her body at all.

She felt as if she were drifting into the living room, and floating out of the door. It was a brilliant day. At the mouth of the alley, there was a line of waiting rickshaws, and with one last effort, she climbed into one, and sank back into the seat. She remembered only that she gave her aunt's address, and then she swooned off. She was wet through.

She came to a little each time the rickshaw went over a bump, and her teeth chattered. The baby had gone limp in her arms, and she clutched the helpless bundle to her, and swooned off again. From time to time she felt herself slipping from the seat, and she drew herself up again. She opened her eyes a little and saw that it was still a long way from home, and slipped into unconsciousness again.

Then it seemed as if all her misery were leaking out of her. The sun warmed her face, there was a gentle breeze, and she dreamed again as she had so often, that all was well, and that she was coming home from America with the baby to visit her family, and telling them all about her trip.

When she opened her eyes again, her dream had come to life. Chuli, Ahua, Zan, and her uncle were all standing in front of the house and looking at her.

"Auntie, I've come home!" she said. "I have so much to tell you! Ahua, you know we stopped at Hawaii on the way over, and Kai bought me a garland of flowers. It's a native custom. Really, travel is so broadening. . . ."

"Take the baby first," Chuli said. "Then lift her out gently."

When Sima came to again, she was lying on the sofa in the salon. The sun was streaming in through the long windows,

and everything looked new and fresh and clean. "New curtains," she said. "What a lovely pattern!"

"Be quiet," Sankuo said. "The doctor is coming, my precious."

"Oh, yes, the baby is sick," she said. She could not understand why her uncle was looking at her that way. "Ahua, you remember that dress with the clashing colors you said I should *never* wear? Well, on the last night on the ship everybody had to dress up and I actually put it on. And do you know what Kai said when he saw it?" She started to laugh, and something oozed out of her. Her heart fluttered, and she sank into unconsciousness once more.

They were all waiting in the foyer when Chuli came out of the salon and closed the door behind her. Her face was dark.

"She has had a hemorrhage," she said. "The doctor thinks there is also an infection. He is sending for an ambulance."

"Someone must go and tell her husband," Sankuo said.

When they heard his voice, they all turned and looked at him, and their hearts stood still. On his face they read something sinister. An unknown quantity, a secret, an ugly mystery was about to happen, beyond their control, beyond their power to change. This was all Sankuo could utter. His eyes were like glass. They were all paralyzed by some dreadful knowledge.

Then Ahua spoke, "You go, Zan," she said, "and hurry! Go straight on to the hospital with Kaiming and don't come here. Aunt and I will go in the ambulance, and Uncle, you come in the car. Yuma must stay and mind the baby."

The words flew out of her. Something told her to take charge and give these orders. This was what must be done, and she saw that she was the only one who realized it.

It was midafternoon when Mung Kaiming and Zan appeared at the hospital. The sun was very bright and when they walked into the courtyard they saw Ahua coming out of the center door of the U-shaped building. Her face looked very coarse under the bright light.

"She had another hemorrhage," she said.

Mung Kaiming looked at her wildly. "Where is she?"

"Upstairs. Second floor. Aunt and Uncle are there."

Kaiming dashed past them into the building.

"He doesn't understand," Ahua said to Zan. "She's dead."

"Oh, no!"

"She kept saying, 'Kaiming, come quick!' What took you so long?"

"I couldn't find him."

They walked into the building together and up the stairs. There was no one in the long corridor with white walls and the sound of their shoes made an unusually loud noise. Ahua pointed to the door, and Zan pushed it open gently and they went inside.

Mung Kaiming was kneeling beside the bed, and there were holes in the soles of his shoes. Chuli and Sankuo were standing at the foot of the bed. Ahua stared with great eyes at her dead sister's face again, and then she went outside.

Then they all came out, too, and left Kaiming alone inside. They heard him sobbing and speaking, and after awhile, he stopped, but still, he didn't come out. "How incongruous it seems that the day should be so sunny," Ahua thought. She saw her fingernails and thought, "I must cut them when I go home."

When Mung Kaiming came out of the room at last, his face was leonine, and his hair disheveled and his eyes bulged.

He seemed startled at first to see them all there.

Then he walked up to Sankuo and said, his voice even and ordinary, "You killed her. You killed her for eight thousand dollars."

Sankuo looked at Kaiming with burning eyes. "Do you think that I had you recalled because of the *money*?" he said slowly, and his face was terrible to see.

"What did you do it for then?" Kaiming said quietly.

"Because of your unethical conduct," Sankuo said.

Kaiming stared back at him, and slowly, his face darkened.

"By what standards do you judge my ethical conduct?" he asked. "Is that what you thought you were doing? You have brought Sima to her death because of your supreme egotism, that form of bourgeois individualism which is typical of you self-styled intellectuals. You have surrounded yourself and your family with a high wall of artificial morals and separated yourselves from reality, the reality of the intolerable suffering of the rest of your five hundred million compatriots. Don't try to blame me for the incoherence of your precious values with the reality of the outside world! Your social outlook is empty and valueless idealism, and yet you want to pronounce judgment on my conduct! People like you are the reason why social revolution is inevitable, and when that day comes, you dirty officials will no longer be able to pull a few strings and use your influence to bear in order to uphold your valueless illusions." As he spoke, he believed in all he was saying. This is so, Kaiming thought, because Sima is dead. Why else was she dead?

"God forgive you!" Sankuo cut in, and his voice was surprisingly gentle. "God have pity on you!" he said in a voice they had never heard before, and walked slowly and deliberately away from them all.

They looked at him, confounded. Blind with fury, Ahua cried at Kaiming, "And yet my sister married you for an ideal! Was that ideal of love and loyalty to the man she married also empty and without reality?"

"I never promised her anything," Kaiming said. "I never deceived her. If you had illusions about me you only deceived yourselves."

And suddenly, then, they all seemed to realize the futility of words, and the inadequacy of human reason in the divine mystery which was death. None of them said any more, and they left the hospital separately.

Sankuo was waiting for his family at the courtyard, standing in the sun, and when his son saw him, he became aware of the existence of a life in his father, beyond the reach of material forces and external influence, which lifted him from the world

of which they were captive. Zan looked at his father questioningly, and Sankuo looked back, as if he were seeking an understanding in him.

"What is it he is looking for in me?" Zan thought. "Do I have it within me, whatever he hopes to find?"

Sankuo took his wife by the waist when she came, and she sagged into his arms.

Kaiming walked for hours in the city before going back to his friends' house.

But at last he found himself turning into the alley where his friends lived, and then a thought came to him, which gave him a strange sense of being almost free. It was just the realization that Sima would no longer be upstairs when he returned, and realizing this, it seemed almost as if the world itself had come back to normalcy again. A wave of emotion flooded him, washing away everything he ever felt for her all at once, canceling and crossing out all the unhappy doubts which had been tormenting him ever since he married her.

No, no more sentiment from now on, he thought. It was his mistake. The world seemed very real again.

He walked into the house and lay down on the sofa. After awhile, he said in an almost offhand way, as if it had just occurred to him to tell his friends something of no significance, "She's dead."

He was pleased with the way his friends reacted to his calm. They were surprised. He would show them, he thought.

"What happened?" they said.

He told them what happened without a trace of emotion. He rose to his feet and paced about the room. At last he told them what he said to Sankuo in the hospital, and he could feel his friends listening with admiration as he spoke.

Kaiming raised his arms into the air. "What are these people but useless, weak sentimentalists," he said, "whose only goal in life is to preserve their stagnant way of life, contingent upon good food, comfort, and luxury! They are soft, these bourgeois, and easy to hurt because they are bound to their stagnant

spiritual and moral beliefs. But we are free. We need not pretend to any false beliefs. We are the product of economic circumstances. We have no bonds. We live in reality."

His friends discerned the ring of conviction in his voice. This was different from all the other times when they sat here, making huge and hollow plans, and they became excited.

"These people must be made to pay for their very form of existence!" Kaiming said. He felt something break loose from him, wild and uncontrollable. It was now that he would realize himself, he thought. It was now that he wholly awakened at last to the power which lay latent within him.

## 26

IT WAS three o'clock in the morning. The garden glistened in the moonlight like a stretch of milky water, and the poplars' leaves trembled like a thousand silver minnows.

"Zan?" Ahua called. "Are you awake? Will you come here for a moment, please?"

"What are you doing?" he said. "Everyone is finally asleep."

"I'm getting a few things together," she said, and she didn't look up when he came in. An open trunk stood in the middle of her room. "They wanted a dress." Then she looked up with great eyes. "But Zan, will they put shoes on her feet?"

He picked up her hand. "Don't," he whispered. "Don't go on like this. Do you know what time it is? You haven't stopped all day."

"I'm afraid to close my eyes," she said. He sat down on the bed, and looked at her with complicated eyes. "Have a cigarette," he said.

"I don't smoke."

"Try one."

He held her hand over the cigarette to keep it steady and lit it for her.

"Put it all away. I'll help you. Do all these things go back in the trunk?"

"Yes."

"I'll take the rest down in the morning."

"All right, Zan."

"Will you go to sleep now?"

"Zan, what was Kaiming talking about? What did he mean?"

"He has obviously decided to turn to the Communists because he knows he has no more future in Nanking," Zan said. "It is very convenient for him."

"Yes, but what did he mean about our ideals being unrealistic and without value?"

"Just that."

"He isn't right, is he?"

"I don't know."

"I thought you knew everything."

"I don't know anything."

"Do you think your father and mother know about the 'intolerable suffering' of the five hundred million people?"

"Do you think they do not know?" he said.

"Oh, Zan, if I had nothing to believe in, I could not live!" she said.

How seriously she took herself! he thought. May she take herself seriously for the rest of her life!

"I have a great deal of admiration for you for what you said to him this afternoon," he said.

Their heads were bent close together. It was so quiet that nothing seemed to exist beyond these walls. Her eyes glowed, their dark intensity stabbed at him; nothing existed beyond what was immediate, what his senses could perceive. He thought, since conditions changed all the time, how could he trust them? Yet at that given moment, time and space seemed completely annihilated. The thing in her eyes—pure and exquisitely sweet—seemed isolated, independent of matter, burning of itself. He wanted to take her in his arms and pluck it from her, this luminous thing, toward which all his impulses were attracted.

Then they heard piercing screams from Chuli's room. They rushed in and found her sitting up in bed, waving her arms in the air. "Tuako! I'm sorry! I should have known better!"

Ahua flew to her side. She put her arms around Chuli and hugged her closely. "It's all right, it's all right, Auntie! I'm here! Go back to sleep, everything is all right."

Chuli dug her fingers into Ahua's arms, and drove her nails into her skin. She was weeping convulsively, "Ahua! I owe your sister an apology! I am sorry! I did not know!"

"Oh, no, no, no," Ahua whispered, wiping her aunt's face and stroking back her rumpled hair. "Don't blame yourself. It couldn't be helped."

"Do you forgive me?" Chuli said, recognizing no one except Sima's sister at this time. She looked at her with haunted eyes.

"There's nothing to forgive," Ahua said softly. "There's nothing to forgive. Lie down now, Auntie, and try to sleep."

She smoothed out the bedding and arranged the pillows.

"Don't leave me, Ahua," Chuli said as she lay down again. "Don't go away. Stay with me, Ahua."

"I won't leave you," the girl replied. "I'll stay right here, as long as you like."

At last Chuli quieted down again, and Ahua remained beside her aunt's bed all night, holding her hand. She did not feel tired. She felt very calm.

"Sima is dead," she thought, and she repeated the words slowly to herself several times. She felt no pain and no sorrow, only terribly vacant. From time to time, Chuli stirred in her sleep, and she assured her that she was still there, and told her to go back to sleep. Nothing seemed so important now as staying by her aunt's side, and it demanded her entire attention, so that everything that happened today seemed to have an explanation.

Ahua stayed beside Chuli for three days. Her presence seemed to give Chuli a comfort she could not find in Sankuo or Zan. She turned to her, as if from this girl of the Kim family consolation must come. Ahua felt deeply calm and void. When

her aunt was asleep, she discussed the details of Sima's burial with Zan and his father, with always a serious expression on her face and almost no trace of emotion. She thought, "This isn't really me. I am not actually talking about Sima's funeral."

Sima was buried three days later. The confused conditions in the city and the condition of Chuli's health forced the family to act fast, and the funeral was as simple as possible. Zan notified Mung Kaiming by letter of the arrangements, afraid that he might cause trouble later if he were not notified, but Kaiming did not appear. A cable was sent to the Kim family in Amoy informing them of the sudden death, but no details were given other than that she died after childbirth.

Mrs. Hsu came to call on them after the funeral, and was surprised by the calm air of Ahua and the way she spoke.

"Ahua," said Mrs. Hsu, "we are leaving for Hong Kong shortly. Your father-in-law wrote to say that the entire household is to move now. Can you come with us?"

Ahua was silent for a moment before she spoke, as if it was difficult for her to turn her attention to the affairs of the Hsu family. Then she said, "I cannot leave now. My aunt is sick. She needs me."

"We will leave the money for you then, my dear," Mrs. Hsu said sympathetically. "I know that your family wants you to be with them now. But as soon as you can, you must come out to us. If anything should happen to Weilin's little wife in these troubled times, I should never forgive myself."

"Happen to me?" Ahua said. She was sitting very straight beside her mother-in-law, and she looked at her with surprised, wide-open eyes. "What can happen to me?"

"Anson says that the Communists may cross the Yangtze," Mrs. Hsu said worriedly. "I don't understand these things. But if they do. . . ."

"Nothing can happen to me," Ahua said. "I'll come to you just as soon as I can."

Ahua continued to sit in the salon after Mrs. Hsu left. Weilin seemed so far away; it seemed as if that was someone else

whom they called Ahua that lived before, and not she. That world in which she, the real Ahua, and Weilin lived seemed to have no connection with this present world, in which her presence was very much needed. Watching her, Zan felt unaccountably disturbed.

Then Chuli called her, and Ahua leaped to her feet and ran upstairs, as if her sole mission in life were to keep her aunt company and make her well again.

Chuli had just awakened. "Is it all over?" she asked, looking at them all confusedly.

"She was buried this morning," Ahua said.

"But why didn't you tell me?" Chuli cried. "If I had managed things, they would have been done properly! Were all our friends and relatives properly informed?" In her shock her mind wandered back to the kingdom of her childhood home, to the disciplined life for which she longed, where birth, life, and death each had its place. Her spirit drew succor from it, which was innate in her.

"We did all we could under the circumstances," Sankuo said sadly. "But now that you are better you tell us what we left out."

He humored her, a stranger in the land of her nostalgia.

"The relatives must each be informed separately," Chuli said with authority in her voice. "And why aren't we in mourning? Ahua, the nearest relative, should be in total mourning, and we, belonging to the older generation, should be in part. . . ."

"I will tell Ahua and Zan to write to Amoy as you say," Sankuo said. "Everything will be done just as you say, and whatever we overlook, you can make up when you are stronger. . . ."

He looked up and met his son's eyes. They went downstairs together, and Sankuo told his son and Ahua to write individual formal letters to the different branches of the Kim family in Amoy, beginning with the grandfather, informing them of Sima's death, the hour, the day, the year.

"I don't understand," Ahua said, and for the first time, a trace of emotion came into her voice. "She is dead. What are we writing all these letters for? We sent the cable."

"These are formalities," Zan said.

"What do they matter?"

"My mother believes in these things with her heart and soul, the customs and family traditions of the normal, disciplined, and respectable society from which she comes, which help to make even death seem a part of life."

"And your father?" she asked and her voice was hysterical, as if at last, she refused to go on with all this make-believe, this absurdity of death.

"Living within tradition narrows the domain of the questionable and gives the mind an illusion of innocence in this world," he said.

"And you?" she asked.

"I wish only that I could give you an acceptable answer," he said.

It was as if they saw the world alike, as one, in all its absurdity and fantasy. He caught her in his arms at last, and they clung to each other in their grief.

After a moment, she tore herself away. She picked up her pen and began to write. He watched her feverishly and could not make her look up from the table.

## 27

THE next morning, Wong Sankuo had to go to Nanking to attend urgent conferences and could not stay any longer with his family. Tsinan, capital of Shantung, had fallen, and Chiang Kai-shek had flown to Peiping himself to direct the defense of Manchuria, where severe fighting was taking place. The economic situation had taken a sudden turn for the worse also, and the newly issued gold yuan in which the whole nation's economic life was staked was on its way to inflation. High officials and wealthy businessmen were making fortunes in the stock market

and a reign of terror prevailed upon the major coastal cities. There were secret arrests, assassinations, and kidnappings, and hoodlums took cover under the general disturbance to rob and loot and many people took this chance to pay back personal revenges.

A few days later, when Wong Sankuo returned to Shanghai, he saw everywhere homes were being put up for sale. Those who could afford to leave for the South were going there, although the possibility of the Communists pressing down from the North still seemed remote. The trains and steamships were already fully booked.

He thought Hsu Paofung must be congratulating himself now for pulling his vast fortune out of the market in time, and, he felt, he himself would have made a very bad businessman indeed.

Riding toward his home, Sankuo told himself that he must be strong. He told himself that room must be made in the house of his life for Sima's death, though at first he was sure that there was no room, no room to accept it at all. He had not yet had time to feel it, but when his numbness wore off, his grief was sure to be hard to bear. He hoped that he could delay the unnumbing process until mentally and emotionally he had accepted it and put it where it belonged, so that when the pain came, it should be confined to its quarters and not tear down the very walls of his house. For if he went, his family went with him, and he must do this for the family's sake as well as his own.

When he arrived, he saw his son strolling in the garden, and Sankuo was thankful that he had come back from America at this time. In mental and temperamental make-up, his son was like him. The bondage of blood was a strong one. Yet how much better it was to have other ties as well!

The poplars in the garden were already shedding their leaves and the ground was soft with rain. When Zan saw his father, he came toward him.

"How is your mother?" Sankuo said.

"She is the same, no worse," he said sadly. There was a sharp smell of wet earth, sweet and heavy, and the sky was thick with gray clouds.

"And the baby?"

"She's come out of it now. Yuma has been taking good care of her." Then Zan asked, "How was it in Nanking?"

It was good to talk about the larger picture before becoming engulfed in personal problems. Sankuo said gravely, "It looks very bad for Mukden and Changchun. What it must feel like to be trapped and depend entirely upon outside help! It must be the worst form of punishment in life! And those soldiers have been in there for almost a year."

"I read that the Ministry of Finance has proclaimed an extension of two months for the conversion of currency into the gold standard," Zan said grimly. "Isn't that tantamount to declaring bankruptcy?"

"Not quite," Wong Sankuo said tartly. His savings were depreciating rapidly into half of their original value, but he had not yet stopped to think about this, as he had not yet reacted to Sima's death. "I must not have any reactions now," he thought. "I cannot afford to have any reactions."

"Father, I have to go to Peiping," Zan said.

"Oh, yes," Sankuo said. He had not thought about this.

Now he looked at his son's face, and was surprised by the pain he saw there, and a sort of helplessness which he had never associated with him before.

"You know that the supporters of Vice-President Li are determined to bring about peace through negotiations," Zan said, taking his father's silence for concern for his safety. "If they succeed, the fighting may stop. I know you don't approve of any effort to negotiate with the Communists, but sometimes I think anything is better than this slaughtering on both sides."

Sankuo compressed his lips, and stared at the dispassionate face.

"I don't approve or disapprove of your politics, my son," he replied softly, drawing a deep breath. "In your hope that peace may be won through compromise, I respect your feelings. But it

is your neutrality, your lack of belligerence, with regard to everything since you came back, that I don't understand."

Zan winced. He understood the reprimand in his father's words, so intelligently put, so civilized as always. Between them there had always been mutual respect, even when he was a small boy.

He turned his face from his father, and avoided his eyes.

A squall sent a shoal of wet leaves to the ground, and gray clouds fled past in the sky.

A wave of emotion swept over Sankuo.

"I like to think," he said softly, "that from me you have inherited a way of looking at life, and from your mother some of her vitality, which should give you capacities for work and play and self-expression, which should make you a king among men."

Zan still did not turn around.

"I know, Father, and I appreciate all you have given me," he said, and now he turned his bare face to his father. The injury in his eyes startled Sankuo.

"Then what is the matter? Can you not resolve the discords you feel into a smooth, even if illusory coherence, instead of building your life on them?" Sankuo said.

His father's concept of the world was sane and clean; his moral integrity raised them from the level of the world, but did not deliver them from it.

"One should be able to live without illusions," Zan said, and felt his throat tighten and tears prick in his eyes.

Shaken by the emotion of his son, Wong Sankuo was silent for a long time. He respected his son's moral passion. He remembered his own outrage upon discovering that he had misestimated the world.

"My son," he said at last. "Have you no Love?"

Zan looked up, startled. "Yes, I have Love," he said in a trembling voice.

"Love of what?"

"Love of Nothing."

"What is Nothing?"

"That is the lack of impulse, liberation from will, and from frustration; pure objective vision."

"But what is there to see?"

"The eternal forms of all transient things."

"But is it not so much better and easier to live that aesthetic phenomenon than to contemplate it?"

"It is not easy," Zan replied.

Sankuo walked a few paces away. They did not look at each other now.

"When I married your mother," he said, "I entered a moral world in which I became related to every other rational being on earth, and in which the whole mass of us, thick as swarming bees, would drag one another along toward some common good or evil, war or peace. No man can live alone. To weigh human values with a disinterested eye is a crime of which none of us should be guilty." His voice shook, and he stopped. Then he turned, and Zan realized all at once the existence of a great difference between them; something great and deathless and infinite absolved his father from the limited material world to which they had been reduced in the last few days.

"I loved your mother's anger when things went wrong," Sankuo continued, now looking at his son. "I loved her righteous indignation with everything under the sun which was none of her business. I loved her indestructible conviction in herself. The bias which my life was to acquire was turned from the moment I fell in love with her toward a human destiny and some useful purpose at last."

They went inside together. Ahua was with Chuli upstairs, and they found them absorbed in each other. Sankuo sat down on the bed and took his wife's hand.

"Are you feeling better now?" he said.

Tears rolled from Chuli's eyes. She was incapable of speech.

"You know next week is my birthday," Sankuo said. "Are you going to give me your famous noodles?"

Chuli's eyes brightened for a moment. "Oh! Sankuo! Sixty years old!" she cried, and fell into his arms, and remained there

for a long time, in the world he and she lived in together, something real and everlasting, which not even their son could share in completely. Zan wondered that he had not seen it before, the strange alchemy of love, divine love from which his father had been reborn, from a deep distrust in the value of human life into ecstatic adoration of all under God's creation.

A budding promise stirred in his soul—something he did not understand yet and which his mind could neither control nor explore, but from which he felt a new life must come. . . .

On the afternoon of Sankuo's return from Nanking, Glass brought a letter to him in the study and said that two young men were waiting outside for a reply. The letter was from Kaiming, demanding the return of his child. Sankuo told Glass to let the men in.

One was Li Huan, who had come to the house once before, and the other his friend Tong Tien. Sankuo was seated behind his desk when Glass showed them in.

"Tell your friend that I cannot return the child," he said.

"You don't mean that you are going to separate father and child?" Tong asked lightly. While he spoke, Chuli came in with Ahua and Zan. The young men looked at them curiously, with smiles on their faces, and then looked at Sankuo again.

"I do not question a father's right to his child," Sankuo replied. "In this case, however, I cannot let him have her."

"Are you going to hold the child by force?" Tong asked evenly. He did not seem surprised.

"I have a moral responsibility to the child," Sankuo said, choosing his words deliberately. Many times recently had Zan heard his father use the word "moral." He stared at the young man with great eyes.

The young men laughed lightly, one echoing the other. "If you mean by your *moral* responsibility the physical comfort you can give the child, of course Kaiming cannot provide the same," said Tong with a cold and sarcastic smile. He, too, had heard the word used many times by his friend. He had not expected the old fellow to come right out with it. He replied readily,

"But the great number of people in this country have survived on less and I am sure Kaiming's child will do the same. On the other hand, the child might die of lack of air in the idealistic vacuum you live in," he added, feeling more sure of himself now than when he came in.

"Don't break wind!" Sankuo cried. His face became red. "Get out, both of you, before I have you thrown out!"

Tong Tien grimaced sardonically. "We are getting out, old man," he said with a smile. "We shall not take the child by force, but legally she belongs to her father."

They sauntered out of their house, taking their time, and turned their heads several times to look at Ahua with open curiosity as they passed.

The lights in the upstairs windows of Wong Sankuo's house burned late that night. The curtains were drawn. A family conference was going on.

"We must consider the possibility that they have underworld connections," Zan said. "But so long as the Government stands up, these underworld gangsters will not dare to touch the Minister of Education. But if Kaiming has only these two hoodlum friends, then the problem is much simpler. Father need only notify the authorities and someone will watch the house constantly."

"I will not let the baby out of my sight again," said Chuli. Her eyes were calm now. She had been shocked out of her delirium.

"It is more likely, though, that Kaiming will try the legal means to get his child back," Zan reasoned. "That way, he has everything to gain, for he can make a good case out of our holding the child who is rightfully his; legally, I am afraid we have no right to the child. But if that is the case, we need not fear for rough handling from them, which is the first consideration."

"No, I don't think there was any question of their taking the baby by force this afternoon," said Sankuo, who sat at the foot

of the bed. "They anticipated our refusal. They came only to threaten us. The child is being used as a pawn in a game . . . it would have upset their play if we had surrendered the child this afternoon."

"What is the game?" Ahua asked innocently. She was looking out the window. The slaty sky forbode a severe winter.

"Money," Sankuo said.

She turned around.

"What else? He is going to force us to pay through our hearts," Sankuo said. "Once more."

Slowly, Chuli's anger rose up in her. Her face stiffened. Her eyes grew sharp. When Sankuo saw it, he felt relieved. The worst was over for her now. "I don't understand the legal position or any other position," she said. "All I know is the baby must not be allowed to go back to that filthy house with those unholy three. We have lost one life already through that house." Her eyes were calm now. Only her voice trembled a little.

"Then you agree his next move will be legal action," Zan said.

"That is my guess."

"If you like, I will stay over," offered the son, who was standing beside Ahua. "I can tell them at the university that I cannot come this term."

Everyone looked at Chuli. She was the reason for everything.

"N—no," Chuli said slowly. Her face was hard. "Your father and I and Ahua will manage. You go to Peiping as you planned, Zan."

Zan looked at his father and waited.

"If your mother says so, then it is so," Sankuo said.

They listened to her; she made the decisions in this family.

"Then I leave in the morning," Zan said.

"You leave in the morning," Chuli echoed.

For awhile the family was silent. Then Sankuo summed up. "Then it is settled. Zan goes in the morning as planned. I am not afraid of legal action. And we shall not let the child out of our hands."

It was the signal for the end of the meeting. Chuli moved.

She got the baby from Yuma's room and brought her crib into her own bedroom. "This is little Ping," she said. "My mother's name was Ping."

"You made a great sacrifice," Sankuo said. "I know how much you wanted Zan to stay."

"Everyone has to live his own life," Chuli answered miserably. "You cannot hold on to him just because he is your son."

He paused at the door of her room, and said, "Would you like to go for a walk?"

"No, I'm going to write to Weilin," she said.

He came in and picked up something from her table and looked at it and frowned. It was a tin of powder for holding dental plates firm in the mouth.

"Don't tell me you have false teeth?" he said softly, with a quizzical, half-sad smile.

"No. Weilin sent it for Ah Yee. I haven't had time to mail it."

He tossed the tin back to her, his eyes troubled and serious. He leaned against the wall, and drew out a cigarette from his pocket.

"Where is the beautiful soul now?" he asked, looking at her.

"In London," she said. Her voice was barely audible.

"I believe that is—uh—in England," he said after a long while.

She looked up savagely, her eyes glowing like embers, and seeing them, he almost had the feeling that he was in love again.

"I suppose you'll be going to Hong Kong before I come back again," he said.

"I will stay as long as your parents need me," she said.

"I want you to know that I am grateful to you for your help," he murmured.

She looked at him as if she did not understand what he said. All at once, she saw Weilin vividly in her mind. He was standing in the golden sunlight and in the background there was the bright blue sea, and he was remote and beyond her reach. Then the real me is here, or is it? she thought.

"After all this is over," he said softly, as if he could read her thoughts, "you'll be with Weilin again. You have great happiness in store for you, Ahua. Don't feel too bad."

They were like prisoners caught in a world they did not make and did not understand. First Weilin went, then Sima died, and now Zan was going also. She was on the verge of saying, "Oh, Zan, *don't go!*" when she heard herself saying that before. She became white and utterly still.

He looked at her helplessly and went back to his room.

## 28

Two days after Zan left for Peiping, Mung Kaiming's two friends appeared outside the house, and loitered there all morning.

A nightmare feeling came over Sankuo when he saw them. They had decided to play rough, had they?

His first thought was that his family must have protection when he was away in Nanking. They must not be alarmed. He did not think that the hoodlums would dare to come inside and take the child by force, for if he had judged correctly they wanted to be paid off. Or would they take the child and try to make him buy her back?

Sankuo telephoned to his old lawyer friend and asked him to come to the house. When the man appeared, the two shut themselves in the study.

Sankuo repeated himself. Legally, the child belonged to his father. But morally, he could not let her go.

His old friend exercised his legal mind perhaps too much today, or was it just Sankuo's imagination? He said, "With the country in such confusion today, the case will never come to court."

"Then do you think he will try other methods of getting

the child back?" Sankuo asked. "I know that what he is after is money. He does not want the child for her own sake, or else he would not have sent his friends with a letter."

"I advise you to telephone the chief security officer who is your friend," the lawyer said gravely.

Suddenly, Sankuo understood the larger implications. Under cover of the confusion which reigned these days, of mysterious disappearances, sudden arrests, and political assassinations, Kaiming might do anything and get away with it. If the legal way was out, then Kaiming might try anything, blackmail, extortion, kidnaping. . . . And if Kaiming had Communist connections, what power would he have over them from now on if the baby should fall into his hands? They would never be free from him again; they would be forever after at the mercy of the man's ruthless will.

"The baby must in no case be allowed to go back to her father," he said. "I know the man . . . and he knows me. I know that now Sima is dead he will stop at nothing."

In the presence of his lawyer, Sankuo telephoned the police chief.

"This is the Minister of Education," he said. "I want you to post two men at my house day and night and keep vigilance over it, and be especially careful when I am absent from Shanghai."

The police chief asked politely, "May I ask the nature of this duty, Your Excellency? May I call on the Minister and discuss the details?"

Reasonable enough, yet Sankuo imagined that the police chief was trying to raise difficulties, just as he imagined that his lawyer was purposely trying to take an ambiguous stand. He knew only too well what the nature of man was like in troubled times; no man could be counted on to do favors for others at the risk of his own security.

When he hung up, still other vistas opened before him. In Nanking, Chiang Kai-shek was being forced from the Presidency, and supporters of the Vice-President, Li Tsung-jen, were working very hard to win the backing of other groups of politicians.

To whom was the police chief loyal, then? If Chiang stepped down, could the police still be counted on to give one of his Ministers protection? In chaotic times, no one need take the responsibility for any duty left undone.

Then what they discussed and the conclusions they arrived at the night before Zan left were not correct. The picture looked completely different now.

The police chief came after lunch, and was cordial enough. Sankuo explained the situation to him, and he could not keep the passion from his voice. "I have every moral right! I know I have no legal right but I have every moral right to the child!" he repeated. The police chief was courteous and promised to have a plain-clothes man as well as a policeman watch the house.

Sankuo watched from the window. That afternoon, sure enough, the hoodlums disappeared. But after dark when Glass went outside for awhile, a stranger came up to her, and whispered something to her which frightened her. The girl came back crying and said she must quit her job. Sankuo gave orders for Yuma to be on constant watch over little Ping, never to leave the child alone when he was away, and offered to double the salaries of all the servants if they would be faithful to the family.

That evening, Sankuo told Chuli and Ahua what he had done, but he did not tell them all his fears. So far, Kaiming still showed some respect for Sankuo's connections. But what if the situation in the country changed suddenly? Were these hoodlums tied up with the large network of the Shanghai underworld, who for the present were supporters of President Chiang? How did these people stand with the Communists? And how did the police chief stand with the underworld?

The next morning Ahua left for school. Sankuo watched her from the window. No one came to speak to her or to molest her. He thought to himself, "So long as there is no reversal of the political situation in Nanking, the police chief will do his job."

He left for Nanking in a fairly peaceful state of mind. He

told Chuli to telephone him long distance should the hoodlums appear again.

Then Wong Sankuo drew a deep breath, and turned his mind to the business at hand in Nanking. With the swiftness of an avalanche, the situation in the North had changed and become almost untenable. When the moral force of a nation collapses, physical defeat in battle follows suit. After the Ministry of Finance announced an extension of two months for the conversion of gold yuan, riots broke out in all the large cities in the east. Food shortage was acute in Shanghai, Peiping, and Tientsin, and the whole structure of the Government was creaking with the portent of immediate downfall.

Chiang Kai-shek flew from Mukden to Peiping on the third of October, and a week later to Shanghai to inspect the security precautions being taken by the city.

Refugees from Northern cities were pouring into Shanghai every day, and people from Shanghai choked the railway stations, the Bund, and the airport trying to get away. Tickets for seats in airplanes were going for ten to twenty gold bars each, while furniture, clothes, and cars were being sold on streets and alleys everywhere.

Frustrated by his attempt to intimidate Wong Sankuo, Mung Kaiming decided to take his story to a Communist-supported tabloid newspaper. It was a cunning move. With this, he might throw himself into the bosom of the Communists and turn disadvantage into advantage. The time seemed right. No longer had he anything to lose.

Stories in the tabloid sheet began to appear, describing Wong Sankuo's forceful detention of Kaiming's daughter. They told how Kaiming first met the Wong family, and revealed the most intimate anecdotes of the family. One described how helpless the Wongs were one evening when their cook quit, and how Kaiming, the son of a farmer, the proletariat, had to go to the kitchen and cook them a supper of "peasant food," which the family enjoyed as a change from shark's fins and bird's nest.

Much was made of Kaiming's poor peasant origin, and of how he worked with his hands as a boy. Nothing was mentioned of his first marriage. The climax of the series was the story of Kaiming's recall from New York, accusing Wong Sankuo of abusing his official privileges and using his influence to destroy the career of the innocent, struggling young Vice-Consul. The story went on to tell how the Wong family turned their backs on Kaiming and his wife after they came back, thus forcing Sima to her death. But now that Sima was dead, they were forcefully detaining the child.

"But these are all lies, lies!" Ahua cried.

"I am used to reading this kind of stories," Sankuo replied with surprisingly little rancor. "No one who knows us can believe them. These stories cannot hurt us."

"But can't you answer back?"

"I cannot," Sankuo replied. "So far, Kaiming has not made a real move to claim the child, for all the storm he is stirring up. If I answer back, I would be saying, 'Come and try and take her!'"

"Then what is he waiting for? What is he doing all this for?"

"He thought we would go to him and say, 'Stop this attack. We'll pay anything if you stop attacking us.'"

"Oh, I see," Ahua said with great wonder in her voice.

"Public opinion, good name, these things mean very little," Sankuo said consolingly. "What is important is how we feel in our hearts."

And Ahua saw that he was not going to discuss it any further. The days for her were like a nightmare, from which she strove to awaken but could not, in which she tried to find some reason, and could not. And yet she felt that all this must be a temporary impasse, and she longed for it to be over with quickly, and to take up life once more where it had left off, before Sima died, before Weilin left.

## 29

CHANGCHUN, with an army of over a hundred thousand besieged men, fell into Communist hands in the third week of October, and the gold yuan went crash. Riots and looting broke out anew in all the large cities. Chiang Kai-shek again flew to Peiping, and Mukden seemed doomed to fall into Communist hands.

Wong Sankuo sent a cable to Zan: "FEAR FOR YOUR SAFETY. RETURN TO SHANGHAI IF POSSIBLE."

Zan cabled back: "IF PEIPING GOES, ALL CHINA WILL FOLLOW. NORTHERN COMMAND DEFENDING CITY WITH THREE HUNDRED THOUSAND MEN." Two days later, the family received his letter. "I cannot imagine that this city will fall into Communist hands before a peaceful settlement of some kind is made. If it does, it will make no difference whether I am in Peiping or in Shanghai, we will all be under the same yoke. But Li's men have been making progress and I hope that a compromise will be reached very soon. I feel that for me to leave the University now would not be right. I must continue here so long as classes are still being held."

Ten days later, Mukden fell, much sooner than the worst pessimists had forecast. One of the best armored divisions of Government troops with supporting infantry had landed on the coast of south Manchuria and was pushing inland when it became mysteriously surrounded by Communist forces in Chin-chow. After a brief resistance, the entire force surrendered. The Mukden garrison, which had been besieged for a year, then moved a few miles into the country, met a very large Communist army, and lay down its arms. In a few weeks, half a million men were lost to the Communists.

Now garrison after garrison collapsed, and the Communists controlled Shantung and opened fire on Hsuechow, far down in

Kiangsu province, with half a million men in its forces. The Finance Minister resigned in Nanking, and the Government announced it was going to allow people to use foreign banknotes again and going to issue real silver dollars to replace the now valueless gold yuan. Nanking and Shanghai were put under curfew: no one was allowed on the streets between eleven P.M. and six A.M.

Wong Sankuo did not return to Shanghai for three weeks, while the battle for Hsuehchow was being fought with the last of the Government's best forces, and every means the Government had was spent in trying to hold that city. Two hundred thousand American dollars were awarded to the garrison which turned the Communists back again after they entered the city. In Nanking, the executive secretary of the Kuomintang Party committed suicide, and the Cabinet was split by its loyalty to Chiang and a desire to save what remained of a tottering Government by asking him to resign and letting the Vice-President take over.

On the twenty-third of November, Paoting fell to the Communists, and three days later, the entire Cabinet, led by the Premier, resigned. Chiang Kai-shek appointed a new Premier, but a new Cabinet could not be formed for many weeks.

The battle of Hsuehchow became a bloody tragedy. Reinforcements did not turn up to support the soldiers in battle in the city, and these latter became isolated as the Communists cut around from the rear. The fighting moved into the tip of Anhwei province. Hsuehchow was lost at last on the third of December, and the Government forces in retreat were ordered to defend the railroad line which led from Hsuehchow to Pangpu and the Huai River, and branched out there toward Nanking in one direction and into the heart of Anhwei in the other.

The exodus from Nanking had already begun. Riots broke out in the railway station and cars choked the highways leading out of the city, as all organizations with transportation facilities started to evacuate. A week later, the whole nation was put under curfew.

Wong Sankuo returned to Shanghai for the first time in weeks an exhausted man and a private citizen. When Chuli showed him a letter from Mung Kaiming, demanding five thousand American dollars for relinquishing all claim to his child, Wong Sankuo was not at all surprised.

"Five thousand dollars?" he said, sinking into a chair. He had not been given a chance to draw a breath. "Have we still got that much left?"

"What?"

"Maybe if we sold the house and furniture also, we can scrape together that much," Sankuo said. "The house may bring a thousand or so."

"A thousand or so!"

Chuli did not understand yet the extent of the economic and military disaster which had impelled her husband to resign along with the entire Cabinet.

"We will be lucky if we can find a buyer," Sankuo said. "Houses are up for sale everywhere."

"What are you talking about?" Chuli cried. "We are not selling the house? We are not going to pay him off?"

"No, we are leaving Shanghai as soon as possible," Sankuo said. "There is no more need for me to stay on here now that I no longer have a job."

Chuli was stunned.

"What about that dirty pig?" Chuli said.

"That is why we must move quickly," Sankuo said. "There is no telling what he will do if we do not move. But once out of Shanghai, we will be out of his reach, for so much power I think he has not, to follow us to Canton." He added, looking at Ahua, "You must wait no longer to go to Hong Kong. From Canton you must go straight to the Hsus."

Chuli blinked rapidly, thinking, calculating, planning. "What about Zan?" she said. Slowly, she was seeing her way. But it wasn't as if they had never moved before. Shanghai was their home, but in 1937, they moved inland, and in 1931, when the Japanese attacked the city, she and the children went to

Amoy. In 1926, she and Sankuo fled from Peiping and a year later from Hankow.

"He can join us in Canton if the situation becomes worse in Peiping," Sankuo said. He had thought about everything before he came back. "But it is quite likely also that Chiang will step down and be succeeded by Li. And if some sort of coalition government is formed we need not fear for Zan."

"But we should go ahead?" Chuli asked. She had to make sure.

"Once Li heads the Government, we will not be able to count on co-operation from the municipal authorities any more. And if there is to be any compromise with the Communists, I want to be on the right side of the country."

Chuli thought quickly, her face twitching. Yes, she had a good feeling about this move. It was right.

"When do we move?" she asked.

"As soon as we can be ready. There is no time to lose."

"Can we get transportation?"

"I think I can still bring my *influence* to bear and *pull* a few *strings*," Sankuo said acidly and deliberately.

"All right," Chuli said, just like that. It was decided, a move like this, in a few minutes.

Once the decision was made, Chuli set it in motion at once. She let Glass go. Yuma would go with the family, and the cook stay until the last day. For their loyalty, they would be amply rewarded, Chuli assured them. The chauffeur and car belonged to the Ministry of Education. Sankuo had not brought them back.

Yes, Chuli thought. Let's go! This was better than sitting here waiting for Mung Kaiming's next move. This was right.

They would take only a few clothes, and leave everything else behind. But everything must be packed, the porcelain, the books, the paintings and calligraphy, the carpets, the curtains. No, they were not going to sell this house, this seat of their living, for a paltry thousand dollars. Values changed. Things were only as valuable as the importance people placed on them.

When they came back, who knows when, they might find these things worth many times what they were worth now.

They packed, and they acted fast. But outwardly, there was no sign at all of the activities going on inside the house. No one must be able to tell, walking past the house, that the family was making preparations to leave. Thank heaven for trustworthy servants at this time. Chuli knew in her soul what troubled times were like. She had lived through them all too many times. Mung Kaiming was not going to get them, be sure of that! Chuli thought. She moved with fury. She moved with decision.

Ahua was horrified. She followed Chuli and Sankuo from room to room. "You mean you are leaving this behind? Aren't you even taking that? And what about that bowl? It was presented to you as a wedding gift, wasn't it? And what about the kitchen things?"

What goes on? What goes on? her eyes begged.

Chuli replied crisply, "Can you do nothing but hang about and ask questions?"

And only then did Ahua understand. It was not that they did not care. But later, later they would think about it all, not now.

In her fury, Chuli even forgot a little her immediate sorrow for Sima. Later, when she had time, she would weep, and think about all the things she was leaving behind, and about how foolish she had been to imagine that this time they were going to stay in Shanghai for long. She put as much as she could into wooden cases. She must leave the house in order. When she came back, everything must be as it was before. But how many times could a person move in a lifetime? The years moved. Sankuo and she grew old.

"Now, don't meddle in my dining room," she said to her husband. "Leave all this china to me."

"I think I am capable of packing china as well as anybody," Sankuo answered contritely.

Sankuo produced the tickets. Three days later, Ahua was awake before the sky was light. Then all this had been a night-

mare after all, from which she was on the verge of awakening. At the end of all this there would be Weilin, and happiness would be waiting for her.

She helped Yuma to carry the baggage downstairs. The cook began to bolt the windows and the back door. The rooms were spick-and-span, and the kitchen was empty. The last of the rice and foodstuffs had been given away, and the stove was cleaned of ashes after breakfast. At five-thirty, the car they had ordered arrived. The suitcases—just one each—were put in the back and on top.

They climbed in: first Ahua, then Yuma with the baby, Sankuo in front, and Chuli last of all. She must make sure that everything had been made secure. And then she got in, and they rode in silence swiftly out of the garden. They had not even written to Zan. They would write when they arrived in Canton.

Chuli sat on the edge of the seat, her back straight like a ramrod, and her eyes round. She held her breath. She dared not say a word. Soon they would no longer be at the mercy of that dirty pig. There was no other word, and she didn't care if it did sound coarse. Dirty pig he was, and dirty pig whose child they were saving from himself. She leaned forward and tapped the driver's shoulder. He drove a little faster, and they slid out of the residential streets, into a city full of chaos and waste and corruption and confusion.

At the station, there was pandemonium. Early though they were, others were earlier. The crowd was enormous—some had slept in the station all night, waiting for space on the train. Luggage was piled mountain high on the platforms, and families stood together in knots, watching over their possessions and looking at other families suspiciously.

Chuli took the baby from Yuma's arms. She walked ahead of them, and when she saw the train, her heart raced.

Wong Sankuo was thrilled. People were fleeing. This was just like the Japanese invasion. For none of them was this the first or final move. Outward circumstances changed. Only people did not alter. In time, ideas are discarded, even facts can be questioned, theories demolished and replaced by others. But

that part of man's nature which is not dependent upon externals never changes and is indestructible: our pity, our joys and aspirations, our capacity for delight, our susceptibility to beauty and pain; these are the eternal values which bind us all together, the everlasting reality which not all the abuse and threats man can heap upon man can destroy, or alter by a mite.

Wong Sankuo had to have the baggage brought through to the platform and this took a little time, so he lagged a little behind. Then he bought a newspaper, and read the news that Peiping was in siege.

It happened by accident. Li Tsung-jen's negotiators had been making progress in Peiping. They had successfully dinned into the ears of the commander of the northern forces, General Fu Tso-yi, the idea that defense of the city was pointless, and at last, a secret understanding had been reached between them and the Communists. The agreement called for an armistice and the formation of a coalition government to end the civil war. The Communists drove a hard bargain. On the military side, it meant the withdrawal of General Fu's troops from vital passes of the Great Wall, and peaceful entry of the Communist army into Hopei and the North China plain. Peiping would be evacuated and left an open city.

This agreement was in the act of being carried out when a shipload of mechanical transport, artillery, and munitions arrived in Tientsin. The agreement was not yet signed. General Fu was determined not to let the arms fall into Communist hands, so he delayed the signing until the arms could be unloaded and sent up to Peiping by rail. He slowed down his retreat and postponed the evacuation.

The Communist commander Lin Piao was not long in learning of the arrival of the shipment of arms and came to the conclusion that Fu must be tempted by the arrival of new arms, and had changed his mind about the agreement. He decided to strike.

On the night of December twelfth, Lin Piao moved his troops around westward of Peiping in a wide turning movement,

carried out by one of those long marches at which the Communists excelled. Early in the morning of the next day, his troops took Fengtai, a railway junction a few miles outside the city, and captured the six trainloads of armaments. They overran Fu's headquarters in the western suburb of the city, and General Fu retired within the walled city of Peiping with seventy thousand men. Peiping found itself surrounded on all sides by Communists.

Chuli waved excitedly from the platform when she saw her husband coming through. "We're here! Over here!" she shouted.

Wong Sankuo walked up to her, his face leaden. Without a word, he showed her the headlines.

When Chuli looked up from the newspaper, she said, "I'm not going." A jet of steam emitted from the train. People were crowding them toward it.

"Chuli," Sankuo said softly. "We were going without Zan anyway."

"Yes, but that was when we thought he could come to us," she said. "Not in siege, with the Communists between us."

"But supposing we are caught here. The Communists may cross the Yangtze now and overrun Shanghai. Then what will happen?"

"If we are caught here, then let us be caught here together," Chuli said. She spoke softly, but from her manner Sankuo knew that her mind was made up, her decision final. "I am not going and leave Zan behind trapped in Peiping. If you want to go, you all go. Leave me here. I want to wait for Zan."

"And what about Mung Kaiming?" Sankuo asked.

"I'm an old woman. I'm not afraid of him. You go, Sankuo, and take Ahua and the baby and Yuma. I'm staying. Go on, why don't you? Get on the train."

She looked at everyone with calm, soft eyes. "Go on. Get going. Here, Yuma, take this baby and get on the train. When you arrive in Canton, write me and let me know."

The servant did not move. Chuli turned to Ahua and said, "Ahua, get on board. From Canton you can get a plane for

Hong Kong and join the Hsu family. That is best for you. You have no need to stay."

Ahua could not move. It crossed her mind briefly that she might not see Weilin again for a long time—perhaps never again at all—if she did not get on the train now, ahead of the rest of the family. But that was impossible. That could not happen to her, not *her*, Ahua, for whom life was unique and blessed with every kind of happiness! Things like that don't happen to Ahua. After *this* was over she would join Weilin in that other world which had nothing to do with this situation here and now.

"I don't want to go," she said.

Sankuo spoke. "With you, Ahua, the situation is different. I think you must go now. Go to Canton, we have friends there, and get in touch with the Hsus at once. You can be out of this and in Hong Kong in two or three days."

She looked at them all, not understanding why they were making her go when they were staying. "But I cannot go!" she cried.

"Why not?" Sankuo urged.

"Why, Zan is in siege!" she said, as if it were absurd that he should ask why.

Chuli then turned to her husband, and she spoke rudely. "What about you?" she jeered, with a toss of her head. "You take the baby then and get on the train, Wong Sankuo." She was on fire. "It's leaving any minute."

"All right then, let's go home." Sankuo said.

He picked up some of the suitcases and Ahua and Yuma picked up the rest. They walked, Chuli leading, with the baby in her arms, out of the railway station, like a band of crazy people. They found another taxi and told the driver where to go. Then no one spoke.

When they came back, Sankuo said, "The siege may be lifted at any time. A few planes will be flying out of Peiping too. We should not reopen the house or unpack our bags. We should be ready to move the moment Zan arrives."

"I can be ready within ten minutes of Zan's arrival," Chuli said. She did not look at him, and she did not want him to talk about it. She picked up her suitcase and walked heavily upstairs.

Then Sankuo went out again, and she did not ask him where he was going. She called to Yuma, "Go to market and buy a little meat and some vegetables." She did not tell her how much, enough for how many meals. She did not want to talk about it herself. She added, "But buy up all the powdered or condensed milk you can find. They are getting scarce. They have stopped delivering fresh milk."

Then she opened the window of her bedroom which looked out on the street and stood there for a long time. The lines on her face softened, and she bit her lower lip. She gazed dumbly out of the window and began to count the seconds until her son should be home again.

Sankuo went to the airport. A plane arrived from Peiping that afternoon, carrying an overload of passengers, who had paid more than ten gold bars each for their seats. When Sankuo heard this, he knew that Zan would not be flying out. One more plane arrived the next day, and on the day after, another. And that was all.

Now Tientsin as well as Peiping was surrounded, and there was little hope that by military force alone the cities would be freed.

Then they pinned all their hopes on a negotiated truce. If Li Tsung-jen could come to an agreement of some sort with the Communists, the cities would be thrown open. There would be freedom of movement under a coalition government, and Zan would come back. And this could happen at any time. Rumors flew thick in Shanghai and Nanking.

Communication between Peiping and the outside world came to a complete stop.

Chuli grew calmer and quieter every day, until she no longer spoke unless spoken to. She stood by the window in the bedroom most of the day and looked out on the street, as if by focusing her eyes there she could bring her son back to her

sooner, as if she shortened the distance between them by the walk from the street to the house. At night, she lay awake until one, and two, and three o'clock. At the rustle of the wind and the sound of footsteps outside, she got out of bed to look into the darkness outside. She imagined she heard someone walking up to the house. Often she was sure it was Zan. Sometimes she imagined it was Mung Kaiming.

A few days later, Sankuo said, "I think we must find another servant. Yuma cannot market and cook and wash and do the housework alone."

Chuli glanced about the empty rooms. All the carpets were still rolled and only a few pieces of furniture were being used. Dust lay in balls around the corners. "Very well," she said quietly. She was too calm.

Yuma set out to Zawkatu, and came back with Bee, of all people.

"I went along to my cousin's, and who do you think I see, squatting on her haunches as plain as you please?" said the little old woman, and pointed excitedly at Bee, her discovery.

Sankuo asked Bee, "Do you mean all this time you never found any work?"

The woman nodded with a glad expression on her face. "I went to work for three days once, but was dismissed, because I was clumsy and stupid." She was wearing a padded jacket and black trousers, and seemed, of all things, to have put on some weight. Her hands were purplish with the raw weather. "I was sitting there this morning when who do you think I see coming along but Older Sister Yu, as bright as you please." She had to give her version of the remarkable meeting. "'Why Bee!' she said. Her eyes nearly dropped out. 'Is it really you? I cannot believe my eyes!' 'Don't you see me sitting here?' I said. And she told me that the Master was looking for someone to help in the house, and said I could come and see if I would be wanted."

The narrow, homely face was red with excitement. She had lost her old fear of him. Sankuo said, "Well, I don't know whether the Mistress will want you to stay."

"It isn't easy to find help," Yuma said. "And this one, clumsy

as she is, is strong and can do the rough work. She hasn't that pair of big feet for nothing."

"I can do the work of two servants, sir," Bee said eagerly. And again, the pair looked at each other and were excited thinking about their meeting this morning.

Wong Sankuo went upstairs. Chuli was standing by the window. When he came in, she was startled.

"It's only me, Chuli," Sankuo said softly. "Yuma has found Bee in Zawkatu and brought her back."

"Very well," said Chuli, and turned around again and stared out of the window. "It's twelve days now," she said. "I was going to send his winter things up to him this month."

Sankuo gently touched her shoulder. She jumped as if he had hit her. Her eyes shrank from his gaze, and her face darkened and deepened. It was as if there was a mysterious soul in her she did not want Sankuo to reach. She wanted to be left alone.

## 30

THIS is a mistake which will soon be rectified, Zan thought at first. The whole thing happened by a fluke anyway. How can two million civilians and seventy thousand soldiers be besieged in this day of modern warfare?

"When I get out," he thought, "I'll remember this as a big joke."

The joke quickly lost its point. On the third day, the last plane flew out of the walled city, and all communication with the outside world ceased. The post office closed. Newspapers stopped coming out. The telephone lines were dead. Peiping was cut off from the outside world by its city wall, which was built by the Tartars thousands of years ago, a rectangle which measured fourteen miles long, sixty feet high, and at places forty

feet thick. Around it, long columns of thousands of Communist soldiers, artillery, cavalry, and mechanical transport waited. The Communists could easily have stormed the city if they wanted to, but they did not, because the outcome of the siege was sure; it could end in only one way.

The shortage of food, coal, water, and electric power was felt immediately. Nothing more came into the city except snow, and that fell in abundant quantities. Occasionally, the Communists fired shells, but only as a reminder that they were outside. From time to time, the soldiers within the city fired shells into the surrounding countryside, a token gesture. Neither side really needed to fight. It was only a question of time. No possibility of relief existed for those inside: the nearest Government forces were more than five hundred miles away in the Yangtze Valley and still retreating.

As for the negotiators, Fu Tso-yi inside the city wall was furious at what he believed to be Lin Piao's treachery. Lin felt that Fu could not be trusted. Between the two opposite commanders, no further communication was possible.

The siege dragged on.

Like the rest of the people in the besieged city, Zan hoped that a peaceful settlement would be reached between the Communists and Li. Government forces outside could not come to the aid of the city, and it staggered the imagination to think that Peiping might be surrendered to the Communists outright.

But as the siege dragged on, the outside world lost reality for them all. Only one idea still had any meaning for those inside. They must get out. They must not be allowed to suffocate here.

Zan thought about the past and the world outside, but it was as if those things never happened or existed at all. Illusion? Deception? Objectivity? All the words with which he had so much recourse before ceased to have meaning. All the ideologies and ideas and ideals with which he had struggled dissolved into nothing, like jellyfish out of water, leaving no substance. Only one idea retained meaning, and grew, the idea that he must live. Because he loved his family, he must not die. That was the only reason he had, the only excuse, even, for continuing to live.

I must get out and go back to the family, Zan thought. I wonder what is happening to them! In the sterility of this city, only one thing could grow. The roots of love took hold, and the necessity to live flowered. He thought of countless reasons why he had to get back to his family alive; they sprouted like clover after spring rain. He tried to imagine what his parents would be like if he never came back. He thought of his conversation with his father in the garden before he left, and was humiliated to remember himself as his father must have seen him. Have I disappointed him? I must go back and tell him I do understand him. I must make him happy for I love him so much and owe him so much. He felt dreadful that he should not have an opportunity to correct himself in his father's eyes again. Oh, he must not die! He remembered that Ahua said she would stay with his parents as long as they needed her. Then she must still be in Shanghai! All at once, the necessity to get out inflated his whole being and he thought he must burst out of these walls and fly out, and catch her before she left for Hong Kong. How could he not see her again, Ahua to whom he could give so much, and to whom he had so much he wanted to give now! There had lain dormant in him all this, all this, unknown to him, but which he could not now deny to himself if he were not to deny the necessity for continuing to live.

Was it true, he wondered, that as his father said our fate lies in our hands? Faced with crisis, he said, the man of character falls back upon himself and imposes his own identity on his actions and in embracing his identity, realizes himself. How could he apply this to the lives of all these people in siege? What concatenation of events forced them to share a common fate now? Was this the result of some great pattern they had been weaving these many years? It was true, then, no man could live alone, the decisions and actions of one were bound to affect thousands of others, even as his own life was now modified according to theirs. Like a mass of swarming bees, his father said, they would drag each other toward some common good or evil. How wonderfully clear and simple this was! How easy it was to understand now!

I must get out, Zan thought. It is vital that I live.

The siege dragged on. On New Year's Day Zan counted they had been inside twenty days. Was there still a world outside? What were the people doing out there? Had they forgotten completely that two million people were trapped here within these ancient walls?

### 31

SANKUO watched his wife worry. He knew how she worried. She worried with every pore in her skin and every nerve in her body and every blood cell. That was how she worried when Zan caught scarlet fever as a child, and that was how she worried when Sima had not been heard from, and that was how she worried when he was away on trips during the war. She did not speak if she could help it, as if it would distract her from worrying, and she must not let up. She must worry Zan home.

She took up her position by the bedroom window facing the street from the moment day broke until it was impossible to see, and broke off only when newspapers were delivered. She became an expert on the terrain of North China, and she understood the logistics of the fighting; she knew the names of the smallest hamlets surrounding Peiping and the names of the commanding officers of both sides, and she knew what kind of bargain the Communists were trying to strike with Li Tsung-jen, and tried to guess whether a negotiated truce was imminent.

On New Year's Day, Chiang expressed his wish for a peaceful settlement of the civil war and said that he was willing to step down from the head of Government if he stood in the way of this. Chuli was almost her old self again that morning. She made pig's knuckle soup and said, "Zan will be home any day now. At any moment the siege will be lifted."

But scarcely before she finished speaking, there was a disturbance in front of the house. Yuma ran in with the news that Mung Kaiming and his friends were trying to force their way in. A crowd was gathering outside, and Kaiming and his friends

were shouting abuse and demanding the surrender of the baby. After a few minutes, a stone crashed into an upstairs window.

Sankuo understood at once that there must have been a change of heart on the part of the police chief. If Chiang was going to step down from office, the changes that followed would affect all the officials in the large cities. Now he could no longer count on his loyalty and protection, and Kaiming had lost no time in finding this out. The whole country was in an uproar since Chiang made his speech.

When they heard people beating on the gate with sticks, Chuli said, "Let him in!" She was wild with the conviction that her son was coming home at any moment. This riot seemed to support her conviction, and she was almost thankful. "Tell him to come and get it!" she shouted.

"Auntie, what are you saying?" Ahua said. Her face drained of color.

"It's all right," Sankuo told her. "You go upstairs and lock yourself in with the baby. Don't be afraid. I'll handle him."

"I'll handle him," Chuli said. "Let *me* handle him!"

They were standing on the doorstep as Mung Kaiming walked in, alone. He was ugly to look at. He swaggered up to them, saying feverishly, "The day has come at last! You cannot hold my daughter by force. The people are outside."

"Stop the talk," Chuli cut in sternly before he finished. "How much do you want?" She spat the words at him. Her eyes did not shy away from his.

Kaiming was startled. He felt a sensation in his heart, a tremor of recognition. He had won, they were going to pay him. "I wrote to you that for a legal settlement, five thousand dollars," he said.

Chuli interrupted him again before he finished speaking. She knew she was dangling bait before him and so she had him in her power at last. She snatched it away again before he could nibble. She saw him flinch.

"I will give you twenty gold bars," she said coldly. "The rest, whatever you want, vases, silver, porcelain, lamps, or carpets, you are at liberty to remove. There is some rice in the kitchen too. Only don't you dare lay a finger on any of us!"

Her son was coming home. What use had she any more for all this? It was junk. It was junk.

Then Bee rushed out from the house, her face was like a red-hot poker and her eyes like live coals. "Mung Kaiming!" she screeched. "What are you doing to these good people!" and she started from the steps and raised her fists as if she were going to pummel him with a shower of blows. Chuli was surprised. She had forgotten her—

Kaiming wheeled around. At first he did not recognize her. That ugly crow from Fox Head Mountain? What was she doing here?

Bee was not aware that anything was going on. She began to shout; this was her moment. "I have accounts to settle with you, Mung Kaiming! Heaven be witness! Never did I think that after all my family did for you, since we took you in as an orphan and gave you food and shelter, that you'd grow up to be such a black-hearted fox! Better had let you starve to death right then and there! . . ."

Kaiming was confused. "Why you cheap little slut!" he said in the dialect of the mountain from which they came. He let loose a torrent of abuse at her, scolding, accusing in the way he used to, back in the days of Fox Head Mountain.

And then he stopped abruptly, as if somehow he had weakened his position by speaking in mountain dialect.

Then Bee stopped too.

Wong Sankuo had walked into the house and unlocked his desk and withdrawn from it a box containing the gold bars—all they had.

"Twenty gold bars is not five thousand dollars," Kaiming said thickly.

"You better vomit up what you stole from this family first, you vermin!" Bee burst out again.

"Bee, hold still!" Sankuo shouted crisply.

"All right, I have jewels," Chuli said.

And now it was her turn. She walked rapidly back into the house, and came back with her jewel case. "There are three

large diamonds in here and a few pieces of jade," she said. "Help yourself. Keep the box."

Her voice was high and polite. "Come with me, Bee," she said, and turned back into the house.

She went straight upstairs, and watched from the window. Kaiming left almost at once, the gate clanged shut and the crowd scattered, and she turned around and saw her husband and Ahua again.

"But how could you!" the girl was crying. She was different these days, her face had elongated, and the eyes were dark and deep. "How can we give in to him like this? It isn't *right!*"

Chuli's eyes grew cold. "We didn't give in," she said lightly, and a satirical smile came over her face which frightened them all. "Zan is coming home."

"Mung Kaiming! Black-hearted fox!" Bee interjected into the silence that followed.

"Go downstairs to the kitchen, Bee, where you belong," Chuli said in a cold, strange voice.

Only Sankuo understood. "You are tired, Chuli," he said. "Lie down for a little bit."

"No, I'm not tired," she said coldly. "Leave me alone. And take that baby out of my sight!"

## 32

FROM now on Chuli no longer stood by the window to watch for her son. She no longer read the newspapers. She no longer changed her underwear so often, or combed her hair so carefully. She no longer took any interest in little Ping. She no longer mentioned Zan, or even counted the days. Her hair turned gray. She seemed almost happy. To all who telephoned or pressed the doorbell, she cheerfully answered, "You want to see Minister Wong? You mean *Mister* Wong. He is Minister no longer." The

postman and collectors of bills smiled and sometimes praised her fine spirit. "That's right. It doesn't make any difference. Minister or Mister, it is all the same."

"They're having an Esther Williams Festival at the Roxy," she said. "Ahua, let's go."

"I'll go with you, Chuli," Sankuo said. They saw all the Esther Williams pictures, the program changed every two days.

The baby slept in Ahua's room now. Ahua had to get up several times a night to feed her, and often she could not go back to sleep again. She stood at the window and stared into the night. One ghostly star winked in the wintry horizon, and she wondered if Zan could see it too. She thought, "Zan! Zan! Please come back!" and tears filled her eyes. She knew that she seemed to miss Zan more than Weilin, but it seemed perfectly natural. Zan was in siege. Only when Zan came back could she live that happy life which awaited her in Hong Kong with Weilin. She remembered her happiness with him and her anguish when Weilin's father took him away from her, and she thought that their love for each other was something which could never be altered or taken away from her . . . the one sure thing which would never change. So all her emotions could be absorbed in the present, with these present conditions beyond which it seemed so hard to penetrate these days. Her hopes and spirits rose and fell with the way the news developed. She was the newspaper reader now. There was always hope; the situation was never completely hopeless. Now fighting was raging fiercely outside Tientsin. Now the possibility of a peaceful settlement seemed great. Everything affected her personally. There was a rumor that a North and South China, comprising separate regimes, might be set up. She beseeched her uncle for his opinions. Was it likely to happen?

"I don't know," Sankuo said. "I have no idea."

"But is there no way to find out, is there no way to be sure that Zan is coming back? Right must be right. He will come back, won't he?" she cried.

"I don't even know that," Sankuo said softly.

"But you must know! You must know!"

"I have faith. I believe he will come back. That is all."

"But is there nothing we can fall back on, Uncle? There must be something we can rely on!"

"We can rely on our bonds," Sankuo replied. "The bondage we have to our dreams, to our loves."

On the twelfth of January, the Communists opened attack on Tientsin with a sea of human beings who were fed into opposing artillery fire to absorb the shells and followed by regular Communist troops.

On the fourteenth of January, Mao Tse-tung announced his conditions for a peaceful settlement, which were tantamount to unconditional surrender for the Nationalist side. These were terms which no one on the Government side could accept, and all hope for an immediate truce seemed lost.

Two days later, Tientsin was lost to the Communists.

On the twenty-first of January, Chiang Kai-shek announced his retirement from the Presidency and was succeeded by Li Tsung-jen. Three days later, the Government announced its intended removal from Nanking to Canton.

Now the refugees flooded into Shanghai in torrents, and steady streams of wagons and wheelbarrows flowed into the countryside. Shanghai was turning itself inside out. To the railroad stations and steamers and airports flocked those who had desisted until now. Onto the street for sale went furniture, bedding, household utensils, and automobiles. The last days of Shanghai had come.

From Hong Kong, Wu Anson sent repeated telegrams: "IMPERATIVE AHUA LEAVE SHANGHAI." When he received no reply, a man from the China-Pacific Tea Firm appeared one day with a precious plane ticket.

Ahua met the man with Ping in her arms.

"Tell them that I cannot go," she said. "I am needed here."

"No," Sankuo said. "I think you should go, Ahua. You owe it to yourself to go now. You may not get another chance. I should never forgive myself if I let you refuse this precious plane

ticket. I appreciate your concern for us, but you are not involved as we are."

Ahua turned pale to the roots of her hair. "But I can't go!" she cried frantically. "Zan is in siegel How can I go without him? He must come back. I won't accept his not coming back, I cannot go without him! Don't make me!"

Something gave way within her as she spoke. Life might force a person to do strange things, but there was a time when a person must make a stand.

Then Sankuo understood that here was someone who shared with them completely the necessity for Zan to come back. Nothing else mattered. All plans for the future must be suspended until Zan should come back.

"All right, then, we won't make you go," he said softly.

The man from the tea company looked startled. After he left, Ahua began to shiver. She ran upstairs to her room and shut the door behind her. Was she staying on in Shanghai by choice then, and not because she could not help it?

## 33

ON THE thirty-first of January, fifty days after Peiping was surrounded, the siege was lifted. General Fu surrendered the city to the Communists outright.

On a day of swirling sandstorm, the Communist troops entered the city in battle array. The long columns of artillery, cavalry, infantry, and mechanical transport took all day to enter the city wall.

By nightfall, they had established themselves in the ancient seat of the Chinese Empire.

Zan was astonished to discover the extent of defeat the Government had suffered in these fifty days he had been cut off

from the world. In anticipation of his return to Shanghai, he had thought that even if the worst happened, and the city was surrendered to the Communists, he might still make his way to Tientsin, and from there leave on one of the foreign-owned steamships for Shanghai. Now he discovered that Tientsin had fallen also, and the railway track between Peiping and Tientsin was chopped to pieces. The last ship left Tientsin more than a month ago. Not only had Hsuehchow been lost, but Communist soldiers were converging around Pukow, just opposite the Yangtze River from Nanking. So Communist territory extended at least eight hundred miles from here to the very banks of the Yangtze River!

He learned quickly also that Chiang Kai-shek was no longer President, and that there had been a complete shift of Cabinet members since he was last in touch with the world.

The first thing he tried to do was to send a cable to his family telling them that he was alive. From the University where he had hibernated for more than a month, he walked to a telegraph office. A Communist party worker was sitting there.

"We accept no telegrams to Unliberated Areas," the man told him.

God! Was there no way to get news across to his family?

As he returned to his living quarters, he realized that he must lose no time in leaving Peiping. Today the Communists were still entering the city. Tomorrow they would have everything under control. Taking the straightest route south, traveling eight hundred miles through Communist territory, and then trying to cross the border where severe fighting was going on was out of the question. Leaving by sea was now also ruled out. Westward then. Communist territory to the west extended only to the border of Hopei or thereabouts. The important thing was getting out of Communist territory first. If he could get to Taiyuan, which was still in Government hands, he would be all right. Trains should still be running down to Sian from Taiyuan. And from Sian trains or buses would take him to Hankow or Chungking . . . Chungking, two thousand miles inland from the eastern coast!

So, he must try and reach Taiyuan, and to get there, he must take the train which would carry him north first, to Chang Chia Kou. He went to the railroad station and found out that trains were running to Chang Chia Kou. Somewhere between that city and Taiyuan lay the border, and from what he heard, not much fighting was going on on that side.

It was snowing when he came back to the University, and he saw in the light of dusk that the buildings had been draped with red flags and that a gigantic picture of Mao Tse-tung had been hung over the door of the central building. He hurried to his own quarters. Most of the faculty were in their rooms, putting away "reactionary" books in anticipation of the arrival of Communist cadres. How quickly people adapted themselves to new environments! Zan felt a slight flush rise in his cheeks.

He went to his room, and stood at the window, watching the columns of soldiers go through the street below. How am I going to get across the border? he thought. I need a pass. Incongruously, he saw also an electric sign blazon over the bank of the Hudson River which he had looked at from his room on Riverside Drive in Manhattan every night for four years. "Bake with Spry," it said. Am I really here in Communist territory? he thought unbelievably. This thought, just as incongruous as the other, made him feel as if he were a double self, a physical self which was trapped in Peiping and had been for about one and a half months, and an inner self, which could not stop making a wry running commentary on the other's absurd position.

Just then, someone knocked on the door. It could not be the cadres already, he thought. It was too soon even for them.

A middle-aged man smiled at him when he opened the door. He looked vaguely familiar, but Zan could not recall his name.

The man came in, smiling broadly. "Do you remember me? I am a friend of your father's. I am his good friend," he said.

It was someone who worked in the local department of the Ministry of Education, Zan remembered now. And still he did not remember his name.

"What can I do for you?" he asked cautiously. He shut the door of his room, and lit a cigarette.

"Do you wish to leave Peiping?" the man asked.

Zan looked at him suspiciously.

"The cadres arrive at the University in the morning," the man said. "You are Wong Sankuo's son. Wong Sankuo is black-listed by the Communists as a criminal."

"How can I leave Peiping?" Zan said.

"To leave Peiping you need a pass," the man said.

He stood up, and came to stand directly before Zan. From his pocket he produced a slip of paper. "This is a travel permit. Fill it in yourself."

Zan's eyes shot up at the man. "Why are you doing this for me?"

"I'm not doing this for you. You are doing it for me."

Then Zan understood. There were all sorts of ways a man could make money in these times. For instance, a man could sell out his troops, as the commander of the Mukden garrison did. Or he could go into the black market in Shanghai and sell airplane and steamship tickets to the South. Astute merchants made fortunes in buying secondhand clothes and furniture from refugees. This man sold travel passes. He must have been going round to the families of "war criminals" all day. Where he obtained the passes Zan could not guess. But if he had a list of the families of Cabinet members and were going through it systematically, it was not surprising that he had come to the son of Wong Sankuo.

"How much do you want?" Zan said.

"Half of what you have. I am a friend of your father's."

"Why only half?"

"You need the rest. I am your friend."

It was fantastic. But because the man was corrupt, and corruption had a ring of authenticity, Zan believed him.

After the man left, Zan sat down at his desk and stared at his travel permit. Name? Place of Birth? Occupation? Destination? Purpose of Journey?

He began to fill in the blanks, feeling as if at any moment someone would come in and stop him while he was doing it. His inner self kept ridiculing him. It struck him as being childish and distinctly unrealistic that he was called upon now to think of a false name to put down. Place of Birth? He wrote his real one. Occupation? Of course not a professor of Taitung University. Then what? Farmer? He was not yet completely insane. Of course not a student. What else did people do? Businessman? That wasn't so bad. He was a businessman. He had just been convinced that come whatever regime, there would always be businessmen.

Quickly, he put a few things into his suitcase. No books, clothes only. In fifteen minutes, he took his suitcase and sauntered out of the University, without saying good-bye to anyone, although many of his colleagues had been his friends for years.

Once out of sight of the University, he headed directly for the railway station. Everywhere there were soldiers waiting in great crowds to get on the trains.

Feeling as if nothing were real, Zan bought a ticket to Chang Chia Kou. He waited in the station until his train came, at five the next morning, and he boarded it. He found out that no fighting was going on between Chang Chia Kou and Taiyuan. Nobody knew exactly where the border was. On the train everyone was very quiet. The change was still too new. Except for a long-haired boy of about eighteen, who kept asking questions of the Communist soldiers, everyone minded his own business. Some women were carrying live chickens by their upturned feet. The men wore fur hats and padded gowns. As the train nosed out of Peiping, it became colder, and Zan kept his hands in his pockets and stamped his feet to keep them from getting numb.

Five hours later they arrived at Chang Chia Kou, and everyone was turned out of the train for inspection. Zan joined the line of passengers and moved slowly toward the Communist soldiers. He saw the red stars on the soldiers' uniforms and he saw them go through the pockets of every passenger and sometimes jerk a man out of line and shove him into a small office.

He tried to think of these soldiers as an enemy breed, people with unknown quantities, but it was difficult. They spoke the same tongue as he, and they were built like him, black-haired, thin-faced, wiry of frame. Again, the reassuring quality was the corruption he knew in human nature.

When his turn came, he produced his pass, sure that it was perfectly good because he had obtained it through corruption.

"Why are you leaving the Liberated Area?" the soldier asked him.

"I am going back to my family," he said. "I don't live in Peiping. My home is in Shanghai."

"What is your business?"

"I am in banking," he lied perfectly easily.

"Unbutton your jacket, then put up your hands."

While he did this, the soldier studied his pass. Then he searched him and finally came to his wrist watch. Quickly Zan undid the strap and handed it to him. "Do you wish to examine this?"

"I wish to detain it," the soldier replied. In one breath he cried, "Next!" and slipped the watch into his pocket.

After Zan passed the soldier, his feeling of relief was such that he had no reaction at all for a long while. "I wish to detain the wrist watch," the soldier said. He could only marvel at his choice of words. That fallible part of human nature established the balance in a crazy world.

He came out of the station. The streets were covered with thick frozen snow. He must have come about two hundred miles northwest of Peiping. Chang Chia Kou was on the edge of Mongolia. Simultaneously with this realization, he felt sharp needle stabs all over his body. It must be twenty or thirty degrees below freezing, he thought!

He ran into a small eating place opposite the station, and sat down close beside the fire. The boy brought him wheat cakes with garlic and looked at him curiously, and Zan realized that he was oddly dressed. Everyone was wearing fur jackets and fur hats and boots, and he decided to buy some after he ate. He thought he would try and go along the highway south until he

found the frontier and cross it. He already had his travel permit stamped. Perhaps in a few hours he would be over on the other side. From here to Taiyuan must be about four hundred miles, and the frontier could lie anywhere between. Now he had his travel permit stamped, the rest was up to him.

When he came out of the restaurant, he looked up and down the street. The houses were decked with red flags which were frozen, and a stray dog ran yelping up the street, leaving paw marks in the snow. He went up a little way on the street and bought a fur jacket and boots and a hat and a sack and then went back into the restaurant and filled it with bread and hard-boiled eggs and some cold meat. There must be hamlets on the way, he thought, where he could pass the night if he didn't come to the border within a few hours.

And then he headed in the direction of Taiyuan. The sky was steel gray, and there was not a sound to be heard except the crunching of his feet upon the ice. After awhile he began to wonder whether he was going in the right direction. Was this really the road to Taiyuan? He could not be sure now, but he realized that he must have decided that it was before he set out from Chang Chia Kou, when he was still in possession of all his faculties. I mustn't begin to doubt myself, he thought. Maybe tomorrow night I'll be actually in Shanghai. I hope Ahua's still there. I hope I'm not too late. His mother probably had a pot of pig's knuckle soup waiting for him. No matter what happened before and where he came from, her pig's knuckle soup was always the most important thing in the world when he came back. The inner logic of her pig's knuckle soup, so blissfully incommensurate with the rest of the world, but which established for them order in life! He wondered if he was going crazy. "Weilin has a beautiful soul," Ahua said. "A beautiful soul?" he said, and began to smile. She snatched her wedding picture back from his hands, and her face was red with anger. "He really does!"

## 34

IN THE beginning of March, Lin Piao's men began to stir up activities along the Peking-Hankow Railway again, after a brief lull during which Li Tsung-jen had ordered the capital moved back from Nanking and engaged the Communists in further truce talks.

Now the entire newly formed Cabinet resigned once more.

Wong Sankuo knew that they could not wait for Zan in Shanghai any longer. He might have been killed. More likely, he was alive, but unable to leave Peiping. In any case, since Peiping was thrown open to the Communists a month ago, they had not heard from him.

The decision to leave without his son was one of the most difficult Sankuo had to make in his life. It seemed grossly unfair that they should be going ahead to safety and liberty while Zan, who had just begun to live, should remain behind. But Sankuo was compelled, as always, to equate his wishes with the outside world. It seemed to him as if his life were spent often in nothing more than constantly trying to mend the estrangement between a wishful longing for all to be right, which was almost a weakness with him, and the actual world. Sometimes, as now, he felt it to be almost impossible.

He withdrew into himself. He felt an innate aloofness from all the world. His spirit longed to return to its original form. He thought of the clean, golden beaches of Quemoy and the island-studded sea. His soul longed for the punctilious cleanliness and scholarly atmosphere of his childhood home. He had been fed whole words and whole meanings as a child, good and evil, beauty and ugliness, life and death, right and wrong! How those words had spun in his imagination when he was a boy!

He came out of it, however. His mood was neither consummate sorrow nor total hopelessness. That seemed like the final insult.

He spoke to his wife and Ahua in his usual calm, collected mien. "We must lose no more time in going to Canton."

"What's in Canton?" Chuli asked drily. She, who was incapable of understanding the simplest joke, now possessed a wry talent for irony.

"Canton is safer," he said, summoning great strength.

Chuli shrugged. "Okay," she said in English.

"In any case, when Zan gets out, he can join us in Canton," he said.

Chuli looked as if he were maliciously trying to deceive her. "I may pretend to be simple-minded sometimes, but you don't fool me," she said craftily. "I'm pretty smart, up here." She tapped her head. "He isn't going to join us in Canton." She was the original pessimist, the voice of doom, the forecaster of evil tidings. It was safer that way. She would not be hurt later.

Ahua packed. Chuli refused to lift a finger. They must go by train. The planes and steamers were booked solid for months.

Already, winter was over, and next month would be April. Weilin had cabled to say that he was arriving in Hong Kong in the middle of April. Even if her aunt and uncle did not go now, Ahua could no longer stay, so she was glad that they were going together.

On the evening before their departure, Ahua was with her aunt, who lay in bed going through the pretense of trying to sleep. She dozed on and off, half an hour at a time, and kept predicting dire things to happen. "We'll never get on the train." "The baby will never survive." "What are we going to do about the house? Everything is going to be stolen, I know."

At last she really fell asleep, and Ahua went back to her own room and lay down, but she did not close her eyes. She felt wide awake. "How awful everything is," she thought. "How utterly unpleasant and undesirable! I wish that it were not so. Why must we go without Zan? Why did it have to be this way? I don't want it to be this way. Why can't everyone be happy?" There used to be a secret voice in her which said, "It's all right."

I'm old Ahua. Nothing will happen to me which I really dislike, because I'm me." But that voice was still now. She could not will Sima to life again, nor will Zan out of Peiping simply because she was Kim Ahua, the unique one. No miracles were going to happen, and there would be no compensations in any other form because Sima was dead and Zan was gone. She simply had to accept it, and she did not like it at all. "I am no longer me," she thought. "I am so unhappy and I wish things weren't this way, because I don't like them and yet I can't change them. I dislike everything so! I dislike myself, even, and I used to love me!"

She had the feeling that she was going to live for a long, long time. She knew that she was not going to die young. The bulk of her life lay ahead, in this dreadful, uninteresting way, something completely different from the life she had imagined before. Then she thought that she might be with Weilin again soon, and it seemed indecent that she should have that to look forward to, while her aunt and uncle might have to face a great tragedy, that of Zan's death, which she had refused to consider before. She was seized by a great sense of reality. The world unfurled itself before her, people died, people were born, people separated, and people disappeared, all in a perfectly ordinary way, and she was no exception. Finally, she dozed off to sleep without realizing it.

A little later, she awoke with a start. There was a scratching noise downstairs. She listened. Thieves? Dogs? There was a distinct scratching noise.

Suddenly, she jumped up and flew downstairs. She ran into the garden and withdrew the bolt in the front gate and opened it.

He was there, like a ghost, looking so different that his very nature seemed altered, and yet it was he, Zan, standing before her. And as soon as she recognized that it was he, although perhaps only the ghost of himself, it was as if all that she had ruled dead earlier in the night had come to life again. There sprang up in her again all the hopes that she had tried to deny herself, all the happiness in her being that she had had to choke off. All

that she strove to accept earlier need not have to be then! She threw her arms around him and put her cheek against his and held him with all her might.

"Oh, Zan!" she sobbed. "I thought you were dead! I thought you were dead! I told myself at last that you were never going to come. We were going to leave without you, and I didn't want it to be so! I didn't want it that way! I wanted you to come back!"

He held her in his arms and kissed her very hard, and there overflowed from him a rush of life, a feeling almost of exaltation.

"You didn't go to Hong Kong!"

"I was waiting for you!"

The clean, cold night wind blew at them, and he realized that she was wearing only pajamas and in her bare feet. He opened his jacket and folded her into it.

After awhile, they became aware again of others. Suddenly Ahua broke free from him and ran screaming into the house.

"He's back! Zan's come back! Wake up! Auntie! Uncle! It's Zan!"

Sankuo had got up. He stood at the stairs and saw in the semi-darkness his son approaching. He said suspiciously, "Zan? Is it you?"

"Yes, Father. It's me," Zan said. He felt embarrassed and strange.

"Zan," Sankuo said. "We were leaving in the morning for Canton." It seemed hard to think of what else to say. He pushed his son gently into the bedroom.

Chuli was sitting up in bed, ghostly in the darkness, her gray hair framing her face, and strange eyes looking at him.

"Mama," Zan said, and went up to her slowly. "I'm back."

He took her icy cold hand, and sat down beside her.

But Chuli looked at him as if she did not recognize him. She was calm and beyond approach. Her eyes were mean-looking, grotesque in the moonlight. Her hand shrank back from his grasp. She seemed frightened.

"No," she said. "Don't try to fool me. This isn't Zan."

"But it is, Mama. I'm back. Feel me. Don't you recognize your own son any more?"

And still, the cold, shrewd eyes looked very clever.

Sankuo turned on the light, and then they saw him and they stared at him. Everything about him was different, the clothes he wore, the way his hair fell over his forehead, his stubby beard, his bleeding lips, and the sunken glistening eyes, shining like stars in his dirty face.

But Chuli recognized him, and as soon as she knew that it was he, she raised her hand and gave him a sharp slap across the cheek. "You bad son!" she cried.

And after she slapped him, she began to pummel him everywhere, as if to punish him and to see at the same time if he were all there, and at last, she drew him to her breast as if he were a little boy and patted him on the shoulder and began to cry.

And then, just as abruptly, she stopped crying. She was talking. "Ahua! Is there anything to eat in the house? Take him downstairs and feed him. My goodness, it is almost light. Zan, you came just in time. We are moving. We waited for you until we could not wait any more. Sankuo, you go down too and eat a decent breakfast." She was out of bed. She was taking over. She shoved them out of the room. "We have to hurry. We have to get moving. It's almost five. We'll let the baby sleep until the last moment. . . ."

Downstairs, Yuma and Bee had already started the stove going, and when Zan came down, the two women rushed in to tell him what a fright he gave them, and how he had come just in time. They put porridge on the table and scrambled eggs and hot beancurd milk and stood hovering nearby, listening.

"I took the train from Sian to Chungking," said Zan to his father, who sat down with him. "From Chungking I took a plane."

"How did you get to Sian?" Sankuo asked. He looked at his son. The sun was rising and he saw lines on his young son's face

which were not there before, around the mouth and around the eyes. To see wrinkles on the face of one's offspring. Was this not one of the great moments in a man's life?

"I thought the quickest way to leave Communist territory was by the west," Zan said as he ate. "It was impossible to come down south along the Tientsin-Pukow railway. So I took a train—it was still running—up to Chang Chia Kou and from there walked most of the way across the border to Taiyuan."

"How did you cross the border?"

"I bought a pass." A smile curled around his lips, a rueful smile, a new wise smile. "A friend of yours sold it to me."

"A friend of mine?"

"He worked in the Department of Education."

"You still have any money left?"

"Only a few dollars." They looked at each other, father to son, man to man.

All at once they turned around, for Chuli had come downstairs, and was standing in the foyer with a crazy light in her eyes. "I was right. Sankuo said we should go to Canton as early as December, but I stood firm and wouldn't leave until Zan came back," she boasted. "Sankuo is stupid. I am smart."

She had scolded, and slapped, and now she was boasting, standing there in her loose dress and with her gray hair combed now neatly and smoothly, as if she had not let it go disheveled for weeks. She was standing in that empty foyer with the carpet rolled up in newspapers and moth balls rolling on the floor. "It takes me," she said, thumping her own chest. "I am no namby-pamby woman who has no will. Come a crisis, I always stand firm. . . ."

They did not answer her this time. They stared at their rice bowls. She did not even come into the dining room to take another look at her son. She was too busy now. She had a mission to perform. In the foyer, she commanded, "*Mister Wong Sankuo*. Don't dawdle over your breakfast. Go upstairs and carry me down the other bags."

She spoke as if they were adversaries and she alone had held the fort here in Shanghai.

Nevertheless, Sankuo took his time. He said, deliberately and severely, "Wait until I finish my breakfast," and the way he said it, Chuli did not answer back. She stood waiting in the empty foyer, her shoulders squared and her eyes very sharp.

Sankuo took his time. He ignored her and was slower than necessary to finish his breakfast. This was something between husband and wife, and Zan dared not take sides. It was on his account his mother stood there in her crazy triumph and insulted his father. In her incongruity, she had been saved from many a death, in her foolishness and absurdity, wisdom and touching simplicity, she outwitted fate time and time again.

But what must his father feel, watching her do a tightrope walk over a void?

At last Sankuo finished eating. "It seems to me," he said, almost maliciously, "Chuli, you win every time."

Zan looked at Ahua now. She was standing across the table from him. He smiled at her, and she smiled back a smile which illuminated her face like the sun. It was all there, her relief that he was back, her wish for everyone to be happy, her desire for all to be right in the world, her lack of malice, her pure and simple spirit. He shivered to think that anyone might hurt her and that he had brought the happiness to her face because of his return.

From the foyer came his parents' voices, snapping at each other. "I think I can still count up to five without making a mistake," his father said. "You said five pieces. One, two, three, four, five."

"And what about the handbag? Where's the handbag?"

"It's right behind you."

"Then let's go! Let's go!"

Then Chuli came into the dining room and said accusingly, "Are you finished in here? Ahua, hurry up! You aren't dressed yet!"

She herself was dressed, oh yes! She had powdered her face and combed her hair and drawn her two crazy tails of eyebrows across her face. So now she could not wait to leave.

Without stopping she strode into the kitchen to see about

Yuma and Bee. "Are you ready in here? What? Not yet? What are we waiting for?"

"Yes, what are we waiting for?" mimicked Sankuo in a high voice from the foyer. Now it was his turn to be satirical.

An hour later, they actually set out in two hired cars.

"This time we're going so far they can't catch us," Chuli boasted.

"Don't be so cocky," Sankuo reproved. "Kim Yek-chiong's daughter was well known for being too conceited. That's why nobody would marry her until I came along."

"That's right," Chuli said. "We Kims are a conceited lot. You Wongs from Quemoy aren't half as proud as we are."

"That's right," Sankuo snapped. "We have more sense."

They were quarreling. They had earned that privilege. Their son had come home.

## 35

THE cars had to stop before they came to the railway station. Hundreds of people and mountains of baggage and furniture blocked the road. People were cooking on small stoves on the street. Rolls of bedding were spread on the ground. They were not a bedraggled crowd, but well-dressed people like the Wongs themselves.

Zan walked into the road. A few people looked up at him with contempt in their faces for the newcomer, and knowing smiles, anticipating the satisfaction of answering the foolish questions he was bound to ask.

"Are you all waiting for trains to the South?"

"I've been waiting here for three days and three nights."

"Are the trains running regularly?"

"They are running. That's all."

"See that gate over there? Every time a train comes in, they unlock the gate, and as many people as possible crowd in."

"When is the next train due?"

"Don't know."

"When was the last train?"

"Last train pulled in midnight last night."

They spoke like people of an upper class to him who had no standing in the society of the street.

When Zan came back to his family, cars and rickshaws and pedicabs had already pulled up behind them, and people were carrying their baggage to the middle of the road.

"There's going to be a long wait," he said.

"I can wait," Chuli said.

She was also carrying her baggage from the car, and Yuma and Bee followed suit. Chuli was anxious not to lose their place in the crowd.

Always ready to conform to the discipline of the majority, Sankuo thought. No leader of fashion, she, but a good follower of the crowd. He looked at her crazily and walked off to verify for himself the information Zan gave, which seemed hardly necessary. When he came back, Chuli had settled right down in the middle of the road, and was sitting on one of the suitcases, and giving Ping her hot water. Yuma squatted beside her, putting the cork back in the thermos. Bee held the blanket. The sun came out now, and it was not too cold. He looked at his wife, camper, worrier-of-son-home, gatherer of motherless children, maker of nourishing soup, crazy, sane, wise, simple, proud, humble, pessimistic, optimistic, stubborn, passionate, young, old, mercenary, generous, doubting Thomas, religious, disciplined, absurd. A long time ago, when they had come together again for the first time after she had had a miscarriage, she had suddenly drawn herself up on the bed and raised her hand like a policeman directing traffic. "Halt!" she had cried, just as he was reaching a climax, and forthwith introduced him to a contraceptive and delivered a lecture on birth control. He had not known whether to laugh or to despair.

He walked away again. It upset him to look at her.

There must have been close to a thousand people on the street. Behind the fence there were hundreds more. Vendors

of bread and tea were doing very good business. Through the bars of the fence people with outstretched arms waved money at them.

It was convivial. It was lively. It was made for Chuli. Sankuo walked all around the station. He could not sit still. But he had to come back to the family. Every time he came back, the crowd had increased behind them, and he understood that they were gaining status in the society of the street, and Chuli was already looking at newcomers with disrespect, and speaking with the intelligence of the street.

So Sankuo settled down too. How long were they going to wait? That didn't bother Chuli now. This was the only way out, wasn't it? You couldn't go by plane, you couldn't go by ship. You could always squeeze on a train.

During midmorning, a train arrived from the North. Several hundred passengers who looked more like refugees than those camped on the road poured from the station, and everyone moved up several feet. When they settled down again, Chuli was proud.

She became conversational, and behaved almost as if she were enjoying herself. She spoke to her son rationally for the first time. She looked him all over and said, "Go buy a pair of new shoes, Zan. And take off your jacket. I packed all your winter clothes." She unlocked one of the suitcases and took out an old coat of his, and several old sweaters and a pair of trousers, and gave them to him.

"You want me to change here?" he said.

"Go across the street and get a haircut, Zan," she said. "And while you're there, wash some of the dirt from your neck."

"Chuli, you're crazy," Sankuo said.

"And buy yourself some warm socks. Don't wander too far away. But we are safe. We are still a long way from the gate. And when you come back, we'll have lunch."

"Lunch?"

"Yes. I saw a nice clean place just around the corner."

When Zan came back, they had not moved. Chuli said when

she saw him, "See that handsome son of mine coming along? Let's go and eat. I fancy some chicken for lunch."

"Chuli, you're crazy," Sankuo said.

"You needn't come if you don't want to," she said.

She rose to her feet and linked her arm through Zan's and swaggered up the street.

The small eating places near the station were doing a twenty-four hour business. Every restaurant was choked full of people, and they could not make the steamed buns and dispense the hot tea fast enough. Chuli went on and on, shaking her head at the cheaper places and finally found one which she liked.

"What do you fancy?" she asked her son as she sat down with an elegant air. "Hey, waiter! Come on!"

They sat down and did not interfere with her.

"Would you like some stewed pork, Zan? We can have a leg of pork if you like. And what kind of fish do you have in this place?"

"Anything at all, Mother," Zan said uncomfortably.

"What about shrimp? A dish of scrambled eggs with shrimp. That is quick and easy."

"All right."

"I fancy a dish of cold chicken myself, nice and clean, and not too greasy."

"Chuli, that's enough," Sankuo said.

"What's the matter? Can't I have a dish of chicken when I fancy it? Can't we afford a dish of chicken? And we must have a jug of wine. A small jug of Hua Tiao."

"To hell with it," Sankuo said. "Let's have a large jug of Hua Tiao."

Chuli's eyes softened. She said derisively, "Now he finally realizes his son has come home." She was as playful as a kitten.

"Let her order," Zan said softly.

"That's right," Chuli said. "I need my son to stand up for me against you, old fellow."

Then she said with a very formal air, "Both physically and mentally, Zan, you gave us a big fright." She swallowed her wine. "Both financially and spiritually, we suffered a great deal."

"And both strategically and logistically, you came at the right time," Sankuo said with tears in his voice.

When they came out of the restaurant, the sun had disappeared. Bee and Yuma got up and handed the baby to Ahua, and went off to eat.

"Country melon," Yuma said, "come with me. Without me you'll get lost."

"Yes, Older Sister Yu. Take me by the hand."

They did not move again that day, and when it grew dark, it turned chilly and a wind started up. Those who had been there the night before acted with experience and unrolled their bedding and spread it on the ground. The newcomers watched like novices. All the hotels nearby were full, people were sleeping in the lounges and corridors. The eating places were packed with people who intended to spend the night.

Bee was the first to untie her bedding roll. She offered it to Chuli, who refused. She produced a blanket from one of the suitcases and wrapped it around the baby and herself. Everyone else was settling down on the street. Ahua sat down close beside her aunt, and leaned against a suitcase. She pulled her overcoat over her legs.

Rain began to fall, a few drops at first, then quickly and steadily. The people on the street stirred. First they held blankets over their heads, and some of them ran to the sides of the street and stood with their backs against the walls. Others squeezed into the already packed shops. The rest remained in the middle of the road, with nowhere to go, amidst the abandoned stoves and bedding and luggage.

Puddles formed on the road and little streams of water rushed around the suitcases and furniture. Rain beat on the blankets which people held over their heads and soaked through reed mats, and a few people from the middle of the road started to leave. Some families disappeared from the road altogether, dragging their baggage with them.

At midnight someone saw the white steam of a train rise

behind the dark curtain of rain, and with a cry of "A train! A train!" everyone swooped toward the gate, those who wanted to and those who did not want to rush for it. There was no choice. Everyone pushed. Children stumbled and were picked up, and suitcases were picked up and then dropped. Those nearest the gate fled behind it like rabbits and others climbed the fence. When it was over, and the gates were closed once more, some families discovered that they had been separated, and screamed for each other through the iron fence. Some saw that latecomers had got into the station while they had been sitting in the shops because of the rain. Now the rain did not matter. Everyone decided to get on the next train. People crowded up against the gate and waved to their relatives to come and join them and bring their luggage too.

Chuli found herself standing very near the gate. When she saw her husband she waved to him excitedly. "We're next!" she cried.

Sankuo shook his head, and beckoned her. In turn she shook her head and refused to come. Then he went up to her reluctantly and said, "I just bought a car."

"What do you mean?"

"A Morris Minor. Twenty dollars. Get in, it's dry."

The car was parked very near the gate. Sankuo had bought it from some people who had fled into the station when the gates opened. He didn't even have the car key. But it was a shelter for the night. The baby was screaming in Yuma's arms and the rain came down harder now. Bee had lost her bedding. So Chuli nodded. The family made their way to the little black car, and Chuli pushed Yuma and the baby in first. Then she got in herself and pulled Ahua in. "You go in front, Bee," she said. Wong Sankuo climbed in behind the driver's seat. Chuli shouted to her son—"Get in!"

"Where?" and he started to smile. The rain streamed down his face.

"In the car!" she ordered.

He said through the window, "Look, Mother, I'll see where some of our baggage is."

"What's the matter with Zan?" Chuli screamed. "Why doesn't he come in? What's he smiling at?"

"At you."

"At me!"

"How many people do you think this car can hold?"

A little later, Zan came back with several of their suitcases and bundles.

"The oilcloth! The oilcloth!" Yuma shouted. They all started to shout at him. Finally he understood that around one of the bundles there was a piece of oilcloth. He untied it and spilled the contents through the window into the front seat of the car, and put the oilcloth over his head, and stood stooping by the door and said smiling, "Are you all comfortable in there?"

His mother did not understand. "How can we be comfortable in here? It's too crowded."

"Sankuo, you go out there after awhile, and let Zan come in," Chuli said.

"All right, Chuli, you're the Empress Dowager," Sankuo said.

A few hours later, Chuli woke up. She found her bearings at once. She looked at her son standing in the rain and leaned forward in the car and cried, "Sankuo! Sankuo, wake up!"

Her husband did not move. His head had fallen backward on the seat and he was breathing heavily through his mouth. She felt his forehead and it was burning.

She rolled down the window and stuck her head into the rain and shouted. "Zan! Your father."

He came to the window. "Let him sleep, Mother," he said.

"Your father is feverish," Chuli said. "Look at him! It isn't natural for him to sleep like this! I'm going to wake him up!"

"No, Ma, let him sleep."

He took her hand through the window, and patted it.

"Didn't any more trains come in last night, or did we sleep through it?"

"They said the trains are being held up. No one knows why."

In a few moments, day broke, and the street came to life. More than a thousand people had arrived during the night, and now

hundreds more came. A newspaper boy made his way through the street, and Zan bought a paper. "The Communists have issued an ultimatum to Li demanding total surrender or else they are going to cross the Yangtze River," he said. "Li has twelve days in which to reply."

Chuli took one look at the dark crowd of people who had arrived behind them, and said, "Zan, I want you to go and buy things. A bottle of brandy. And oranges, as many as you can. And buy some thermos bottles and fill them up with hot water. We need that for the baby as well as for the old man. You may have to go a little way for them, but we must take a chance."

She opened her handbag and produced some real silver dollars. Then she ordered everyone except Sankuo out of the car. It had stopped raining, but the clouds hung black and low and it seemed like only a temporary respite.

"Bee, take an empty bag, and go and buy all the buns and hard-boiled eggs and cold meat you can. Spare no money. And fruit, anything you can find."

She bent her head and shoulders back into the car, and began to rearrange and repack.

"I'd better go with her," Yuma said. "This stupid thing doesn't know how to bargain."

"All right, go with her. Give the baby to Ahua."

Then Chuli went to work. The tins of powdered milk were essential. Blankets they needed. But no change of clothes. She made Ahua change into a dry, warm woolen dress, put on a heavy sweater and her coat over it. She changed, too, and the wet clothes she rolled in a bundle and put on one side of the car. From the suitcases she produced a pile of baby clothes, and this she put with the pile of things that she meant to keep. Everything else, shoes, extra suits, shirts, all that must go. She packed all that she considered essential into two suitcases. Then she covered Sankuo with a blanket.

When Bee and Yuma came back, Yuma said, "Black-hearted wolves! They are charging three times the ordinary price for buns."

"Did you get them?"

Yuma pointed to the bulging handbag.

"Hold on to it with your life," she said. "See all those people in back of us? If we don't get out of Shanghai soon, we're not going to have anything to eat."

"The people with food wagons have set up all along the back streets, ma'am," said Yuma. "They are selling noodles and fried rice as fast as they can make it, and making a fortune at it."

"The next time the gate opens, we are going to get inside," Chuli said.

The family listened to her.

"Bee, you be responsible for the food bag. Hang on to it with your life. Ahua, the baby's powdered milk. Yuma, you be responsible for the baby. Zan and I will carry the suitcases. There are just two."

"What about the rest?"

"We are not going to be able to get them on the train."

"I don't know what I'm going to do with the baby," Yuma said. "She stinks."

"Use the diapers and then throw them away," Chuli said. "In the daytime, hold her out from time to time, she can go bare-bottom as long as she is wrapped in a blanket. Don't let her drink too much, but keep her warm."

"That's just it, ma'am," Yuma said. "We've run out of diapers."

"Then use underwear," Chuli said. "We have no more use for them anyway."

Zan came back with a bottle of brandy and oranges and several thermos bottles an hour later. "I took a taxi all the way to Nanking Road for these," he said.

Chuli looked at him, frightened. "You went back into Nanking Road? Is that what took you so long?"

"I knew you would wait for me, Ma," he said with a smile. "I also bought quinine and aspirin."

He looked in the little car. It had been swept clean and everything was tidy. The mess of diapers had been thrown out in the gutter. The suitcases were neatly stacked in the front seat. Now

Chuli climbed back inside the car and uncorked the bottle of brandy and gave it to her husband.

"Drink this, old man."

"I don't want it."

"You're going to have it. Take a big swallow, and then I'm going to give you four aspirins."

"Yes, ma'am," Sankuo said.

"The rest of you go and have your breakfast at the wagons Yuma said were set up. Go by turns, and eat your fill, but don't wander off too far."

"But we just bought all these buns," Bee said.

"That's for later," Chuli said. "Don't worry about those buns. They'll be eaten."

"You'd better do what the chief says," Sankuo said from the front of the car. "When she says eat, eat."

"Old man, you just keep on drinking that brandy and shut up," Chuli said. "The rest of you, keep away from the old man. He's full of germs. Don't want you to come down with flu one by one."

"What about you?"

"I'm immune to Sankuo's germs."

The car was a rabbit warren, and the mother rabbit stayed put. Chuli peeled oranges and gave them to Sankuo wedge by wedge. A little color rose to his cheeks after the brandy.

"You must eat something yourself," he said.

"Don't worry about me. I'm eating," she said, and took a big bite out of a bun, which was still warm.

No train came in all morning. In the afternoon, the clouds piled up again and rain came down in gusty showers. The roads were packed solid with people as far as they could see, and no one left. Zan held out the oilcloth over himself and Ahua, and the servants jumped back into the car with the baby.

"Are you afraid, Zan?" Ahua said.

"Of what?"

"Of everything. Why does your mother keep calling your father 'old man'?"

"I don't know."

"They never used to bicker this way."

"They are not bickering. They are making love."

She looked at him calmly. "Do you think we'll ever get on a train?" she said.

"I think so," he said with a smile. She studied his thin, rude face, and the way his hairline came to a widow's peak at the forehead and the patch behind his ears which was not as dark as the rest of his face had become.

"What will happen if we don't get out before the Communists cross the river?"

"They may not cross the river as easily as all that," he said.

"I am frightened," she said. "Everything changes so quickly. It is like a dream. Look at all these people. What are they all doing? Where are they all going?"

"They're all going to live, that's all. You have to keep right on living."

"It doesn't make sense," she said. "It's like a dream."

He let the oilcloth drop and it hung down to their knees. He held her very close. It was dark inside, and the rain rattled upon the cloth and she felt very warm and soft.

"Zan, don't!" she said.

"You're not dreaming," he said. "You're awake."

She pushed herself away from him. "No, Zan, no, no, no!" she said.

He kissed her until she was out of breath and began to breathe through his lips.

When he could see her again he saw that she was in tears.

"I cannot think any more," she said softly. She was looking again at the people on the street. Over everything water danced. The rain came down harder now, it swirled into the gutters and then overflowed. People were standing in pools of water, and yet they did not move. There was no question of letting the rain drive them away.

"It's a senseless world," she said.

The late editions carried more alarming news. Li Tsung-jen

counterproposed to Mao that a cease-fire should be effected first, the terms of settlement to be agreed upon later. Mao answered that there would be no cease-fire until Li surrendered.

"Oh, Zan, I'm frightened," she said. He put his arms around her and this time she did not resist. It was as if she had been carried by the rain into a world in which there was no right and no wrong, nothing normal and abnormal.

Chuli called them to the car at noon and gave them hot tea from the thermos bottle. The food wagons had sold out and folded up, and the eating places dispensed only hot water now.

"How is Father?" Zan asked.

"He's drunk," she said proudly.

"That's good."

"You two come inside for awhile," Chuli said. "I can stand."

"No, Mother, you stay where you are."

Chuli handed the bottle of brandy to her son. It was only half full. They went back to the fence, and under the oilcloth they ate the eggs and drank the brandy. They did not talk much. The oilcloth gave off a strong smell, and the brandy burned in their stomachs.

Later the rain let up for a few moments and the street glittered with water. Chuli made Ahua come in the car and Bee went out to stand with Zan and the rain started promptly again.

Chuli considered themselves lucky. It was dry in the car.

## 36

Just after it darkened that evening, Zan heard a sound, pitter-patter, quite distinct from the rain. It was like the faint ticking of a clock. "Listen!" he said to Ahua.

The pitter-patter became louder. They walked over to the car and Zan said again, "Listen!"

Chuli's muscles stiffened. She cocked her ear. "Yes!" she whispered.

In the car she said, "Let's be ready. Quietly now. Remember, everyone stick together."

First Chuli moved out of the car. Sankuo came out also, then Bee. Now the sound of the train was growing louder. A few other people heard it too, and began to stir.

"Give me the baby," Sankuo said. "You can carry the hot-water bottles."

From the corner of his eye, he saw the rush of people coming toward them. "Quickly!" he said.

With a great roar, everyone surged forward.

"Everyone stay together!" Chuli shrieked. Yuma did not have time to get out. One foot was still in the car when people came crushing past her. They carried her along toward the gate. She did not know how she got there. People climbed the fence and others were pinned against it and could not move. They rushed through to the platform without buying tickets. People were trampled on. People were lost. Baggage was torn from hands, and skin torn from bones.

People climbed on board. Some broke windows and climbed in. Some families linked arms and pulled each other forward.

Before the train had stopped five minutes, it pulled out of the station again, without warning. People fell into the tracks. The gate outside had been shut again, and people lay moaning on the ground. Some were seriously injured. Others were hysterical. Police were fighting people back with sticks. Families which had been separated begged to have the gates opened again.

As he came out of the car Wong Sankuo and the baby were carried backward into the station without having a chance to turn around. Chuli and Ahua were inside. Bee was there, her eyes excited and triumphant, the food bag in tow. They looked around.

They saw Yuma on the ground. She had fainted dead away. Zan was standing beside her. They counted. Everyone was inside.

From nowhere, suddenly another train appeared, completely

empty. Those who heard it whirled around, not believing their ears and saw it pull into the station. The people moved quickly now, and cautiously. Zan picked Yuma up in his arms, and they went on the train. The gate outside was not opened this time until those inside were all on board. Few outside knew that a new train had arrived, for they were not expecting it.

As quickly as the new train was filled, it pulled out of the station again. Wong Sankuo sat beside his wife, and handed the bawling baby back to her. Chuli sat rigid, not believing it. She pushed her feet hard on the floor, and clasped the baby tightly to her. Her lips were compressed. She did not speak. She looked from person to person, counting, seeing if they were all there, and she looked out the window and saw electric lights moving swiftly past in the driving rain, and she almost felt like crying, but she did not do so.

Wong Sankuo looked at his watch. "Seven o'clock," he said, and they could tell that he was calculating the time.

"We're not there yet," Chuli said, afraid to talk about it.

She took stock of what they had left in the way of baggage. Her handbag with the money in it was on the train, and the food bag, and two tins of powdered milk and two thermos bottles, and a bag of baby clothes. That was all. But they had been lucky. She thought, "As we go south it will be warmer."

Then Chuli saw Yuma.

"I think she's coming back to consciousness," Ahua said. "Her foot has been wrenched right around."

"Put her leg up on the seat," Chuli said.

The little woman gave a piercing scream when they touched her, but they managed to bring her bad leg up on the seat, and she lay weeping and moaning. The ankle was swelling up, and the foot was lying limply sideways.

Suddenly, Chuli thrust the baby into Ahua's arms, took hold of Yuma's foot and wrenched it back sharply and quickly. The woman shrieked and her face went green.

"It was dislocated, that's all," Chuli said. "We must bind it now."

"She sets bones, too," Sankuo said. They all looked at her with terror at what she had done.

Chuli took from the baby's bag a pair of pajama trousers which were going to be used as diapers, and ripped it and wound it around the ankle. Yuma cried out loud and then fainted dead away again.

"It had to be done. It was beginning to swell up," Chuli said, as if an explanation were required of her. Beads of perspiration stood on her upper lip. "I've seen people do it like that at home in Amoy." She sat down beside the little woman, patted her hand, awakened her, and then coaxed her into sleep again.

And then everyone was still, so she became still too. The motion of the train swayed her, and she leaned back on the seat and put her head back.

All of a sudden, she allowed herself to think about Canton. She had never been there, but it was a large modern city, not like the hinterland places they had to go to during the war.

"Thank God we are all together," she thought. "I pray we arrive soon, and find a place to live. Those two, Ahua and Zan, have to get into some dry clothes, and the old man must not catch pneumonia." She looked pitifully at the baby in her arms, and a knot of anger burned in her chest. "Look at this child," she thought, "she is beginning even to look a little like that dirty pig, and not like Sima. Where's your father, baby? I bet he doesn't care!" and she felt sick with herself, and sick with everything, almost inhuman.

And because she was feeling like this, she held the baby even closer. To admit the truth, Ping hadn't given them much trouble at all. She was as good as gold. Strong peasant stock! "A person can't afford to think too much," she said to console herself. "A person has to keep right on going." She sighed. "I almost had no time to think about Sima even these last weeks. I don't know why I am this way. It used to be Sima, Sima, Sima, and even in grieving I felt as if I still had a little of her. Now I can't even think back that far any more."

And then she saw Sankuo looking at her.

"Everything will be all right when we are in Canton," he said.

"Are you feeling better now, Sankuo?" she asked. "You don't feel any pain in your chest or anything, do you?"

"I'm all right, chief," he said.

She made a grunting sound. But she knew that he was going to be all right, and a great load dropped from her mind.

All night the train bore through the wet and the dark, and when morning came, they were in Kiangsi province.

Wong Sankuo tugged at Bee's sleeve. "Look, do you know this part of the country?"

"How's that?"

"It's your province. We're in Kiangsi. We should be coming to Lake Poyang soon."

"Why, if that isn't true!" Bee said, although she did not understand.

"We should be in Nanchang soon."

"Why, if that isn't true!"

The sun came up and shone on the green plains and suddenly they realized that they had left the rain behind. Ahua and Zan were still dead with sleep, but Yuma woke up and vomited and then fell back on the seat again, whimpering like an injured animal.

The train came to Lake Poyang, and stopped at a little village. Chuli said, "Sankuo, go down and see if you can get these thermoses filled, and see what you can buy to eat."

But before anyone got off, an army officer came on the train and said, "We've commandeered this train. Everybody get off."

Through the windows, they saw the platform filling with troops.

"You can't do that," someone said. "We waited for this train for three days."

Other officers and soldiers came on board, and began to remove baggage from the aisle.

"Dirty pigs!" Chuli whispered, her face white with rage. "They can't do that to us."

"What is the matter with you, Chuli?" Sankuo whispered. "These are our soldiers."

"Dirty pigs," Chuli said again.

Yuma began to cry. "We'll have to carry her," Sankuo said.

"I'll do it, sir," Bee said. She swooped down and swept the shrieking woman off the seat. "Hang on to me, Older Sister Yu," she said.

And so they got off. Before their eyes the train filled with soldiers and pulled out of the station and disappeared back in the direction of Shanghai.

Everyone spilled out of the tiny station and walked aimlessly toward the lake, which came right up to the edge of the road. It was pretty countryside with rolling hills all around. Some people were washing their hands and faces in the water. Most began to wander up the road toward the village.

There seemed to be more people on the road than had gotten off the train. People were camped on both sides of it. Sankuo and Zan walked to the village and bought hot water from a tea shop. "How far is this place from the nearest big town?" Zan asked.

"About seventy miles from Nanchang," said the man behind the huge brick stove, filling the thermos bottles from a large brass kettle. The place was full, and strange-looking people milled on the street.

"Who are all these people camping on the roadside?" Zan asked.

"They've been pulling them off the trains," the man replied. "Others have been arriving at the lake from Wuhu, Kuling, Nanking."

Father and son looked at each other. "I think we are at the southern tip of Lake Poyang," Zan said. "The Yangtze River flows into its northern end."

They took the filled thermos bottles and bought some wheat cakes and walked back to the women. Several army trucks passed them in both directions on the road.

"The thing to do is get to Nanchang," Zan said. "Then get on another train to Canton."

When Chuli saw them come back, she looked up with a sul-

len face. She was sitting on the grass, her legs spread out, with the baby in her arms.

"We're about seventy miles from Nanchang," Sankuo said.

"Did you get the hot water?" she said in reply. She was not interested in geography. She began to fill the baby's bottle with the hot water, stirring up the powdered milk in it with a chopstick.

"Maybe we can get a ride on one of those trucks," Zan said.

Chuli kept on stirring the milk.

"I'm not going," she said.

"What?"

"I'm not going to Nanchang," she said.

"There probably won't be any trains going to Nanchang from here, Ma," Zan said. "They have been stopping all the trains and turning them back up North."

"I don't care," she said. "I'm not going to Nanchang. I've had enough of it. How long are we going to camp outside the railroad station this time?"

"But what are you going to do here?" Sankuo said. "There isn't a place to stay here."

"I don't want to talk about it any more," Chuli said, and she squirted some milk from the bottle in the crook of her elbow to test it, and then gave it to the baby.

Ahua looked around. Everywhere there were people, as far as the eye could see on the road. Some were stretched on the ground. She saw a well-dressed woman in a fur coat with five or six children, who were having a picnic under a tree. The family seemed to be well provided with food. She saw the woman opening a tin of sardines and making sandwiches, and mixing Ovaltine for the children. They had several pieces of luggage, too.

The woman in the fur coat saw Ahua looking at her, and came over and said, "Maybe I can help you. What is the matter with her?" She pointed to Yuma. "I have some medicine and things."

When they told her she had twisted her foot, she frowned. "Well, I have a bottle of aspirin, and codeine, if that will help."

She told one of the children to get the medicine from one of their suitcases.

"Where are you people going?" the woman asked.

"We're trying to go to Canton," Ahua said.

The woman raised her eyebrows and assumed a crooked expression on her face.

"Where are you going?" Zan asked.

"I'm going back to Shanghai."

They stared at her. "Back to Shanghai?"

"I've just come from Canton. I guess it doesn't make much difference which direction we go any more," said the woman, with a smile.

"What do you mean?" Zan said sharply.

"Oh, don't you know?" the woman said. "Li Tsung-jen's fled Nanking. The Reds have crossed the Yangtze at Tikang. Don't you see all those people pouring in from the lake? The Communists have started a great assault on Nanking."

"Where did you hear this?" Zan said. "We haven't heard."

"I came from Nanchang this morning," the woman said. "We came from Canton last week. Nowhere to live there. I decided to go back home to Shanghai. At least we have a house there. It's all the same now." She began to giggle.

"How did you come here from Nanchang?" Sankuo asked.

"We came by train and got pulled off, just like you," the woman said, still giggling. "It took us a week just to get inside the station. There must have been ten thousand people camping outside the station."

"It's like that too in Shanghai," Chuli said.

The woman got up and walked back to her children.

"What did I tell you?" Chuli said.

"I'm going to find out whether there are buses or trucks which will pick people up," Sankuo said.

Yuma continued to moan and weep.

"I'm not going," Chuli said again.

"What is the matter with you?"

"Didn't you hear her say what it was like in Nanchang?"

"Didn't you hear her say the Communists have crossed the

Yangtze?" Sankuo said angrily. "Don't you realize what that means? This will be nothing compared to the crowds which will be arriving by nightfall."

"I'm not going," Chuli said again. "I don't want to talk about it any more."

The rest of the family were quiet. No one dared to make any suggestions, or take sides.

Then Sankuo did something which surprised them all. He started to strip off his clothes, and when he was down to his trousers, he leaped into the lake. They watched him, and no one said a word. Chuli's eyes were as still as stones. After a long while they saw his head come up far out in the lake.

"He's going to be sick swimming in this weather," Bee said. "And him with a cold, too."

"Let him," Chuli said.

"The lake is real deep," Bee said worriedly.

"He's old enough to look out for himself."

Half an hour later, Sankuo swam back. He rubbed himself hard and dressed and lay down under a tree and closed his eyes. Chuli did not even glance at him.

"What are we going to do now?" Zan asked of his father.

Sankuo kept his eyes closed. "I only carry out orders," he said. "You have to ask the chief."

Then Zan and Ahua walked into the village. Beyond the village, the refugees seemed to have increased since an hour ago, and new arrivals were spreading alarming news. Nanking was being evacuated.

"Your parents frighten me," Ahua said. "When your father jumped into the lake I almost fainted."

"He's a good swimmer," Zan said.

"Do you still have cigarettes?" Ahua said.

They stood on the road and lit cigarettes.

"Zan? What are we going to do if your mother refuses to go to Nanchang?"

"God knows."

She was shivering. She looked extremely pale, with dark circles under her eyes. When they came back, they sat down and no

one made a sound. They watched straggling families wander in both directions on the road. None of them seemed to know where to go. There were no buses to Nanchang, and the army trucks stopped for no one. The wind from the lake grew fresh in the afternoon, and Ahua felt it go through her damp clothes into her bones.

In midafternoon, Bee suddenly stood up and made a slow turning circle, shielding her eyes from the sun and screwing up her face.

"She's crazy," Ahua said.

"*Omitabah!*" Bee cried out. She pointed into the distance toward the south. "Look at that! Look at that!"

"What?"

"*Omitabah!* If that isn't Fox Head Mountain over there! See those ears sticking out? That's the fox's ears. I've been here all day and I didn't know it."

They saw a mountain in the distance which vaguely resembled the shape of a fox's head in outline.

"Why, that's no more than a short day's walk from here!" Bee said.

Slowly, Chuli said, "Good, Bee."

Bee looked at her.

"I don't know why you shouldn't go back," Chuli said enviously. "Do you have a place to stay there?"

"Why, I have a place to stay if I want," Bee said. She looked at their miserable faces.

"Then you should go," Chuli said. "It's better for you to go."

"Back to Fox Head?" Bee said with great wonder.

"Why not?"

Bee dug her toes into the ground, and the flush of excitement on her face faded away.

"I don't want to go back to the mountain," she said.

"Why not? It's the best way," Chuli said miserably. "We're not taking you anywhere."

"I want to stay with you," Bee said.

"But what for?"

"It's lonely in the mountain," she said. "And it's poor. From year end to year end hardly a soul ever comes up from either side."

They were silent for a few moments.

Then Zan said, "Either side of the mountain? What's on the other side of the mountain?"

"There's a town by the river on the other side," Bee said. "Folks from the mountain go down at harvest time to trade there."

"What river is that?" Zan said. "What is it called?"

"Kan River."

"Kan River?" Zan and his father looked at each other.

"Are you sure?"

"Nobody ever called it anything else."

"If it's the Kan River it runs almost directly to the border of Kwangtung province," Zan said.

Now Chuli stirred. Her eyes grew sharp. "Are you sure that's the Kan River, Bee?"

She did not understand. "Why, of course it's the Kan River," Bee said in astonishment.

"How far is it from Fox Head Mountain?"

"No more than a day's walk."

"Have you ever been there? Have you ever been to the Kan River?"

"Yes, ma'am."

"Are there any means of transportation from the mountain to the river?" Zan said.

"What's that?"

"How do folks take their harvest down when they want to go to the river?"

"Why, folks go on foot, sir."

"But are there carts, wagons?"

"Oh, yes, sir. Folks can't carry all the harvest down themselves. We use donkey carts, sir, and mules."

"If that's the Kan River there should be steamers," Sankuo said.

At last Chuli said, "How do we get up on Fox Head?"

"No more than a long walk, ma'am," Bee said again.

"Yuma can't walk."

Slowly, the idea began to penetrate Bee's mind. They were going to her mountain! Bright color rushed to her face, and they tried not to stare too hard at her.

"Why, if you're thinking of coming up my mountain, I could carry Yuma!" she cried. She was smiling from ear to ear. "I could carry her on my back!"

And still they hesitated.

"Why, I carried firewood up and down that mountain more times than I can remember, sir!" she said to Sankuo. "Older Sister Yu weighs no more than half a bag of charcoal!" Her heart was beating very fast. Her face lit up like a lantern.

Ahua turned stunned eyes toward the mountain. It lay in the murky distance, purple against the sky.

"I'll pay, Bee," Chuli said. "When we get up to Fox Head, I'm willing to pay. Will folks let us stay a night in their houses?"

"Why, houses in the mountains are no more than huts, ma'am," Bee said wildly. It would not happen after all. "They're not good enough for you, ma'am."

"Huts will do," Chuli said. She got up.

Without another word, she picked up the thermos bottles and food bag. When Bee understood, she squatted to the ground, and hoisted Yuma on to her back with a flick of her wrists. She stood up again and tucked her palms under the little woman's behind.

## 37

GRADUALLY, they left the people and the village behind, and started to climb. Once they left the plain they looked back and could see all sorts of boats streaming toward the banks of Lake Poyang. The road seemed black with people. Already, fires were being started, although the sun had not yet set.

"Nanking's lost," Sankuo said grimly. "I'm sure of it. The army must be in full retreat!"

"If Nanking goes, how long can Canton hold out?" Zan said.

"You mean the whole country, the whole country will go, too?" Ahua said unbelievably.

"Come on, let's go. There's no time to lose," Chuli said.

But Ahua remained watching for a few more moments, and a dreadful feeling overcame her. Everything she once knew and believed in was fading away. It was like the last night on earth.

About two hours later, they came to a fork in the road, and Bee cried out, "Why, this is where I made a turn to the right the other times I came down this mountain! Imagine that!"

She went ahead to lead the way. This was her mountain, and she must not fail them. She kept reassuring them about the distance, and that the villagers would put them up for the night.

Little by little, they climbed into Fox Head, and when the sun set, they had left the neatly cultivated rice paddies at the skirt of the mountain behind, and were in the woods. A brook coursed down on one side of the road amidst a profusion of blossoms and plants, and the thickets buzzed with bees, crickets, and cicadas.

Then darkness swallowed the mountain in one gulp, and the insects' buzzing sounded louder, and the brook sounded like a roaring cascade.

Bee set her friend down and ran into the thickets and splashed water on her face. She was panting. Chuli and Sankuo were lagging a little behind. Ahua ran into the thickets also, and sank down to the ground. A wave of fatigue swept over her. She kicked off her shoes and put her feet into the icy stream, and fell asleep almost at once. The voices of the others retreated and retreated.

A little later, Sankuo and Chuli came up.

"Sit down and rest, Mother," Zan said. He could not see their faces.

"No, thanks!" his mother said girlishly. "We rested a few minutes before!"

"This isn't really a steep climb," his father said. "It's only a long climb."

Their voices sounded young and gay, almost like the voices of people out for a night's stroll, and he wondered at their strength.

"It's not far now," Bee said, and picked Yuma up from the road again.

Zan stumbled into the thickets to find Ahua. The bushes pricked him and he tripped and fell to his knees beside the rushing stream. The night air was filled with a strange sighing, and the smell of fir trees. He lifted Ahua's feet from the cold stream and wiped them on his trousers. He bent over and heard her even breathing and felt the warmth of her body and smelled the perspiration on her neck.

"Ahua?" he whispered, and put his hands upon hers which he found upturned over her head. He lay down over her and kissed her cheeks and her neck and her lips.

She awoke with a start, and at first she could hear nothing except the rushing of the water. And then she cried out, "Don't! Zan!" but her voice was lost in the sighing air. She felt his head upon her breast and she tried to push him away, but he was upon her and he whispered, "Don't be afraid! Hold me tight! Hold me tight!"

"Have mercy upon me!" she cried out at last. "I shall die!"

"No, you shall not die," he said. "I love you and you shall not die!"

And then it was as if all the grief and horror of these months had come together and penetrated her, and she threw her arms around his neck to keep from falling.

"Don't cry, beloved," he whispered. "Don't be afraid."

"It doesn't make sense," she said softly.

It was so dark that she was conscious only of sounds and feeling. She tightened her hold upon his body. A dreadful melancholy rose in her even as they were joined together. "Is it possible that this is me?" she wondered, but no strength within her seemed able to overcome what was happening.

At last he helped her to her feet, and they walked again up

the road and did not speak. The night was like a curtain through which they could walk without end. The mountain was like a prison which held her captive. The road wound in and out of the woods, and the stars were white and sharp. The sighing air spoke to them as if in some mystic communion and beckoned and beckoned. Come in, come in, deeper and deeper, it said, and Ahua felt herself dissolve into the blackness.

At last they left the woods completely behind, and saw the figures of the family outlined against the sky. A bald curve appeared on the road, and after a few steps, there were roof tops and solitary trees.

Bee ran ahead. She pounded her fists on the door of the first house she came to.

"Open up! Open up! It's me, Bee! I've brought distinguished guests to Fox Head!" Her voice rang through the night, strident, important, and improbable. The door opened, and an old woman with a wizened face appeared, holding an oil lamp. Younger faces also came to the door. Bee stepped inside and disappeared and they heard her talking inside.

After a moment, Sankuo called, "Bee!"

She hurried outside. "Yes, sir?"

"Show me the river."

Bee walked on tiptoes now, with Yuma off her back. She hastened with him down the road and then stopped and pointed.

There, by the light of the stars, was indeed a river, shimmering like a silver ribbon in the valley below.

They divided, and someone with a coarse hand led Ahua over mud paths to a hut. By the pea-sized flame of the oil lamp, she saw two little girls sitting up in a bamboo bed, and an old man and a woman. They made the little girls give her a corner of their quilt, and told her to lie down on the bed with them, and asked her if there was anything she wanted. Ahua stared at the strange-looking woman for a moment, and then asked for a drink of water. She heard the woman go to the stove and pour some into a bowl, and soon she came back and proffered it to her. The

woman's hands were cracked and extremely bony. And then she blew out the light, and all became quiet and dark again. The little girls started to squirm and touch her with their horny toes. The old man shouted something in a voice which was thick with phlegm and the girls stopped giggling but kept their toes on her legs.

Everything was strange and bizarre, and there was a foul smell in the bed. Ahua seemed to feel that there were chickens under it. The old man coughed for some time, and then all became silent.

"Where am I?" Ahua thought. "What am I doing here? Who are these people with whom I am spending the night, and what do I have to do with them?"

Now that she was lying down, the mountain did not seem so threatening. All of a sudden, she found herself in Hangchow. The real Ahua was sitting under a weeping willow tree with Weilin, and the branches hung down to the ground in a perfect circle, so that it seemed they were in a green lace cage. Everything was glowing, the water and the leaves and the pebbles on the ground, and their faces looked perfectly green. Weilin and she were gazing deeply into each other's eyes, and then she picked up a tiny lizard and it crawled under his nylon shirt sleeve and out through the collar. Someone was raking the gravel in the garden and it made a lovely sound.

"Oh, how happy am I!" she had said voicelessly, and she had known then that it was real, and nothing was going to change it. Then everything else must be false, and she must only be dreaming that she was sleeping in a hut, with chickens under the bed. The walls of the hut retreated, the darkness gave way to a rapturously illuminated world in which she, Ahua, the most loyal, the most honest and steadfast of all people on earth, was the very center.

The next morning, Chuli was up with the rest of the villagers at dawn. A couple of sling chairs had been produced, and the villagers were going to carry Yuma and Chuli down. Some woman had made a poultice of medicinal herbs for Yuma's foot and

tied it with bamboo slats. It was the most exciting day in Fox Head in years.

"Carried me all the way up the mountain, did you, Bee?" Yuma said.

"You don't weigh more than a sack of charcoal," Bee said.

"I always knew that a pair of big feet were not good for nothing," Yuma said with a miserable smile on her face. Her ankle had swollen hideously.

Chuli opened her handbag. "This is for your trouble," she said, taking out some real silver dollars. The villagers thanked her, and then she wanted to leave. Only this morning did she see what Fox Head was like, and she did not like it at all. The villagers crowded around, the children stretched out lean and scraggly hands and touched her here and there. Her heart ached with dislike.

"Where are the others?" she called impatiently. "We have to move."

A woman came running from the fields. "It's the young lady, ma'am!" she cried. "She's taken sick!"

It was so dark in the hut that Chuli could only just see Ahua lying on the bamboo bed. Two little girls with snot on their faces were standing very close to her, staring. Chuli pushed them aside and bent down.

"Ahua?" she called.

"It's *me*, Ahua," the girl whispered, as if she must identify herself. Chuli's eyes grew large. She put her hand on the girl's forehead and felt it burning hot.

"She must have taken a chill when she put her feet in the stream, ma'am," Bee said, bending down and touching the girl also. A transformation had taken place in Bee overnight. She had become the most important person of Fox Head Mountain. She could not stop talking this morning.

Ahua shrank from her touch and looked up at them as if she did not know them. "How terribly depressing everything and everyone is!" she thought. Everything she saw was different from the luminous world in which she had fallen asleep the night before.

"Warm blankets, a quilt under the sling chair, and her head well wrapped up," Chuli said. "We must get her down the mountain to where there are at least doctors." She felt under the covers and discovered that Ahua's clothes were soaked through. She made them produce dry clothes and started to undress her.

Ahua shook her head and clutched her fingers tightly about her collar.

"I'll hold her arms, ma'am," Bee cried. "You undo the dress!"

And then her body did not seem like her own any more. They were dressing her in some sour-smelling old clothes. "You're making a mistake!" she wanted to cry out. "This isn't really me!" But she could not make herself speak.

"Be still now!" Chuli said, bending her face very close. How severe she looked! How unlovely and depressing everyone is! How loathesome they all are! Ahua thought. Why can't they leave me alone?

And then she stopped resisting, and closed her eyes. Only I am beautiful, she thought, and all the aura of her glowing world came back once more, with all the promise of happiness in store. She and Weilin were sitting in the rowboat in the middle of West Lake. The sun was slowly burning the morning mist away, and they were trailing their hands in the cool water, Weilin and she, and talking about immortality.

Chuli wiped her brow with her sleeve and walked out of the hut over the mud path and to the road. Her lips were puckered and she was mean-looking.

"Let's go! Let's go!" she began to shout.

Sankuo took her by the arm and they began to walk.

"How is she?" Zan said.

"I don't know," she replied, and looked darkly at her son. "I don't know what possessed me to keep the girl with me in Shanghai for so long. I should have made her go to Hong Kong where she belongs long ago, without waiting for you."

Zan looked at his mother's angry eyes. Was there anything

she did not know? "When Ahua goes to Hong Kong I'm going with her," he said simply. "I love her."

"You make me sick!" Chuli cried. She wanted to hit him. She wanted to explode.

Her son walked away to join the sling chair which was carrying Ahua down. She looked at him as if she hated him.

"Chuli, Chuli," Sankuo said. She was crying. "They are not strong when they are young. They are so easily hurt, so quickly wounded, like lilacs in spring, reaching out in every direction all at once."

"No, old people like us are tougher," she said. "It is better to be old."

They walked on and on. Overhead, the sky was as clear as glass, and all around them, the rolling hills were jade green. Halfway down the mountain they saw steamers on the Kan River. They had been so wise, Sankuo thought, cutting across the mountain. But he could not bear to speak about it, and they did not point the steamers out to each other.

"Let's keep going," Chuli said softly. "Let's keep right on going, Sankuo. I can't stop now. Let's keep right on going until we are in Hong Kong, too. Don't ask me to get up and go again once I stop."

## 38

WHEN Ahua opened her eyes again, they had arrived at the river. She heard them saying that the Communists were in the outskirts of Shanghai, and that Nanking and Hangchow had been lost. But it did not concern her.

They waited in the boat station all afternoon. They found out that steamers were running regularly to Kanchow City, very crowded, but not impossible to get on. Sankuo telegraphed to Canton for a car to meet them at Kanchow City.

It was a cool, clear day, and Ahua felt a little more clear-minded. When the sun set, lights appeared on the river and they looked very pretty. Over the rims of the hills the sky was satiny gray, and here and there, fishermen's lanterns glowed like fireflies in the dark.

Then the steamer arrived, and Zan carried her aboard, wrapped in her quilt. There was a single common cabin on board with rows of benches, and once more, people crowded all around, so that it seemed almost as if no one had any individual identity of his own. The women came on board dragging their children with them and the men came with bundles and baskets, the old and the young. And then the steamer started up, and gradually, the chatter stopped and the lights went out, so that nothing could be seen again. Ahua felt as if Zan were holding only her spiritless body, the real she was far, far away. From time to time, someone struck a match to light a cigarette, and there flared before her a crowded world of eyes, ears, noses, and mouths, from which those belonging to the people she knew could not be distinguished from those she did not know. And then the world flickered out. But it appeared again, full of faces, and a sad and crippled look about them made them seem all alike. It was as if something had a dreadful claim upon them all. She remembered that she was walking in the rain with Weilin on the night they promised to marry each other. They had been to the cabaret where the hostesses had rocklike faces, and they were walking in the wet streets. Everywhere behind the walls about them there were people whom they could not see, but who they knew were there, people who coughed and could not go to sleep, and people with recriminations in their hearts, people with mean faces and children who would grow up too smart, every one of whom never wondered what made them that way. It seemed that the walls had come down now. She was seeing the faces of these people, and they looked exactly as she and Weilin thought they would. And yet she understood now what had made them that way. There was some claim the world had upon them all, which was at the same time the cause of and the reason for the way they looked.

"I must tell Weilin this," she thought. "I must remember exactly what I am thinking and explain it all to him." She tried to remember it all again, but it was gone. She felt Zan tightening his hold upon her, holding her fast, and she fell asleep, feeling safe now, for the explanation which had just come to her, and was gone again.

The impression of her revelation lingered in her mind when Ahua woke up again, although she could not remember now what it was that had come to her understanding. Nothing was very clear now. She was conscious of motions and voices and strange places, and she felt powerless to control what was happening to her. She had a sense that she was quickly coming to the edge of this world now, and going over to the other. But every time she opened her eyes, she still saw her family around her. "I'm finished with them," she thought. "Why don't they deliver me over?" And she would close her eyes in disgust again. She found herself sitting in strange cars, lying in unfamiliar rooms, with always the same depressing faces hovering over her, looking at her anxiously. And she was always conscious of Zan, through whom she seemed to establish some sort of connection with these people. At the same time, he seemed like a shield, protecting her from the annoying sensations which she became extremely conscious of, jolts upon her body, irritable voices, strange sensations, which tried her sensibilities very much.

Ahua had pneumonia and was unconscious for three days after they arrived in Canton. The city was in turmoil. The streets were packed with refugees and soldiers, the whole country was collapsing like a house of cards. Acting President Li was in Kweilin and had to be begged to come back to the capital. The Cabinet resigned again.

They were staying in one room in a temporary Government hostel.

Once when Ahua regained consciousness again and found herself in a damp, half-dark, and crowded room, she awakened from an exultant dream. She had seen all the shimmering delights the future held in store for her with Weilin. He had come back

and told her about the wonderful and strange things he had seen abroad, and they were going abroad together again, the two of them, to rob the world of all its pleasures.

It was hard to believe that she was still here in this chilly room, lying in bed.

"Ahua, Weilin has cabled from Hong Kong," Chuli said. "He is waiting for you."

"Weilin? In Hong Kong?" Then she was really, really going to be with him again soon! "I must go to him at once!"

"Ahua, you are very ill," her uncle said. "You will go as soon as the doctor says it is safe for you to travel."

Restrictions again. She shook her head vehemently. "No, I must go to him at once!" she said sharply. "I cannot wait!" Tears filled her eyes. She was conscious of a burning head and aches everywhere, and a despondence came over her which was almost too much to bear.

Sankuo and his wife looked at each other. They were at the end of their tether.

"Oh, God!" Chuli said. "What are we going to do?"

Sankuo said gravely, "If she cannot wait, we must not wait."

"How are we all going to secure passage right away?"

"One seat. One seat on a plane I think I can manage," Sankuo said. "She must go first. The flight is only two hours. I will wire Weilin to have an ambulance meet the plane."

When Ahua heard this, a childish smile appeared on her face. She looked at them with shining, frightened eyes, as if she wanted them to reassure her again that what she heard was true. Seeing her, Zan sank to his knees beside the bed and grasped her hands.

"Ahua, can you want to go?" he said.

She saw tears in his eyes, and she smiled helplessly at him, as if to say, "I would like to stay, but you see, I cannot, when the other world awaits me, brimful of happiness." How could he ask such a question?

He leaned over and kissed her on the lips. The kiss was warm and sweet.

"Do you love me?" he said.

"Yes, of course I do," she said perfectly serenely. "But don't you see, it has nothing to do with what I am, where I belong, what I must do."

Sankuo pulled his son away from the bed.

"Let her go for now," he said. "Don't be afraid."

She imagined it. Or was it real? She had dreamed of it so many times before. Weilin was standing in the brilliant sunlight against the shimmering sea which reflected the sunlight, blue and gold. There seemed to be no one else about, only he, and he looked exactly like a picture of himself. He was wearing the suit and tie he wore when he left her at the airport in Shanghai. For a split second, she could not feel anything at all. Then it must be only a dream. Weilin came nearer and nearer, and she stretched out her arms and shut her eyes. "Oh, Weilin! Weilin! It's you!" she cried, and flung her arms around him. But strangely, all she could feel was his clothes; it was as if there were nothing, or nothing very significant, inside. It seemed almost as if she were embracing only herself, and that was nothing at all.

## 39

THE hotel was perched high upon a hill, overlooking the crescent bay with its clean, white sand and the sea. Everything about the place had an air of elegant repose, and it was not extremely crowded because it was the most expensive hotel in Hong Kong and situated away from the noise and bustle of the city. Bellboys in white starched uniforms stood on the carpeted steps of the veranda and occasionally ran down to open the doors of a sleek long car from which well-dressed guests in European and Chinese clothes arrived to dine on the veranda, where there were tables with beautiful linen and vases of flowers, or inside in the high-ceilinged lounge, where leather chairs surrounded

small tables, and where there was tea dancing in the afternoon.

It was lovelier than all the hotels Weilin had stayed in in Europe. Their room upstairs overlooked the sea, and there was a small balcony with fresh white paint, where later Ahua could sit and convalesce, and watch the sea changing colors.

He sat beside the bed and gazed at her. It was dreamy and quiet and peaceful. Music drifted softly into the room from downstairs. The sea lay calm as a mirror, deep blue and without a wrinkle. Not a breath of wind stirred the white curtains which hung at the windows. Occasionally, reflections from the chromium of cars fled past on the speckless white ceiling.

Weilin felt enchanted, intoxicated, almost overcome with relief. He almost wished that Ahua would sleep like this and never wake, and that nothing more need happen to them than the continuation to eternity of this soul-healing quiet, this peace, this dignity. He filled himself to the brim with it. It had been such a long, long time! And now all was over, and she was here!

At night, he lay down beside her and watched her in the dark until sleep overtook him. Staring at her sleeping face, he whispered into her ear, hoping that if she were dreaming, she might hear it as in a dream, "Ahua, Ahua, I love you so! I nearly died!" and bent over and lightly touched a few strands of her hair and kissed her face. Was it possible for him to love her so much? So much that it hurt him in the bowels? What is she dreaming about? What horrors has she experienced since I went away? He wished he could wake her, and tell her, "I'm here! It's all over! I'm here," but he did not. He fell back on his own pillow. Involuntarily, his brain began to operate, like a movie projector which was out of order. Images of his trip to Europe flashed past on the screen of his mind: his father's angry face, his father's false smile while talking to tea buyers, his father's shrewd face when he thought he was going to conclude a business deal to his advantage; rushing for airplanes and trains, cocktail parties, business conferences in London, hotel rooms, tea auctions. . . . Just as abruptly, the images stopped flashing and he realized that he was panting very hard. He listened to his heartbeats and tried to synchronize them with the beat

of the music which was floating into the room. How calm he felt now, after the stormy scenes he had with his father! Peace and quiet! This was heaven! Fragile dreams circled round and round the room. He put his fingers gently on her wrist and felt her pulse. Her heart was beating more slowly than his. He closed his eyes and tried to think of nothing.

Ahua slept deep and long.

The first time she opened her eyes and saw Weilin's face beside her bed, she remembered that this must be happiness and closed her eyes again with a smile.

And then she opened them again, and he was still beside her. He was reading. She looked at him for a long, long time.

The last recollection she had of their being together in a room was when she was lying in the hut on Fox Head Mountain, and that had been a dream. Dare she trust herself to awaken now? She remembered again the promised happiness of her reunion with Weilin, and her heart contracted with anticipation. She looked around at the room and could not recognize it, and felt herself sink into sleep again.

She awoke again, and now it seemed to be in the afternoon, and it was still in the same room. Weilin was still sitting beside her, but his eyes were closed and the book had slipped from his hands. At first, she thought, "Is he still here? Why is he always here whenever I open my eyes?" And then she looked at him with a little wonder and thought, "Who is this man who looks so much like Weilin that he could be his twin brother?" And then she remembered having seen him this morning, and it was as if she had forgotten something very important. "If it is indeed Weilin, then I must be very happy," she thought. But why must be? Why not am? There was a profound stillness everywhere, as if the question demanded an answer and no answer came. She could not understand it. "Isn't that strange?" she thought, and when she closed her eyes again, the Weilin in her head was more real than the one who was in the room. That Weilin was wearing his short-sleeved nylon shirt and a lizard was crawling up his arm.

And then she woke up again, and the sunlight was streaming in from the window, and the room was shining as if it were made of gold. This was more like her dream. He was no longer beside her. Then she saw him standing on the little balcony outside, and she felt a strange, uneasy twinge in her heart, as if it was all true then, and she was really here in Hong Kong with him again. She did not call him at once. Everything was so still, it was as if the world had been emptied of feeling. She did not remember it to be like this before.

Then she called him in a tremulous voice, "Weilin!" and he came in.

As he walked toward her, Ahua stared at him as if she had never seen him before. "Can this be Weilin?" she thought. "Is it really him? Is it possible that he is my husband and that we love each other passionately?" And again, there came a very strange pang in her heart, and she felt completely confused.

Now he was sitting on the bed, so near that she could touch him if she wanted to, and faintly perceive the subtle fragrance of the hair lotion he always used, and for a fraction of a moment, she grasped the reality of it and then it was gone again.

"Ahua?" he said. She saw the look in his eyes, fragile and naked and tender. She felt that something was expected of her, but she did not know what to say. Oh, I cannot remember! she thought frantically. It must be because I am still not well.

"Where are we?" she said then with great wonder.

"In Hong Kong. We are at Repulse Bay," he said timorously, as if afraid to scatter the illusion of her awakening.

She sat up a little and looked out the window. The air was warm and heady, and the scene before her was like a picture post card, too green, too blue. The sea lay between the cliffs, many-layered and many times turquoise, shot through with speckles of sunlight.

"Did you meet me at the airport?" she asked slowly.

"Don't you remember?" he said with a tender smile. It spread from his lips and made little crinkles between his eyes, sad and touching, the way it used to be.

And then she seemed to recall stretching out her arms in expectation of some great infinite thing which had eluded her when she embraced it.

"I met you," Weilin said. "You were in the hospital for three days, and then they said you could come here and rest, and we have been here for three more days."

"Oh," she said with great wonder. She frowned, and then she said, "But what about my uncle and aunt? Where are they? Are they still in Canton?"

"They arrived by train yesterday," he said.

And then it was as if the shell in which she had awakened this morning had broken. "But where are they? Are they here? In this very hotel?" she said with great urgency.

She saw his eyes darken, and she did not understand why. "They are living in a small hotel in Kowloon," he said. "It is quite a distance from here. But I spoke to them and assured them that you were getting better."

"Oh," she said, trying to fit the pieces of information together.

All of a sudden, Weilin took her in his arms. "I have so much to tell you! We have so much to be thankful for!" He took her by the hand and said, "Come and see! Can you get up?"

She let him pull her to her feet, and she was shaky for a moment and then she straightened and they walked to the balcony.

"Look!" Weilin cried.

It was a moment before she understood what he meant. She had already seen the sea before. But she saw the expectant look in his face, and she obliged and looked. Before them was the sea and below them there was a crescent of clean white sand. There was a neatly planted circle of flowers at the entrance of the hotel, like artificial flowers.

"Ahua, we are free!" he said, and he was shedding tears. "We are free at last! We can stay here as long as we like! I planned it so that you would awaken to this beautiful view, and later you can sit here on the balcony before you are strong enough to go about. . . ."

Weilin stopped talking abruptly. He sensed that something was wrong.

"Why didn't my aunt and uncle come and live here too?" she asked.

He turned his face from her and said with an indifferent voice, "They said it was too expensive." His heart was pounding dreadfully. Ahua! Don't you see! he wanted to cry out. I didn't let my father make a man out of me! I was true to you! I did not change! He walked back into the room.

She did not go in at once. She stood looking at the sea, trying to bring back old associations which she had forgotten. Did it remind her of the Garden Hotel, with the water and the freedom he was talking about? Isn't it odd, she thought. I dreamed of the Garden Hotel too when we were in Fox Head, and yet it seems as if I were only half here. Where is the other half of me? What am I trying to tell him?

When she came back into the room, the table beside the window had been set for breakfast. Everything was shining and new, and she must grow used to it, she thought. Had she once been used to things like this?

Weilin watched her, and in spite of himself, a feeling of panic swept over him. It isn't true, he thought. She's just tired. It isn't true what the man from the tea company told Uncle Anson about her and Zan, why she did not come to Hong Kong sooner. I will never ask her, he thought. I must not doubt her.

He blinked back tears from his eyes, tears which he was ashamed for her to see now. It seemed as if a wall had risen between them, and he longed to tear it down and pull together the suffering they both had experienced separately and make them one.

"You know," he said lightly, trying to sound nonchalant, "I can't eat anything studded any more?"

"Studded?" she said quizzically.

"Like a raisin bun. It happened suddenly when I was in London. It doesn't matter if all the raisins are on top, but if they are imbedded, or as I said, studded in it, then each time I discover one it sends an electric shock through me."

"I don't remember your being so particular about food before," she said politely. It occurred to her that once she would have exclaimed, "Really? How extraordinary! Isn't that the most curious thing!" It was as if she saw in him the mirror of her old self, which she could not yet bring back.

"Weilin!" she said sharply. "You said you talked to my family? Over the telephone? Can I phone them?"

"Of course," he said, "I'll get them for you."

She flew to the telephone. "Auntie!" she was shouting. "It's me! When did you actually arrive? Yes, I am better!" It was only now that she understood she was in Hong Kong. She was laughing and crying at the same time. "Yes! I'm up! No, I won't overdo it. Why? Really? Oh, I'm sorry to hear that." She cupped her hand over the telephone and said to Weilin, "Yuma is in a bad way." "What did the doctor say? How is everyone else, though? Really? I frightened you? I'm sorry, Auntie. Really I am. I apologize. You must all be exhausted. You slept thirty-six hours? You must take care of yourselves now. Weilin? Yes, I'll tell him, Auntie. No, don't hurry. Now you must really rest. Yes, I will too."

She hung up, relieved and happy. Then she saw such an unhappy expression on Weilin's face that she went up to him and threw her arms around him, as if she could not bear for him not to share her joy.

"They came out! They are safe!" she said.

They always slept late. When they opened their eyes, everything always looked fresh and beautiful and as if the room was there to confirm and reassure them that it was true that Ahua and Weilin were together once more. Ahua was still very weak, and often went back to sleep again after she first opened her eyes. Always, the waiter brought breakfast to their room, toast, jam, eggs, and milk and coffee, served on gleaming white plates with scrupulously polished silverware, and they ate, looking at each other and smiling. They did not talk much.

When there was no wind they spent an hour lying fully clothed on the beach. Weilin was sure that Ahua would

profit from the sun. In the afternoon she always slept again, and sometimes remained in bed until the next day. The days merged into one another, endlessly long, like a long, seasick voyage, and Ahua was impatient to be well. A great deal awaited her, she felt. But she did not feel equal to it yet. Sometimes everything seemed terribly still, her mind, the room, the mirror-like sea. She felt it was too still.

It is all coming true after all, Weilin thought. It is slowly coming back. He tried to amuse her sometimes, when it became almost too quiet for him, too. He showed her a tin of mustard powder he had brought back from England; beneath the recipes for making mayonnaise, salad dressing, and mustard sauce printed on the label, there were directions for preparing a mustard foot bath. He read, sitting beside her bed, "Mustard foot bath for adults and children: Mix one heaped tablespoonful of mustard with a little cold or tepid water and allow to stand for a few minutes; add to foot bath or basin full of water as hot as skin can bear and immerse feet for ten to fifteen minutes." She listened with a jaded look in her eyes and a ghost of a smile. Everything seemed far away.

Each morning Ahua woke from her sleep feeling more whole. One day she felt almost completely like herself again. The sky was slightly overcast and they were the only ones on the beach. They were sitting together as usual, watching the water break on the sand, when she felt a sudden curiosity about everything.

"Weilin, when did you arrive?" she said.

He was reclining on his canvas chair with his eyes closed, picking up handful after handful of clean white sand and letting it fall through his fingers. A thought crossed her mind: isn't he bored, having to sit here with me day after day?

"A few days before you did," he said.

"Was the trip successful?"

"The blended tea was a success, if that's what you mean," he said with a shrug.

She sat up, keenly interested. "Your father must be very happy then."

"Oh, he's delirious," he said with the same shrug. He opened

his eyes. Was this the moment to tell her then? Was this the moment to surprise her and watch the expression on her face when she knew?

"I suppose we should be going back to live with your people soon," she said, "now that I am almost well."

"I broke with my father," he said.

She was startled. "You broke with your father?" she said. "How?"

Then Weilin sat up to watch the affect. "I told him that I was not interested in the tea business and never would be," he said. "I told him after we came back that I was through pretending any interest in it, because it was not honest." He was going to say more, but he saw a strange expression on her face.

"What happened?" she asked anxiously. "You mean you are independent of him now, financially and everything?"

The question surprised him. What did she mean? She didn't seem to understand at all.

"Oh, nothing like that," he said, trying to sound casual. It all burst out of him. "Ahua, don't you see? We are free! This is me, Weilin! I didn't let my father change me, although he tried! I almost died to remain true to you! And now you are back, we are together again, and free!" He wanted to take her in his arms, he didn't want to talk, it seemed absurd to have to explain. "All the time I was abroad, I kept thinking of you. You were right. You said you wanted me to believe in myself, but I didn't listen to you before. Instead, I bowed to my father's wish because I didn't want to hurt him. I should never have gone with him. It nearly killed me. But now I am free. I told him that I would never subject my will to the desires of other people again!"

The words came at Ahua as from a long forgotten childhood story. *He hadn't let his father make a man out of him!*

He picked up both her hands. "You said that we owed it to ourselves to do whatever we wanted, as long as we thought it was right," he said feverishly. "You said as long as we thought what we were doing was right, that was all that mattered, and we shouldn't pay any attention to what people thought. When

I failed to graduate, that's what you said."

It all came back to her. She remembered how important her words sounded then, only everything sounded fantastic now.

"You should have seen some of the people I had to talk to!" he said. "You should find out how much hypocrisy there is in life! My father was trying to show me how to make money! He expected me to play my false part! I tried but I just couldn't! I simply couldn't understand it, how people can let themselves become so false, how they can be convinced of the necessity of their way of living, and never stop to think. Then I realized that it was true, you and I, Ahua, we are the only ones who understand life. That is what I have been trying to tell you. Can't you see . . . don't you remember, my love?"

She looked at him bewildered. "But, Weilin, what are we going to do?" she cried out.

"Do?" he said, aghast. "Why, we are free of him now, we can do anything we want!"

"You mean he has given you money to do what you want with?" she asked.

"Money?" he said, confounded. "Money?"

"Who is paying for our hotel bills?" she said.

Now he became afraid. Am I the only one then, am I the only one? What has happened to you, Ahua?

"He has agreed to give me a monthly allowance," he said mitigatingly. Something was terribly wrong. Why was she asking these common, ordinary questions?

His words began to trip over one another. "You see, during this trip, I suddenly understood what it was all about," he decided to explain. "For instance, my father—my father, Ahua, was plotting and planning how to save his own tea company before it was even certain that the Communists were going to win! He had it fixed so that either way the China-Pacific Tea Firm would live forever. That is just one of the examples I can give you. Ideals? Faith? Love? All these things tied me to him before because I thought he must believe in something for its own sake. But he loved me only because I was his son. Do you see what I am trying to say? People are prisoners because

they are tied down by their limitations. There is no purity in the world. I was unhappy because I denied myself and accepted those limitations, mistaking them for true feelings."

Ahua felt herself spinning and spinning. The big words came at her like balloons popping.

She did not respond at all, after all he said.

He went on again. "You said if I did nothing all my life but love you, you would not mind," he said, and tears were rolling down his face again. "You said in the end every man must account only to himself."

Ahua saw herself sitting under the pine tree in the rain. "And you said that in the final analysis of life, in the final evaluation, we have to weigh everything on the scale of society, in terms of everyone else's struggles and lives."

It was such a long time ago, and it seemed fantastic that they should be recalling these words to each other now. Those were the very words she had used, and later he had asked her to marry him, and this was what she had been coming back to. All the time while she was ill, she had been dreaming of this, had the sure knowledge that this other world was waiting for her at the end of it all. She felt a horrible upheaval inside, as if everything were about to be canceled out.

"And you said we were the only ones who could see things clearly, with any perspective at all, because our physical demands could not interfere with our spiritual ideals," he said.

"That's right," she answered. The words had no meaning. They sounded sophomoric.

She turned to him and a thought came to her, a sudden recognition. Her love had flown away, like a butterfly which alights on a flower for a moment and then naturally flutters away, like a fruit which falls from a tree when it is ripe, naturally, like ice melting in spring, naturally, dissolving without a trace.

He was crying. A wave of nausea swelled up in her throat abruptly. Why did he shed so many tears? He was a grown man, not a boy.

And then the feeling passed, and some unknowable sorrow

sprang from within her, some awful reality, some troubled strength. It was almost as if she had crossed a bridge and arrived at the other side of the water, the side where people lived and worked hard and ate and slept with each other and then laid down their heads to die. All the phantasmagoria of half dreams and visions she had ever had of herself settled to the ground.

"Don't you believe in those things now?" he asked.

"I don't know," she said stupidly. And now there were tears in her eyes also, tears of dreadful pity for him.

He recognized them. He saw her now as if she were behind a barrier, together with all the other ordinary people in the world who had lost their perspective. She had become ordinary, a member of the common herd whom he could not understand. Perhaps, he thought desperately, she had found some meaning in life which was not completely fraudulent. "Tell me," he wanted to say, "What does it feel like? What does it look like from the other side?" But the words choked in his throat. No, he could never be like ordinary people! He was seeing things from another dimension, from another area of knowledge which was his exclusive kingdom.

But oh! how he loved her! He remembered when he told her not to let other people's ideas about life change her, and she said, "If you doubt me, you are only hurting yourself."

Oh, how she dazzled him! The things she used to say! We're kindred spirits, Weilin! We're twins of the soul!

"What changed you?" he asked suddenly. "Was it your cousin Zan?"

"Zan?" she cried sharply.

"Yes, Zan!" he said. He was not going to say it, but the ugly thing spoke itself. "Why didn't you come to Hong Kong sooner?" he demanded in a deadly voice.

She could not understand why he was asking this at first. Then she went white in the face. Everything fitted together. Real life encompassed her. Zan was waiting for her in his hotel! The impossible had happened. Real life was waiting for her

to take up again, and it was demanding to make itself felt again also, from within her.

"Did you sleep with him? Did you, did you, did you?" Weilin cried.

She buried her hands in her face. A dreadful anguish made her hide her face from the broken mirror and cold marble which his face suggested to her.

"Oh, Weilin!" she growled, "you don't know what we have been through!"

Then it was true.

All at once, Weilin went limp. He felt spent of everything. He did not want to torture her any more. Leave her in peace, leave her alone.

"You are free to go," he said passionlessly. "Don't bother to deceive me any more."

I don't love her any more. And I don't hate her. These are the last chains I have freed myself of. I am beyond it all now.

When she looked up, he was no longer beside her.

"Weilin!" she shouted with all her might.

He was already several hundred yards away. He heard her but he did not look back. He could not bear to be with her any more. He quickened his footsteps. He was walking away, away from all the people who had ever tortured him, away from all the ugly people in the world.

Day had begun to darken when he came to the cliffs. He sat down on a rock and felt as if nothing could hurt him any more. Only he alone, then, was different. Only he was pure. Perhaps theirs had been the only pure love, he thought. Perhaps theirs had been a real disinterested love, free from ulterior motives and nature's designs, sexless, even. Oh, the dreamy adventures of the spirit they had had! How close to perfect mortal happiness they must have come! But perfection was not in human nature. He did not blame her now. Only release me, release me from illusion!

The sun was sinking into the sea. Shafts of its last rays shot into the sky like leaping flames and spattered the sea with golden

coins. Through the blur of his tears, he watched it like a wordless baby looking into its mother's face. The majesty of what was before him transfixed him. Puffs of clouds burst into flame, orange, purple, gold. And then the sun sank for good, and there came upon the sea a dark alluring velvet hue, warm and comforting and deep.

He had to shut his eyes for a moment, unable to bear the beauty of it, which was at once equal to all the expectations he had ever had of life. The tide broke against the rocks and wet his feet, but he did not move. The darkness was gathering him into its bosom. The sea before him seemed to be speaking to him. Come back, come back to the domain of Nothing, where all individuality and personal identity have ceased, where there are no mountainous burdens to bear, where the limitations of being Hsu Weilin will be lifted forever, and he need no longer suffer and struggle.

The tide broke upon the rocks again. But Weilin could not wait for it to come now. He would go to it. He rose and walked into the sea. The water pounding upon the rocks echoed in his ears. I am coming, I am coming home! Oh, mother sea! support me, carry me in your bosom so that I need never stand up alone again, and be lonely. I am helpless, helpless . . . helpless . . .

As the sea washed over him, he felt a relaxation; death drew him in and he could not resist its lure.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Lin Tai-yi was born in Peking, China, in 1926 and has divided her time equally between living in the Far East and in America and Europe. She began her writing career at the age of twelve, when she started contributing regularly to Chinese magazines and published her first book in English. *The Lilacs Overgrow* is her seventh book. Her other novels, *The Eavesdropper*, which was published a little over a year ago, *The Golden Coin*, and *War Tide*, have been translated into six languages.

Miss Lin has taught Chinese at Yale University and was editor of the Chinese-language magazine *Tienfeng* published in New York. She now lives with her husband and two children in London, where her writing has appeared in *Punch* magazine and she also contributes to the B.B.C.





*This book was set in  
Electra, Perpetua, and Weiss types,  
printed, and bound by  
The Haddon Craftsmen.  
It was designed by Larry Kamp.*









