

A CHINESE BANDIT NOVEL :
LONG NIGHT by Yao Xueyin* (2)

Translated by Philip Billingsley

THE STORY SO FAR

En route back to his home in Dengzhou in southwest Henan province from Xinyang where he has been attending school, 14-year old Tao Jusheng is captured by bandits along with his elder brother Qinsheng and several other people. All of them are put up for ransom, but Jusheng himself, because of his high-spirited nature, is made the foster-son of one of the gang's subchiefs, Wang Sanshao. His brother, however, continues to live the miserable life of a captive. Unaffected by the customary prejudice against bandits, Jusheng is able to see through the rough exterior of these men and to understand the conditions that drove them into their dangerous life. He thus gradually finds himself sympathising with their behaviour despite their treatment of his brother. As the second instalment opens, Jusheng has just been transferred from the subsection of Wang Sanshao to that of another subchief named Xue Zhengli, after Wang is forced to leave the gang.

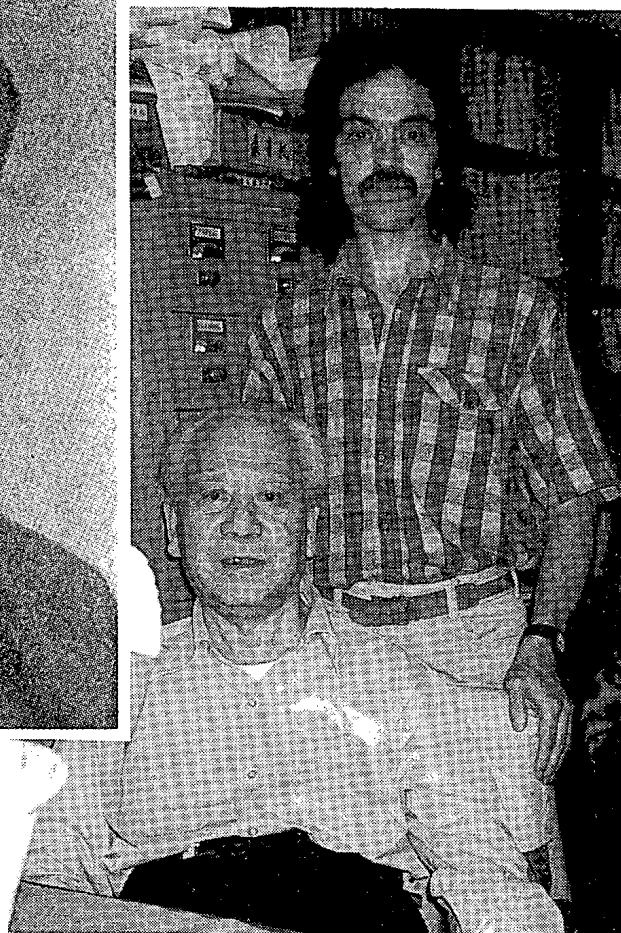
Chapter 11

Not long after Rangzi Jiu had left Liu Laoyi came running up and, with a proprietorial air, went off taking Jusheng with him. The name

* 姚雪垠著：長夜（人民文学出版社，1981年）



Yao Xueyin in 1945



Yao Xueyin, with the translator,
September 1991

of Jusheng's new adopted father was Xue Zhengli, but everyone in the gang called him Second Brother Xue, a measure of their respect for his honest and tolerant personality. One of the gang's most important subchiefs, Xue was a gentle and modest man who spoke little, possessed not a single bad habit, and never touched a cigarette. Although Jusheng had noticed him before and knew that both Liu Laoyi and Zhao Shizi were his subordinates, he had never had a chance to get to know him. When Jusheng was brought before him by Liu Laoyi, Xue Zhengli refused to allow him to kowtow; grasping Jusheng's hand and pulling

him towards him, he said in a kindly voice, "From now on you'll be staying with me, alright?" At that moment Jusheng suddenly realised that the bandits who had pursued them on the highway had all been this man's followers. Never once was the matter brought up, though, and even Jusheng himself felt not the slightest twinge of resentment; on the contrary he found it all somewhat amusing.

In the company of Xue Zhengli Jusheng's spiritual malaise was considerably lightened. After a couple of days he had become familiar with all of Xue's men, who enjoyed having him along when they went for a stroll around. Although this section of the gang was several times larger than that of Wang Sanshao, it did not possess a servant, and so Jusheng found himself carrying out various trivial tasks for them. When the gang was on the march he carried on his shoulder a grey-coloured cloth bag containing cigarettes, matches, and a set of opium paraphernalia: lamp, pipe, borer, scraper, etc. While there was no 'opium fiend' among these men, still from time to time they would lie down and enjoy a pipe; in particular, it was sometimes necessary to entertain visitors with opium. Xue Zhengli presented Jusheng with a new white towel and ordered him to bind it around his head till even his ears were covered. When his cloth shoes wore out Liu Laoyi requested the peasants to make him some new ones. And, since the surveillance was less strict than before, he was able to come and go about the village as he pleased.

Before Jusheng had been with Xue Zhengli's group five days something of momentous significance took place in the captives' quarters: Hu Yuying ran away during the night. Nothing like it had ever happened since the gang had been formed. Hu's uncle had subsequently been whipped to within an inch of his life by the 'One-Eyed Dragon' Li

Erhong, and the other captives had also been beaten by turns.¹⁾ Immediately upon hearing the news Jusheng ran to see how his elder brother was. Crouching timorously on his bed of wheat-straw, Qinsheng told Jusheng in whispered tones of how he had had the chance to escape along with Hu Yuying but after a moment's hesitation had decided to stay behind for fear of what they might do to Jusheng. "Did they beat you badly?" asked Jusheng with a look at his brother's filthy, tangled hair. "No, it was nothing," whispered Qinsheng in reply. "By a stroke of luck, after Erhong had given me a couple of lashes Zhao Shizi happened to wander by, and because he went off with the whip I wasn't beaten badly at all." Jusheng plucked a fat black louse from the edge of his elder brother's ear, then left the captives' quarters.

That afternoon, while some of the bandits went off to amuse themselves and others slept, Xue Zhengli remained by the fire apparently deep in thought. Opposite him, cleaning his gun, sat Chen Laowu, a bandit whom Jusheng found less easy to get on with than the others. He it was who had tried on Jusheng's grey gown in the dry gully into which the party had been taken following their capture. Aged about 35, his face, lined with deep wrinkles, was half hidden by a dark stubble. Whenever they arrived at a new place his first concern was to find a barber to shave it for him; two days without finding one and he began to look like an ape, and the rasping of the razor as it sliced through the hairs would resemble the sound of grass being mowed. His hands were equally peculiar, for even the backs of his finger-joints were covered with hard skin like the calluses on his palms. His clothing, meanwhile, was cut extremely slim, with an extravagant number of buttons down the front, using a black foreign cloth of a deep sheen that would have impressed at least the rural moneybags of the period if no-one else.

After washing his face, he would carefully rub cream into the skin, though it was hardly smoother than the bark of a jujube tree, to prevent it from being split by the cold wind. In much the same way, right now he was sitting in silence, meticulously rubbing oil into the spare parts of his rifle-bolt with his coarse finger-tips. Tao Jusheng sat between the two men, his head bowed as he rubbed an inkstick on an inkslab, his cheeks glowing red with the heat of the fire. When he had finished he turned to his adopted father and asked:

“Uncle Xue, what should I write?”

“Make it a bit tough, ask for ten kilos of opium and a thousand silver dollars,” replied Xue Zhengli.

Jusheng warmed the tip of the brush near the fire for a moment, then pressed it onto the inkslab and began to write. When the letter was done he turned and began to read it out aloud to his adopted father, pronouncing each syllable clearly:

Notice to the Inhabitants of Wangzhuang Village

Being at present short of ready cash, we request that you deliver to us in not less than three days and not more than five,²⁾ ten kilograms of opium and a thousand silver dollars. Should you fail to comply, your houses will be razed and your people slaughtered down to the last dog and chicken! None will be spared!

From Xue Zhengli

The subchief smiled softly as he listened, nodding his head with satisfaction. When the reading was over he accepted the letter from Jusheng with great interest and perused it carefully.

“You write pretty good, pretty good!” His eyes returned momentarily to the paper, then he looked up with a smile.

“You sure you wrote my name right?”

“Of course,” replied Jusheng, thinking to himself, “As if I could get it wrong!”

“Let’s see, this is a ‘Xue’, this must be ‘Zheng’....” Xue Zhengli traced the characters one by one with his finger-tip, but finally couldn’t help asking with great curiosity:

“What’s this extra character you wrote after my name?”

“It’s a *qi*, just a formality used when writing letters. If you want me to take it out I can.” Jusheng felt himself blushing, for his teachers had in fact never taught him the actual meaning of the word. Yet the answer seemed to satisfy Xue Zhengli, for he laid the letter down on the ink slab, rubbed his hands over the fire, and asked in an affable tone:

“Jusheng, tell me the truth now. Are you thinking of running away too?”

“Absolutely not.” Jusheng shook his head innocently.

“Sure?”

“Sure.”

“If you want to run away just go — no-one’s watching you any more. What I’m afraid of is if you try it and don’t make it. If you’re caught and brought back here, you’ve had your chips and your brother with you! And don’t forget there are ditch-diggers everywhere these days — if you run into one of those local upstart outfits³⁾ you’ll find things a lot less happy than they are here!”

"I know," Jusheng replied obediently.

Flakes of dry snow began falling from the sky, bouncing off the tiled eaves of the thatched houses and the yellow earth of the courtyard and piling up with a soft, pleasant sound. Chen Laowu put away his rifle and warmed his hands over the fire, murmuring distractedly as he gazed out through the door:

"Snow, just what we needed. Only pity is, it's come too late. If it'd fallen three weeks ago the wheat seedlings would've come up nice and strong." He fished in his pocket and brought out an imitation ivory cigarette holder, fitted in a cigarette, moved up closer to the fire and, looking Jusheng in the face, began to speak.

"You mission school kids, once you get out of school you're all in line to be officials. Jusheng, some day when you're an official me and your adopted father are going to come looking for you, so you give us some kind of job to do, OK? Tell me, what sort of work would you give your adopted father to do, eh?"

Jusheng merely giggled, not knowing how best to reply.

"I'll tell you what'd be the best job for me, commanding Jusheng's bodyguard!"

"Right, the whole crowd of us could be his bodyguard!" Chen Laowu added his agreement. "Jusheng, as soon as you're a district magistrate us lot'll come find you, then you'll just have to take us on!"

"Ha!" laughed Xue Zhengli, "By that time he's sure to have completely forgotten the likes of us!"

Right after these words had been uttered, the crack of a whip and the piteous wail of someone no longer young assaulted their ears from the temple next door. At the same time they heard Zhao Shizi's voice flinging a torrent of angry abuse. Chen Laowu leapt up from the fire-

side and exclaimed hotly:

“That fucking Zhao Shizi, he managed to trick his uncle into coming here after all!”

Xue Zhengli frowned deeply, listened for a moment, then lowered his head and silently resumed toasting his hands at the fire.

“I’m off to give Shizi a hand with the whip!” Chen Laowu exclaimed hotly. Then, rifle in hand, he ran outside.

“Oy, Laowu!” Xue Zhengli looked up at the other bandit.

“Tell Shizi to give him the first degree,⁴⁾ after all he is the guy’s uncle.”

In the wake of Chen Laowu’s departure Tao Jusheng and his adopted father sat without speaking, looking out at the light flakes of snow swirling in the courtyard, listening attentively to the sounds of the beating coming from next door. Why Zhao Shizi should be treating his uncle this way was beyond Jusheng, and his heart filled with a mixture of fear and misery. After a while he could repress his feelings no longer, and begged his adopted father:

“Uncle Xue, please go and persuade Uncle Shizi to stop!”

“Forget about him!” Xue Zhengli shook his head, and from the corner of his mouth escaped a hopeless grimace.

Chapter 12

The snow continued falling until partway through the night. Tao Jusheng was rudely awakened from his dreams to find the others all up and preparing to depart. He hurriedly put on his gown, bound his white turban tightly about his head, and strung his grey cloth bag upon his shoulder. Recently, as the gang gradually grew in numbers, they

had taken to moving by day and resting at night. For them to be getting ready to move out in the middle of the night like this there must be some pressing reason. Partly from anxiety, partly because of having been so sharply shaken from his bed, Jusheng found himself unable to restrain a fit of shivers, and his upper teeth chattered softly against his lower ones. Seeing that he still had some time to wait before the others would be ready, he squatted down by the fire and began amusing himself playing with the embers.

As soon as the others finished their preparations, they all clustered around the fire to warm themselves. All, that is, save Zhao Shizi and Chen Laowu who, to Jusheng's surprise, were nowhere to be seen. Then, from somewhere beyond the village confines came the sound of two rifle-shots, followed by the distant howling of dogs, after which the world lapsed back into stillness. Just at that moment the owner of the house they were commandeering sent over half a pail of hot water with which they took turns to wash their faces before gathering once again around the fire. Soon after Zhao Shizi pushed open the door and entered the room, stamping the snow from his shoes and deliberately blowing out streams of warm breath. His chubby face wore the gist of a smile. Liu Laoyi drew deeply on his cigarette, looked Zhao Shizi up and down, and asked with a smile,

“Did you send him home?”⁵⁾

“All the way!” replied Zhao Shizi. Coming over to the fire, he thrust an icy finger into Jusheng's neck, causing him to shrink convulsively away. “I'd had the old sod strung up from a beam,” he went on, “and he was already frozen half to death, so I dragged him over to the fire and warmed him up again, then told him, ‘Uncle! Enmity can be dispelled but never resolved! I'm going to send you back home, OK?’ At

first he didn't want to believe it, but he caught on soon enough. The problem was that we'd already broken both his legs so he couldn't move. I had to get the peasant who was watching over him to carry him on his back while I trotted along behind. All the way we chatted and laughed, just like you'd expect your uncle and your nephew to be...."

"Rape your mother!" Liu Laoyi's oath burst from his lips, making the others laugh.

"So my uncle says, 'If only the first year of the Republic hadn't been such a hungry one I'd never have done it. Afterwards I wished I hadn't, and I've been regretting it ever since. Ahhh! The only bad thing I've ever done in this life... I haven't the nerve to go and meet your mother after I'm gone.' That's how he goes on, and then he bursts into tears, crying so hard even I couldn't stand it. So, anyway, after we've gone a half-mile or so...."

Suddenly Chen Laowu burst into the room, his rifle slung over his shoulder. After pausing to wipe a strand of clear-coloured mucus on the door-jamb, he stamped the snow off his shoes and went over to the fire where, using another bandit's shoulder as a prop, he hoisted one foot up to warm it over the flames. In a slow voice he announced:

"Don't bother to rush, the family head has only just got up. Number Two says to go ahead and eat, smoke some opium, whatever we want, we won't be moving till the sharp-mouths start shooting the air." ⁶⁾

"Screw his ancestors back through eight generations! Could've stayed asleep if I'd known this would happen!" Liu Laoyi thrust the end of a cigarette into the fire, then turned to Zhao Shizi.

"Where'd you see him off then?"

"Anyway, after we've gone a half-mile or so," continued Zhao Shizi

from where he'd left off, "I tell the old peasant to drop him on the ground and say, 'Sorry Uncle, you'll have to go the rest of the way home by yourself, this is as far as I can take you.' Well, he soon cottons on, and throws himself down on his knees and starts howling, doesn't he? 'Shizi lad, I'm your uncle aren't I? Killing me like this isn't going to bring you to a good end!' So I says to him, 'Uncle, it's no use you cursing me, I plan to be around till I'm eighty!' Then I put a bullet through the top of his head and another through his heart to make sure, and see him off home well and truly!"

"Well, you bastard, you finally had your revenge!" Liu Laoyi's tone seemed almost congratulatory.

"No way, there's still my Second Uncle to go!" butted in Zhao Shizi, the smile no longer on his face. "Once I've personally seen to him I'll be happy."

Xue Zhengli's words when he joined in had a worried edge to them. "It was your First Uncle that was mainly to blame, wasn't it? Why not let your Second Uncle hang on to his few remaining years and save yourself a bullet into the bargain!"

"Brother Xue, you don't know the half of it! The two of them were in cahoots! My First Uncle wouldn't've had the nerve to do it on his own!" Abandoning the attempt to mollify his fellow bandit, Xue Zhengli rubbed a hand down his face. It was his habit, whenever he felt at a loss for words or for a second was unable to reach a decision, to pass a hand down from his forehead to the tip of his chin a few times. The gesture completed, he ordered Jusheng to go out and see if the peasants had got the food ready. Just at that moment the first cockerels began to crow.

Jusheng ran into the adjoining room, where he found an old woman,

her son and his wife bustling around a cooking range. The old woman was sitting in front of it tending the flames, the wife was baking some bean-flour pancakes filled with onions in a pan, and her husband was preparing noodles in a big pot. Seeing Jusheng come running in, the wife cried in an agitated voice:

“Nearly ready! Nearly ready! The noodles are done, just need a jolt more heat to cook them right through!” Then she cried out to the old woman, “Stick in another big handful, this is no time for you to go trying to save on firewood!”

Jusheng, too embarrassed to ask them to hurry up, stood warming himself in front of the range. “We’ve really put you all out by staying here.”

“Nonsense, nonsense!” replied the husband in a courteous tone. “This year’s harvest was bad so we’ve nothing good to give you. Please don’t take offence.”

The wife gave the pancakes a final turnover, covered them with an open-meshed lid, then moved over to her husband’s side and gave the noodles a stir with the handle of a spoon.

“They’re done, bring the bucket, quick!”

“It’s not salty enough. Here, you have a taste!” answered her husband awkwardly in a low voice.

The wife tried a spoonful of the soup, then quickly took up the empty salt-jar, poured in half a spoonful of soup, rinsed it around and poured it back into the pan.

“Just on done. Be quick and get the bucket, get them ladled in!”

No sooner had the bandits finished eating than the number two sent someone to instruct them to assemble immediately. Amid the sporadic crowing of cocks, the whinnying of horses sounded two or three times

from the centre of the village. Xue Zhengli emerged with his squad from the door of the thatched cottage and headed for the house where the gang's number two was billeted. One by one the subchiefs congregated, Rangzi Jiu bringing up the rear pushing a crowd of captives before him. Some people had already cleared a patch of snow on the threshing-ground outside the main gate and were building up a fire using bundles of sorghum stalks. Bandits and captives alike crowded around the perimeter of the fire, some sitting, some standing, the glare of the flames dancing about their bodies and faces. Jusheng saw his brother squatting across and to one side of him, casting furtively about to right and left with melancholy eyes. Realising that he was looking for him, he gave a cough. At the sound Qinsheng turned his face toward him; the two brothers' eyes locked, then quickly disengaged. Jusheng also noticed Hu Yuying's uncle sitting on the damp, frozen ground, his head slumped onto his chest, leaning on another captive for support and coughing weakly. Jusheng, finding his heart going out to the old man, quickly stood up from the fire and turned away toward the main gate. Knowing that the red horse belonging to the chief was the only one the band possessed, he was surprised to see three unfamiliar horses being led out from the courtyard. Among them was one equipped with a foreign-style saddle, the white hairs of its mane neatly trimmed. Though one of the three men leading the horses was a bandit, the others wore grey uniforms, carried Mauser pistols, and gave the impression of being some officer's bodyguard. As soon as the two soldiers emerged they immediately became the hub of attention for everyone congregated in the yard. Rangzi Jiu, prancing about like a monkey, ran over to them calling:

"Hey, I was so busy trying to get warm I'd clear forgotten all about

you! Well, are you going back to the fucking city now?"

"Your lot will soon be gone, and our business is finished — what's the point in us staying out here?" replied one pale-skinned soldier.

"Well, can't you see it's just that my heart is breaking because I don't know when we'll meet again after this!" bawled Rangzi Jiu, grabbing the soldier by the arm.

Cursing and laughing by turns, the men good-naturedly horsed around for a while, then stopped and began a muttered conversation in which Rangzi Jiu appeared to be seeking some important information. Before they had finished talking, the number two appeared from the farmhouse accompanied by a man wearing a camel-hair overcoat. Rangzi Jiu quickly forgot about the soldiers and turned to greet the visitor:

"Commander, are you going back to the city now?"

"Ah, Rangzi Jiu, you turtle! I wondered who it was!" The man feigned surprise as he let out a curse, then went on. "What, aren't you coming into town with us to let your hair down?"

"Right now I've no time for messing about. As soon as I get someone to look after the ticket office for me⁷⁾ I'll be off into town looking for you, Commander." Rangzi Jiu's voice sounded full of familiarity.

The Commander's reply was vehement: "Watch out for yourselves, Generalissimo Wu Peifu's star will rise again.⁸⁾ As soon as Brigade Commander Ma has need of you I'll send somebody to find you. Better be ready!"

Rangzi Jiu's response was immediate: "Rain or shine, Commander! You're buddies with our family head, and I used to be one of your men, so any time you want us we're ready to go! Don't worry, when the time comes none of us'll be shilly-shallying!"

"My only fear is that you'll all be doing so well that the price'll be

too high!" laughed the other man out loud.

Jusheng, though fascinated by this close relationship between an army officer and a bandit, still found it hard to fathom out. After his gaze had seen the three riders out of the village, his ears continued to follow the slowly diminishing sound of their hoofbeats. Before they had entirely faded from his hearing, the number two had returned from the edge of the village and was issuing the order for their departure.

"Start out!"

Chapter 13

"Pass it on, everybody's to open their paces!" ⁹⁾

A waning moon shining through a layer of thin clouds illuminated a cold wilderness of still-unmelted snow. The outlaw band hurried with its captives across the still, barren plain, the snow crunching beneath their feet. Occasionally from a ruined village along their route of march the howling of dogs would be heard, but in an era of chaos dogs too lose their courage: not one of them dared approach the passing band, and even as they howled they were scuttling into the shadows. Now and then the column passed beneath the walls of a fortified village, whose defenders would stick their heads out over the ramparts for a brief look, then quickly pull them back, leaving only the sound of whispering voices. Apart from the occasional sharp command from the number two urging them to move faster, the reports from the scouts or 'strip guides', couched in the bandits' slang, that they were about to ford a river or cross a bridge, and the mechanical passing-back of those commands through the rank and file, not one word was spoken.

Neither was there any of the haphazard firing into the air that had accompanied their previous marches. The effect was to give the night around them an air of still greater eeriness and foreboding than usual. Even the northerly wind customarily associated with the onset of winter seemed to have become encumbered in the branches of the withered trees.

The tense procession continued on its way. After the third cock-crow the horizon to the east began gradually to brighten and the sky to lose its dark hue. From the other side of a hill just in front of them there suddenly came the sound of a rifle-shot, and bullets whined over their heads. The number two quickly issued the order to "tread earth!" — the bandits' slang term for "halt!" — from his position back along the column, and soon the entire gang was poised, rifle in hand, pistols plucked from waistbands in readiness. A moment later the number two ran to the front accompanied by Xue Zhengli's men, calling out to Rangzi Jiu to follow him slowly with the captives. Tao Jusheng, who was with the captives' party, felt somewhat perturbed. When they reached the top of the hill he was able to make out through the dim morning light the shape of a big fortress a mile or so away; it was from there that the shot had come. The detail led by the number two had already reached the bottom of the hill and was fanning out along the highway. Several rough inns huddled on the lower slopes, and while the others continued their advance Rangzi Jiu and the captives settled down in front of them. The peasants living there were already up and had removed the boards that served as doors, and as the sound of firing grew ever closer Rangzi Jiu stood on the road waving his pistol and hurrying the captives inside a nearby shed. Turning round to face Jusheng, he patted the back of the boy's head and gave an affectionate curse:

"Get inside will you! Shit! If one of those bullets hits you it'll feel like more than just a fleabite!"

Tao Jusheng continued to stand in the roadway peering into the distance, as if Rangzi Jiu's words had passed unheard. Li Erhong stood rifle in hand beside a grave mound not far ahead. Suddenly he twisted his head around and called out to Rangzi Jiu. "Somebody's wounded!" Looking hurriedly in the direction where Li Erhong was pointing, Jusheng saw a scattered group of a dozen or so bandits approaching them from far off across the snow-covered plain. As they rode they turned in the saddle from time to time to let off a shot. In front ran two peasants carrying the body of a wounded bandit, and in their rear another bandit carrying a Mauser pistol was leading a horse. For a moment the attention of all the bandits accompanying the captives was focused on this development, their expressions suddenly a mixture of tension and anxiety.

"Hey! That's the family head's horse!" Somebody softly uttered a surprised exclamation, then almost immediately added with relief: "Ah, but the family head's there at the back!"

Passing through a graveyard, the party of men approached the inns, growing nearer by the minute. Watching, Jusheng was trying to make out who the wounded bandit could be when suddenly a bullet whizzed past his ear, causing him to duck involuntarily. At the same moment he heard the diffident voice of his brother calling him softly from within the shed. "Ju! Come over here!" With an impish smile Jusheng glanced at his brother, then walked over to stand under the eaves.

Soon the men accompanying the chief, each with two or three rifles slung over his shoulder, were hurrying past the inns. The two peasants were carrying a detachable door on which lay a man covered by a

nankeen quilt, his legs hanging down and dangling to and fro. Rangzi Jiu exchanged a few words with the other bandits as they drew near, but Tao Jusheng had no ears for their exchange; all his concentration was focused on the man on the stretcher. Those dangling legs were covered by a pair of dark-coloured crepe trousers, one foot by a black corduroy shoe, and the other foot, which had already lost its shoe, by a grey sock. "The family head's cousin!" he thought to himself, "Dead!" Before he had had time to tell his brother of his discovery, he suddenly noticed the large party of bandits led by the number two streaming back towards them in full retreat, and saw that among them were his adopted father Xue Zhengli, Liu Laoyi and Zhao Shizi.

"Start out!"

"Start out will you, you bastards!" Rangzi Jiu and Li Erhong yelled frantically at the captives.

As one the captives struggled to their feet and set off alongside the bandits. As they walked, a blood-red sun struggled over the horizon, irradiating the snow-covered plain. In their wake a few scattered shots rattled out, after which silence resumed.

Chapter 14

At noon they stopped in a broken-down village to fill their bellies and allow those who needed it to satisfy their opium craving, and soon after dusk finally arrived at some place in the middle of nowhere to settle down for the night. The melting snow had made the roads muddy, leaving them all more tired than usual. Tao Jusheng went to bed immediately after supper, and by the time he woke up it was already the time when country-dwellers were having their morning meal. Jumping

down quickly from his bed, he poked at the fire burning on the floor until the flames were leaping up once more, then plucked two or three fat lice from inside his tunic and tossed them into the blaze. By the time he had washed his face the bandits were following suit, and after bustling about warming water for them he was at last able to sit down by the fire and wait for the villagers to bring breakfast.

The house where Jusheng's party had been put up was an old, dilapidated affair. Facing onto a small outermost courtyard was a shopfront flanked by connecting rooms on either side. Behind that were the inner residential quarters, and at the back of those was the rear courtyard. Their billet was a room within the big inner gateway that led through to the main buildings. Jusheng, in order to fetch water for washing, bring firewood and visit the toilet, had been inside the gateway several times already, so had been able to carry out a detailed survey of the house. Both its main section and the back room had already been razed to the ground, and the buildings along each side had also been heavily ransacked. The shopfront had contained some storage shelves and a counter, but these too were in pieces, and had been piled up together with some broken tables and chairs.

Jusheng imagined how it must have been ten years before when the owner of this residence had lived here in comfort: healthy and prosperous, ducks and geese by the flock, male and female servants responding instantly to a single call. On market days the doors of the shopfront would have been thrown open to the small lane outside, the bustling crowds there forming a never-ending procession. After every spring and autumn harvest the tenants would come pouring in from the nearby villages in carts laden with grain and fuel which they would drag through the back gate into the rear courtyard.

In the midst of this reverie, Jusheng, recalling the house in which he had once lived, was overcome by a vague feeling of ennui. Within the deserted house he had seen only a blind old woman with white hair and a village girl who cared for her. "Wherever can everybody else be?" he wondered. "Dead? Or perhaps fled into the safety of the town?" The memory also caused him to recall his own grandmother and the stories she used to tell him of the 'Red Heads' and the 'White Wolf'.¹⁰⁾ Their home had been sacked by bandits several years ago, and less than a twelve-month later she had died of sorrow....

After the morning meal Zhao Shizi rounded up Jusheng and a couple of the youngest bandits and led them off in high spirits to find some fun. Once outside Jusheng was able to see that the street where they were was actually just outside the thick village wall, and that the house they had been billeted in was close to the gate. Although the wall had been reinforced with yellowish-brown stones, clumps of dried grass sprouted from the cracks between them, and the gateway had already half tumbled to the ground. Gaps in the battlements boasted iron-cast cannon, their muzzles adorned with a layer of recent snow. The two massive gates, inlaid with strips of iron, stood vainly barred against intruders, opening only a fraction from time to time to allow the passage of peasants bringing food to the bandits. A group of ragged children playing on the ice that covered the nearby stream peeped timidly at Jusheng and his party. Jusheng longed to venture within the walls for a look around, but was forbidden to do so by Zhao Shizi. "There's nothing for us inside those ramparts, we'll go off to the seats to have some fun."¹¹⁾ So saying, he led Jusheng and the two bandits off in the opposite direction.

After leaving the main road, they crossed a little stone bridge deeply

rutted by the passage of heavy carts, turned down a narrow track, and travelled for about the distance of an arrow-shot before arriving at the foot of some low hills. There they found a great pool into which flowed a narrow stream spanned by another small stone bridge. Although the swiftness of the current had as yet kept the stream from freezing over completely, the pool had come to resemble a patch of jade. On the lower slopes two young peasants were pasturing a mule, a young colt and two oxen, and at the sight of the colt Zhao Shizi's eyes lit up. Dashing forward, he grabbed hold of its mane and, heedless of its bucking and kicking clambered upon its back, calling out at the same time: "Jusheng! Jump on the mule! Jump on the mule!" After expending much energy, Jusheng was finally able, with the aid of one of the bandits, to hoist himself upon the animal's back. They had gone no more than a few paces, however, when the mule suddenly gave a violent kick with its hind legs, sending him flying to the ground. Since Jusheng shrank from having a second try, the young bandit took his place and followed Zhao Shizi as he trotted up the slope toward the top of the hill. The two young peasants, showing so signs of fear whatsoever, laughed as they watched. Tao Jusheng tagged along behind with the remaining bandit, calling and laughing happily despite his shortness of breath.

The sky was clear and crisp, a sea of blue stretching to the horizon where, looking more like a flock of sheep lying on the shore, a small clump of white clouds lingered. Here and there scraps of unmelted snow clung to the shaded spots on the slopes, in the fields and on the roofs of the village houses. From the damp patches left behind where the snow had already melted, steam curled upwards in the heat of the sun. Looking down from their vantage point toward the village, they could

see that it contained a crossroads and a large number of tightly-packed tiled houses. In the streets a few peasants could be seen, while others stood on the walls watching events. Jusheng felt happier than he had done for several days, and could not prevent himself from grasping hold of Zhao Shizi's arm:

“Uncle Shizi, are any of our people stopping inside the ramparts?”

“No, the family head has forbidden us to go in and cause trouble for the peasants.”

Jusheng abruptly recalled the events that had transpired early the previous morning. Some time before dawn the boss had led a group of bandits to sneak into the village to steal the guns from the local police detachment. Although they had managed to get into the office and steal the guns, owing to the carelessness of the scouts a militia unit stationed in a nearby blockhouse had suddenly opened fire upon the squad and surrounded them in the courtyard of the police office. With a Mauser pistol blazing in each hand the boss had led a charge and deflected the ‘wind at the gate’.¹²⁾ Just as the bandits were about to clamber over the wall, however, the boss' cousin Li Xiangfu had received a bullet in the back and had been killed instantly.

“Do those ramparts contain any rich families?”

“Sure. Almost every house in the place has a rich family in it.” Zhao Shizi turned to look at the two young bandits before going on. “In the old days people with less than ten *qing* of land here were considered too poor to give food to beggars, and even now there are still a good few families with several hundred *mu* each.”¹³⁾

“And they even have a police detachment?” asked Jusheng anxiously.

“They sure do. Still, they generally haven't wanted any trouble with us ditch-diggers, and things have been pretty friendly.”

"The gateway on this side," said one of the bandits, pointing to the eastern gate, "was smashed with a cannon shot when some army was fighting a battle here, and they set fire to a lot of the houses, too."

"They also reckon that all the young women who hadn't managed to run away were taken off to be the soldiers' bedmates," added the other bandit.

"Huh!" added Zhao Shizi with an air of pride, "The soldiers nowadays are even less reliable than we are!"

High above a flock of wild geese flew slowly out of the north and passed over them in perfect V formation, calling gently to each other as they went. Zhao Shizi, with a look at the sky, pushed the colt over toward Jusheng and ordered peremptorily: "Grab hold of the mane, quick! Don't let it get away!" Then, losing no time, he slipped his rifle from his shoulder and pushed in a bullet. With one eye on the flight of birds, he asked:

"Jusheng, which one do you want me to bring down?"

"The one on its own," replied Jusheng, eyeing one bird that had fallen some way behind the rest.

"Right, but you go and check it out for me, OK?"

Zhao Shizi casually lifted the rifle and loosed off a shot. The bird they had selected fluttered and span in the air a few times before plummeting down to the wilderness below. The rest of the flock immediately broke formation and scattered, their frightened, panicky cries echoing in the air. At once the two young bandits selected targets of their own and loosed off two or three shots each, but no more of the birds fell from the sky. Zhao Shizi cursed them, laughing:

"Come on, stop wasting so many fucking bullets!" Then, grabbing hold of the colt's mane, he gave Jusheng a push:

“Off then and find that goose for me!”

The downed bird had fallen some 200 metres away. Jusheng, recalling the fact that he was no more than a prisoner of the bandits, hesitated for a moment, then finally picked up the skirts of his gown and ran down the hill. By the time he had returned panting to the spot, the others had gone over to stand by the frozen pool. After a quick examination of the goose (which in fact meant sizing it up for the pot), they returned it to Jusheng and resumed their game of skimming stones over the ice.

Words could hardly suffice to describe the exquisite sound of the stones as they skimmed over the frozen surface, the beauty of it seeming to increase as the stone slid further away. If any words could be mobilised to express the sound, perhaps only ‘light and clear’ would do, for as the stones receded into the distance it was like the faint trembling of a thin copper string. Even one of the young peasants could not resist the urge to join in their game, but none was able to match the skill of Zhao Shizi. Zhao’s stones would touch the ice within ten feet or so, then glide over the surface until they reached the opposite bank far away in the distance. As for the others, either their stones hit the ice too late or they would come to a stop long before they reached the other side. Tao Jusheng tried his skill two or three times, with results so abysmal that the others could not help laughing.

Their game over, the party returned amid hearty laughter the way they had come. When they reached the entrance to the house Jusheng spied Liu Laoyi chatting with a soldier on the stone bridge in front of the gate, their faces too wreathed in smiles. Zhao Shizi cheerfully dangled their trophy in front of Liu Laoyi:

“Laoyi, what do you think of this then!”

Liu Laoyi replied with an air of disgruntledness. "Rape your mother! Couldn't you bring down more than one?" As the conversation on the bridge resumed, Zhao Shizi and Jusheng strolled into their lodgings.

Chapter 15

As they were snatching a quick midday meal, Xue Zhengli suddenly came in from outside, smilingly brandishing a cloth full of silver dollars in one hand and a bundle made from heavy mulberry-bark paper in the other. One of the rich captives had just been redeemed, and both the money and the opium represented his cut of the ransom from the boss. Opening the two bundles, he first took a share for himself, then divided the rest among the other bandits. Chen Laowu, who was in the middle of a shave, hastily pushed the barber to one side and stood up from his stool. Taking his share of the silver dollars, he painstakingly held them to his ear one by one and tapped them to test the sound. The opium had already been cut up into pieces by the boss, but he weighed it carefully in his hand, collected the crumbs that had fallen onto the table with his finger tips, then wrapped it all up in some waxed paper. Finally he stuffed both the money and the opium into a cloth wrapper and weighed the whole carefully again before sitting down to continue his shave. As the razor ran down his face, sounding more like someone scything grass, the onlookers burst into merry laughter. In this way the morning passed in an atmosphere of revelry, and it was not until two in the afternoon that they finally set out.

Before they had been going very long Tao Jusheng discovered a number of new facts: first, that the number two was now riding a white horse instead of walking; second, that the gang had from somewhere

not only acquired some new recruits but also suddenly increased its stock of captives; third, and most intriguing for Jusheng, that the soldier whom he had seen that morning in military uniform chatting with Liu Laoyi outside the village gate was now, dressed in plain-clothes and carrying a pistol, riding with the gang. This new bandit, who only hours before had been a member of the military, was evidently on excellent terms with the gang's number two and with the one-eyed Li Erhong; clearly, his initiation into the gang had preceded that conversation with Liu Laoyi.

While they were riding Liu Laoyi introduced him to Xue Zhengli, Zhao Shizi, Chen Laowu and Xue's other subordinates, and the man quickly became familiar with them too. "You're to call him 'Uncle Li'" ordered Liu Laoyi, patting Jusheng on the head. Tapping the ash from his cigarette with the tip of a finger, the man looked at Jusheng and smiled kindly. "You're Jusheng, right? Do you miss your home?" Although Jusheng could not bring himself to like this Uncle Li, finding him a bit slippery-looking and having the air of a ne'er-do-well,¹⁴⁾ yet he too soon found himself getting on with him swimmingly.

"Uncle Li, what did you do with your uniform?" Jusheng summoned his courage to ask the question that had most sparked his curiosity.

"The tunic? Back in the ramparts having a few days off!" replied the other with a smile.

"Then you won't be with us for long?"

"Right, I just came back from leave, I'll need to be off pretty soon." The man called Li obviously did not want to divulge too much about himself to Jusheng; winking craftily at him, he went on: "I'm a bloke who likes to be with his mates and who enjoys a wild time, so I'm spending a few days on the road with this bunch. If we bump into each

other again look out you don't go acting familiar, OK?"

The words, though uttered in a tone of joviality, nonetheless contained an element of threat. Jusheng laughed, but did not dare to dawdle any longer chatting to 'Uncle Li'.

Just before dusk they reached a largeish village where they bedded down for the night before setting out again next morning. The same pattern continued for more than a week, the gang meanwhile growing all the time. On the move the bandits and their hostages formed a black swath over the plain for almost a quarter of a mile. Although he still thought often of his father and mother, and continued to worry about his brother's fate, Tao Jusheng felt himself growing closer and closer to Xue Zhengli and the other bandits, and having got used to their life was beginning to discern points of interest in it. At heart a romantic child, during his elementary school days he would often stand in front of the storyteller on his way home from class and listen with rapt attention to his stories of various greenwood heroes, loathe even to go home for dinner. Now that he was living the greenwood life himself, his romanticism and heroic temperament had been tempered still further. He loved Liu Laoyi and Zhao Shizi for their straightforwardness, their courage, and their skill with guns, and had it not been for the fact that his brother was living a life of misery as a captive under constant threat of death, he would not have been in the least disturbed had he been ordered to remain with these bandits forever.

Up to now Jusheng had yet to exchange a single word with the 'family head' Li Shuimo, and had rarely had the chance even to catch a glimpse of him. Because his opium habit was so serious, Li was never seen outside taking the air; when the gang got under way he would emerge after the others had already set out, and once astride his horse

turn up the collar of his heavy overcoat to conceal his face completely. Jusheng's impression was merely of a very young man, slight of build, with a sallow expression more suited to a frail scholar. The early-morning battle some days before had done nothing to dispel that impression.

Nevertheless, Jusheng had come to feel a strong affection for Li Shuimo, even to the point of hero-worshipping him. He would often sit and imagine how the militia had had him surrounded in the courtyard and how Li had fought his way through the 'wind at the gate', the gun in each hand cutting a 180 degree swath through his enemies. With one stride he was out the door, killing assailants as he ran, shielding his followers with his own body. Dreaming of the tense, stirring episode, Jusheng's breath would grow short and his eyes would gleam, for all the world as if he himself had become Li Shuimo. The stories that circulated within the gang about the chief swelled still further in Jusheng's eyes the unusual aura of mystery surrounding this pale-faced individual.

It was said that Li Shuimo had 'fallen into the water' — become a bandit — at the age of 16, and by the time he was 25 had got himself enrolled as a regimental commander in the army. For more than a year following his gang's enrolment, however, their superiors had refused to let any pay filter through to them, with the result that Li's men were at the end of their tether. Li, knowing that with their bandit records a mutiny was out of the question, somehow managed to restrain their tempers. One day a subordinate of his, a company commander named Cui Erdan, resolved to secretly lead his own followers away and return to banditry. When several of his men came running to Li Shuimo to inform him of Cui's secret plans, Li had received them coolly, refusing

to believe their story. Shaking his head, he explained:

"Impossible, you men shouldn't listen to idle rumours. If Company Commander Cui was really thinking of returning to digging ditches, he would have come to report to me first."

Yet that night, sure enough, Cui assembled his company and prepared to flee. Li Shuimo, informed of this serious development and urged to act immediately to nip Cui's plan in the bud, once again continued serenely cooking his opium and replied with a shake of his head:

"I still don't believe it. Old Cui wouldn't keep such a plan secret from me."

By this time Cui Erdan had already led his men outside the confines of the village, but the more he thought about it the more ill at ease he began to feel. Finally he ordered his company to wait and hurried back to regimental headquarters where he stood beside Li Shuimo's opium couch and stammered:

"Regimental Commander ... I, I'm a straightforward man who doesn't go behind people's backs. Cui Erdan is a man who appreciates a favour. Commander, you've always treated me too well...."

Partly from anxiety, partly from sadness, Cui Erdan found that a lump in his throat prevented him from saying the things he had come prepared to say. Li Shuimo, his gaze fixed indolently on the lamplight, continued cooking his opium. Finally, in a tone which was half consoling, half reproachful, he replied:

"Whatever's on your mind, can't it wait till morning?"

"The brothers have had it with this poverty!" blurted out Cui. "Everyone wants to get out of here and go back to being ditch-diggers again. But I've come to report to you first, as you've always been so good to me...."

Li Shuimo glanced calmly at Cui Erdan. "Shit! Why does something no bigger than a sesame seed have to get out of hand like this! Now don't give me your crap, you've been planning this for months, right?"

"Yes sir!"

Li Shuimo, still cooking his opium, asked concernedly. "And you're planning on leaving right away?"

"The men and horses are waiting outside the village. I just came back to report to you."

"How many men are you taking with you?"

"Only my own company. I swear I wouldn't take a single one of anybody else's men."

"And the rifles?"

"We're taking them too."

"Send the ordnance officer over!" ordered Li Shuimo to a sentry standing beside them. "Tell him to get here right away!"

Li Shuimo pulled himself to an upright position, placed an opium pellet in the bowl of his pipe, then put it down and began reproaching Cui Erdan.

"Erdan, the situation outside's not what it was. With your lousy rifles and not more than one ammunition belt per man, do you really think you can leave here and get yourselves started again? In any case, once you made the decision you should have told me about it rightaway. Loosening your belt when the shit's almost out of your arsehole — no wonder they gave you the name 'Erdan'!" ¹⁵⁾

Li Shuimo, his diatribe over, returned to his reclining position on the couch, took up his pipe, and commenced sucking gustily. Cui Erdan, nonplussed, gazed at him, not daring to leave, yet not knowing what to say either. Just as Li finished smoking the opium pellet the ordnance

officer came rushing in, still oblivious to what was happening. Li Shuimo began issuing him orders.

“Go now and see to it that Erdan is issued with twenty of the best rifles together with a full ammunition pouch for each man in his company. Oh, and give him one of our light machine-guns and five good Mausers from our pistol detachment!”

“Yes, Regimental Commander ...uh... should I do it right away?”

“Immediately!” Li Shuimo spoke with an air of curt finality. The ordnance officer disappeared, unable to make head nor tail of things. Cui Erdan, more baffled than ever, cast apprehensive looks all around him. Li Shuimo weighed his opium borer in his hand, then, his eyes fixed on Cui Erdan’s face, gave a gesture of his chin toward the outside and ordered in an affable tone of voice:

“Go on then, Erdan! Go and have your fun for a few months! Then, when you’ve been thoroughly thrashed, send someone to me with a report!”

Suddenly realising the meaning behind these words, Cui Erdan dropped to his knees and began bawling.

“I’m not going after all! I’d rather stay here and starve to death than leave you, Regimental Commander Li...!”

“What the fuck are you blubbering about, you spineless bastard!”

Li Shuimo sat up, this time with an air of genuine anger.

“You’re not some kid who can’t leave its fucking mother! So you’re going to leave me for a couple of months, what of it? Get up and get the shit out of here, stop behaving like some fucking woman!”

Another story circulating about Li Shuimo also concerned his days as a regimental commander, and amply demonstrated his courage, his steady nerves, and his ingenuity on the battlefield. During one of

Henan's warlord conflicts, he and his regiment had been set to capture a certain vital area. One night, after satisfying his opium habit, he set out with a cane in one hand and a torch in the other to inspect the front line positions. In order to present as small a target as possible, he refused to allow anyone to accompany him. Single-handed he managed to find his way to just in front of the enemy scouts, and remained there quietly observing things for some time. Just as he was preparing to shift his position, however, he was startled by a sentry who, only a few paces away, levelled his rifle at him and shouted, "Password!" Li switched on his torch and, directing the powerful beam straight at the man's eyes, began striding quickly towards him. When he reached him he switched off the beam and rapped the man sharply on the head and hands with his cane, knocking the rifle to the ground. In a low but fierce voice he began to rant:

"Idiot! Don't you even know how to ask for the password right?! Shouting out in a voice like that, if I'd really been an enemy soldier I could have put paid to you with one shot! What's your name?"

The unhappy sentry could only assume that it must be his own commanding officer come to inspect their positions, and stammered out his name through trembling lips. Li Shuimo watched him, then turned about and disappeared into the inky darkness.

Stories such as these, constantly on the bandits' lips, left a deep impression on Jusheng's romantic, adolescent mind. Seeing the band growing rapidly larger, seeing Li Shuimo's reputation rising like the sun in the east for a radius of some 100 miles around, Jusheng derived as much pleasure, even pride, as any of the bandits. In the early days he had been aware at every moment of his status as one of the bandits' 'tickets', and his every move was made in a state of constant anxiety.

These days it was only when he caught a glimpse of Qinsheng or remembered his brother's plight, when he thought about his mother, or when he wished he could learn how to fire a rifle that he recalled his humble standing among the bandits. At all other times he was able to give vent to his naïve fantasies, imagining that some day his marksmanship would surpass that of Zhao Shizi, his ingenuity on the battlefield exceed that of Li Shuimo, that he too, at the command of a vast company of riders, would be able to roam freely across the world. At times like these he would recall quite naturally scenes from the 'Romance of the Three Kingdoms', and in his imagination become Zhuge Kongming, flitting unpredictably across the battlefield at the head of his men.

As the days passed the notions conjured up by Jusheng's imagination became more and more wild and fanciful. He wished with all his heart that he could join the gang on a raid, longed for a chance to stand alongside Xue Zhengli and the others as they fought their way through the 'wind at the gate'. While everyone knew that he was a gutsy kid, nobody suspected that he was harbouring such whims as these. Then, one afternoon when the gang had decided to spend the entire day in a certain village, the man named Li came running in and, after inviting Liu Laoyi and a few others to join him to 'have some fun' — the bandits' term for a raid — asked Jusheng if he would like to come along too. And so it was that Tao Jusheng set off in high spirits to take part in his first set-to with honest peasants. As he personally took a hand in razing their simple dwellings to the ground it would not be without a hint of misgiving in his heart, but at the same time this new taste of reality left no room to doubt his bravery.

Chapter 16

In a relaxed mood, the group of bandits led Jusheng down an incline, running east along a bleak and disused highway. All the way the man named Li related with gusto his recent gambling exploits and the women he had acquired for himself, the bandits meanwhile listening enraptured. Jusheng alone ran far ahead of the others, jumping in and out of the deep gulley beside the road, frolicking like a young mountain goat just let off its leash. From time to time he picked up a rough stone from beside the road and threw it mightily into the distance at the crows pecking at the wheat stalks, causing them to flutter into the air. Suddenly, after they had gone some two miles or so, half a dozen peasants came rushing out of a village just over an arrow-shot away on the right-hand side. Brandishing red-tasselled spears, they came charging toward the highway, their mouths emitting the same unnerving sound:

“Ha! Ha! Ha...!”¹⁶⁾

Tao Jusheng, startled, promptly picked up a big stone and jumped back a step, but fortunately for him Zhao Shizi, Liu Laoyi and the rest reacted quickly. Loosing off a volley of shots, they killed three of the peasants on the spot, causing the others to turn tail and flee, then chased the survivors into the village where they killed all they met and burned every house they came to. Throughout the fierce battle Tao Jusheng stuck close to the bandits, shrinking from nothing. Despite the remorse he felt toward the peasants concerned, he could not help following Li as he plunged into the courtyard of one house. Two women were already lying inside the brushwood door, their pale faces surrounded by a pool of blood. Jumping over the body of one of them, Li took

a burning sorghum stalk and touched it to the roof of the house, and Jusheng, his heart too suddenly turned vicious, ran with another into a side room and hurriedly left it leaning against the wall in one corner. Flames hissed, and blood-red tongues of fire licked hungrily at the dry thatched roof of the house. In seconds it began to belch black smoke and caught fire. Jusheng did not retire immediately, but stood watching the flames anxiously, worried that they might go out after he had left. Then from out in the courtyard he heard the man named Li shout:

“Time to get out of here! Everybody out!”

Hearing the shouts, Jusheng hastened from the room, jumped over the dead bodies for a second time, and left the smoke-filled farmhouse courtyard behind him. Scattered shots could still be heard throughout the village as the bandits searched every last corner for those still in hiding. It was clear that, apart from those who had escaped before the attack with their mules and oxen and other valuables, everyone in the village had been killed. Setting light to another wheat-stack, Jusheng pranced gaily over to Zhao Shizi. Zhao was just then standing in front of the doorway to another house watching the building burn, but turned around at the sound of the approaching footsteps. As soon as he saw Jusheng he exclaimed in a loud voice,

“Oy, take a look at your shoulder!”

Jusheng stood transfixed, then discovered that a piece of burning material as big as an egg had fallen onto his right shoulder. Laughing, he hurriedly beat out the flames, then shouted:

“Wow! So that’s the smell of burning I noticed!”

“How did you manage to burn yourself like that?” asked Shizi.

“Search me!” Jusheng glanced at the singed patch, then continued.

“Uncle Shizi, what lousy luck! I only just had this green gown made last winter in Xinyang!”

By this time Liu Laoyi, Li and the others had all arrived, leaving only Chen Laowu unaccounted for. “Where’d that guy get to?” Everyone cast about them with their eyes until finally Liu Laoyi bellowed in his stentorian voice:

“Chen Laowu! Chen Laowu! Come on out!”

“We’re moving out any minute!” Zhao Shizi added his voice to Liu’s.

Chen Laowu finally emerged running from a house that was already starting to burn. Over his shoulder he carried a huge bundle, but because it had been hastily wrapped the end of a footbinding cloth and a child’s trouser-leg could be seen protruding from it. Liu Laoyi and Zhao Shizi exchanged looks, then began cheerfully cursing him:

“Just as I thought, you turtle!”

Chen Laowu, appearing nonplussed by their jeers, yanked on the smelly bandage and threw it along with the trousers into the flames, retorting,

“You wastrels don’t know the value of things! If I hadn’t brought these few things out, they’d all have burned wouldn’t they?”

“He’s right, anything we take home will come in useful!” Liu Laoyi mocked Chen Laowu in his rough voice. “Hey, the old lady here keeps her jamrags under the mattress. Quick, nip back and grab them too!”

The words seemed to render Chen Laowu more tongue-tied than ever, for he merely aimed a blow at Liu Laoyi with the bundle, cursing under his breath, “Poxy sod!”

Skirting a dead body lying in their path, the bandits made their way out of the village, still laughing uproariously. Instead of returning the way they had come, they turned onto a narrow track and continued

down the hill. A few hundred yards away there was a winding stream that meandered its way between two hills. Its banks were joined by a small stone bridge, on the far side of which were scattered a few bedraggled old willow-trees. A little further along they came to a tiny village whose earthen walls had already all but collapsed. Through cracks in the wall they could see that only a few thatched houses remained, all the better dwellings having been reduced to the red shell of their surrounding walls, and all the substantial trees burned to the ground. Outside the village stood a single tallow tree, the few red leaves still clinging to its branches adding an incongruous dash of colour heightened by the rays of the setting sun. Apart from this one deserted village the entire plain stretched emptily before them as far as the horizon, not a solitary village with houses still standing nor a fully-grown tree to be seen anywhere.

“That little village was my uncle’s,” Zhao Shizi told Li, “I burned it down myself.”

“How’d you come to hate your uncle’s family so much?” asked the other.

“It’s a long story. Y’know what they say, ‘It takes a long time to explain why a kid has lost its mother.’”

Fending off his friend’s question with this old folk saying, Zhao Shizi peered off towards the village. Suddenly his eyes bulged, and he unslung his rifle from his shoulder, exclaiming softly in a tone of surprise,

“Well, if it isn’t my second uncle!”

Standing beside a freshly-dug grave outside the village gate, a figure dressed in a long blue cotton gown stood shielding his eyes as he gazed in their direction. As soon as he noticed that Zhao Shizi had discovered him he leapt like a rabbit into the ditch beside the road, turned around

and scurried away. Zhao Shizi cursed him loudly in a tone of hatred.

“Bastard! You won't get away! Now you'll see what I can do with a gun!”

With Zhao's first shot the fugitive fell to the ground, but evidently the bullet had passed through his calf without breaking the bone, for he immediately struggled to his feet and in a limping run continued his flight. Because several stone markers outside the gateway obstructed their vision, Zhao Shizi and Liu Laoyi let off a number of shots without hitting their target. Soon they saw the fleeing figure's back disappear through the gateway, and Zhao set off after him letting out a stream of angry oaths.

“If you get away from me today old Zhao'll cut his head off and stick it down his own crotch!”

Liu Laoyi exclaimed with satisfaction: “Ha, it's gonna be as easy as finding a louse between your own balls! Look, there it goes now!”

Exerting the last of his failing strength, the fugitive dragged himself into a low thatched hut and hid under the bed, a trail of blood marking his passage. When the inhabitants had seen the bandits leave the village on the opposite hill and approach their own, all the young men and women together with the children had taken refuge in a nearby barn, leaving behind just two old women to watch the gates. Realizing that it was Zhao Shizi come to seek retribution on his uncle, however, they summoned their courage and came forward calling out familiar greetings. A dozen to fifteen strong, they surrounded Zhao Shizi, some calling him “cousin”, others “elder brother Shizi”, while the middle-aged and older people all called him by his full name. Blocking his way into the hut, they all began to plead with him to show mercy to his uncle.

In a quavering voice an old woman begged: "Little Shizi, little Shizi, spare the life of your second uncle, won't you? He's already fifty and doesn't have many more days to live. Forget it and let him go, and when he's born again he'll repay you by becoming a mule or a horse!"

Another old man beseeched him: "You've already killed your first uncle and all your cousins and burned down their houses, for your mother's sake just spare his life!"

One middle-aged peasant with a humped back continued: "What happened has been over and done with for twenty years, even the deepest grudge should be forgotten by now. And he's your ma's brother, after all ... they were both raised by the same mother...!"

"Cousin, cool your temper, cool your temper, he's not worth using a bullet on!"

"No!" roared Zhao Shizi. "Even if the Ruler of Heaven himself came to plead with me it would be useless!" Turning to the hump-backed peasant, he went on in a brutal tone: "Fifth Uncle, this is your house. If you don't bring him out I'm going to burn it down!"

"Shizi, for your ma's sake"

"Any more of your crap and I'll burn the place down now!"

When the wounded man was finally pulled out from under the bed, the others scattered and fell back several paces, not daring to say any more. Some of the children cowered behind the backs of the adults, others took refuge inside the house. Jusheng too felt his heart overcome by sadness. Already unable to walk, once out of the house the victim fell to his knees to beg for mercy. Zhao Shizi declared that he would not kill him, but that he would have to spend some time with the gang. Supporting his second uncle by one arm, he walked with him a few steps then gave a discreet sign to Li. The latter aimed his pistol at the back

of the man's head and let off two shots in succession, after which the only sound was a kind of gurgling from second uncle's throat as he slipped from Zhao Shizi's grip to the ground. Tao Jusheng ran quickly to stand behind Shizi, then, after he had got over his shock, cheekily poked out his tongue and exclaimed in a bantering tone:

· "Uncle Shizi, he's drunk!"

"Ha, he does look drunk at that!" Liu Laoyi bared his yellow teeth in a laugh.

With the nonchalance of victors the band left the village and returned the way they had come. For many days after that the bandits would ask Jusheng every time they saw him how he came to burn a hole in his gown, and Liu Laoyi would praise him for his nifty phrase, "He's drunk!" Thereafter, whenever the bandits were about to put someone to death, Liu and the others would laugh merrily and order:

"Take him out and give him a jar of liquor!"

Chapter 17

Soon after the 8th day of the 12th lunar month the gang arrived at a village named Xue Rise and remained there for three days. Xue Rise was a rich village where all the most important landlords were named Xue and were from the same lineage as Xue Zhengli, Jusheng's adopted father. It was only a mile or so from Ciyuan, another village once prosperous but now fallen on hard times where Xue Zhengli's own family lived, and one dinner-time Xue took Jusheng and Zhao Shizi home saying that Jusheng's adopted mother and grandmother were longing to meet him. The house, unlike the imposing dwelling beside it, was small and squat with no courtyard of its own. Grandma was

squatting before the cooking range busily working up a fire when they arrived, while Ma, a blue cotton apron tied around her waist, was standing in front of a chopping board rolling noodles. Their surprise at seeing Xue Zhengli walk in with Jusheng soon turned to happiness, and for a moment they both fell into a fluster. Despite the dim light from the rape-seed oil lamp hanging on the low, smoke-blackened wall behind the chopping board, and the orange glow coming from the open door of the cooking range, the room was very dark. Zhao Shizi took Jusheng by the hand and led him over to the chopping board, saying with a laugh:

“Second Sister, take a look at this adopted son of yours then. Pretty good looking, eh?” Then, turning to Jusheng, “Kid, quick now and bow to your Ma!”

Ma, her face all smiles, quickly turned up the flame on the lamp and looked Jusheng up and down. Finally she nodded: “You’re right, and I thought you’d been pulling my leg!” Wiping her hands on her apron, she took Jusheng’s arm and turned him in a circle as Grandma came running over. “Look Grandma, think what a good family he must come from. He looks pretty bright, and well turned out too!”

“Let me see! Let me see!” cried Grandma, catching hold of Jusheng’s other arm.

“Nice, nice! Thick eyebrows and big eyes... How old are you, youngster?”

Jusheng’s adopted father was sitting by a small table, his contentedness obvious despite his silence. Zhao Shizi, who was sitting in front of the kitchen range tending the fire for Grandma, used the opportunity to loosen his collar fastening, go over to the fire and capture a troublesome louse. At that moment Grandma looked up from her idle banter-

ing with Jusheng to see great flames shooting from the door of the range. Hurriedly she deserted him and rushed over to where Zhao Shizi was standing.

“Little Shizi, out of the way! Let me do the cooking!”

Zhao Shizi looked up with a smile: “Leave it to me, old lady, making fires is my favourite winter occupation!”

“Certainly not! Scamps like you don’t have a clue about how important firewood is! Next you’ll be sticking the mulberry-wood fork in the fire!” For all his mischievousness, Zhao Shizi had no choice but to surrender his position at the stove and squat on one side where he concentrated upon catching lice. Cracking a ‘fat sow’ between his finger-nails, he looked up and pressed Ma to hurry:

“Second Sister, can’t you roll any faster? My guts are rumbling!”

“Youngster,” Ma addressed her reply to Jusheng. “Why don’t you sit down on that stool and give your legs a rest. I bet you’re hungry too, eh?”

“No, I’m not hungry” replied Jusheng, going over to sit on the stool facing his adopted father.

“What a wretched hovel this is!” said Ma as she rolled the noodles. “Nowhere to put your feet... You’d better not go poking fun after you’ve gone!”

Partly because Xue Zhengli did not find it easy to get home to eat, but mostly because Jusheng was a well-born guest on his first visit to the house, Ma had prepared four small dishes, among which was omelette with green onions. After dinner Xue Zhengli and Zhao Shizi, having something to see to, disappeared for about the time it takes to smoke a pipe, leaving Jusheng behind. Ma chatted to him as she washed the dishes and scrubbed the pan, while Grandma sat in front of the

range holding a body-warmer, quietly smoking on her pipe and putting in a word from time to time.

"Your adopted father's a good man," said Ma, "It's because the times are so bad that he's had to become a ditch-digger. You've been with him for more than a little while, so you must know what he's like by now, eh?"

"I know that Second Uncle is honest and sincere with people."

"The last time he came home he told me that you'd persuaded him to leave the gang. Did you really do that, youngster?"

The affair had taken place long before on an occasion when Jusheng and Xue Zhengli were alone in a room writing a letter demanding payment from some peasants. When the letter was finished Jusheng's adopted father suddenly asked him:

"Jusheng, do you think this ditch-digging lark's a good idea?"

"No. It almost never gets you anywhere," replied Jusheng frankly.

"But there's no choice, it's the circumstances that push us into it!" sighed his adopted father, shaking his head.

"Second Uncle, how about giving it up after a little while longer, huh?" urged Jusheng, carried away by emotion.

"I've thought of washing my hands too when I've just made a little more out of it, but who knows whether I'll be able to live a peaceful life at home afterwards?"¹⁷⁾

"Then how about getting yourself enrolled in the army and transferred somewhere else!? As a soldier you'd have prospects, but as a ditch-digger you're never going to come to a good end."

"Don't think I haven't had the same thought myself"

Since that day Jusheng had never again raised the topic with his adopted father, but from Ma's question he realised that Xue Zhengli

had indeed been considering 'washing his hands'.

"That's right, I tried to persuade Second Uncle to join the army because he'd have a better chance of getting somewhere."

Ma ceased her work and went on: "Kid, you've had an education and your heart is as clear as a mirror. Keep on persuading him, alright? The sooner he washes his hands the better, the sooner the better! If he comes to something I'll be indebted to you for the rest of my life on earth!" Suddenly agitated, Ma lifted up one corner of her apron to wipe her eyes, then continued. "When he first took up this life last year his grandmother and I couldn't stop crying. But first one guy would press him then another till finally they pressed him so far up Mt. Liang¹⁸⁾ he couldn't turn back! The poor guys kept on at him to be their leader, and even some well-heeled people among his own relatives nagged him because they wanted to use him to settle a few scores."

"Ah, and they were pushing him toward the cliff!" interposed Grandma bitterly.

"That's right! One way or another they were determined to push him off!" Ma heaved a deep sigh, then went on in a softer tone:

"You know how the saying goes, 'Even if you're dying don't become a bandit, even if you're being persecuted to death don't take out a lawsuit'! Now your adopted father's taken to banditry he's stuck with it for the rest of his life. How're we ever going to live easily again?"

"It's all the fault of that scamp Zhao Shizi — he really raised hell last year! And on his own he's as aimless as a quail without a tail...."

Ma cut Grandma off in mid-flow to ask Jusheng, "Youngster, is it true that you were there when Zhao Shizi killed his second uncle?"

"That's right, I was standing right behind Uncle Shizi. But I still can't make out why he'd want to kill his own uncle's entire family...."

"To avenge his mother, of course!" sighed Grandma. "Shizi's too violent. Avenging his ma is natural, but he goes too far. The poor dead thing isn't going to be too happy with him down there in the other world."

They explained to Jusheng that Zhao Shizi's father had died very young without leaving anything, so that his mother had had to return to her own family's home where his uncles, penniless because of their opium habit, promptly sold her to raise money. Rather than remarry, after crying for three days and nights she threw herself into a well leaving young Shizi, then aged 5, behind.

"So that's what happened," thought Jusheng. He too had found Zhao Shizi's behaviour excessive, but now he found his sympathy for him growing stronger.

Xue Zhengli and Zhao Shizi came back into the room bringing in their wake a large crowd of adults and children all come to take a look at Jusheng. The smiling stares of these idlers as they crowded into the doorway, honest as they were, left Jusheng feeling highly embarrassed. Luckily for him Xue Zhengli lingered only a little longer before taking him back to Xue Rise.

Chapter 18

The following morning the gang left Xue Rise, and for the next several days was constantly on the move, travelling by day and bedding down in the early evening. One heavily overcast afternoon with a north wind blowing and the sky threatening snow, Jusheng sat alone indoors guarding the door, listlessly playing with a rifle. Suddenly one of the bandits came rushing into the room to tell him that his elder brother

Qinsheng had just been dragged outside the village to be shot. Although this was not the first time the bandits had tried to frighten him by bringing such evil news, Jusheng, knowing what a trifling matter it was for them to kill someone, could not afford to ignore the warning. Leaping to his feet, he rushed out of the door, jumped over a wall, and ran for all he was worth toward the edge of the village. Sure enough, on the bank of the ditch surrounding the village stood a group of bandits, and at that moment there came the sound of a gunshot from inside the ditch. When he had pushed his way through the crowd of people, however, he discovered that the victim was not his brother at all but Hu Yuying's uncle. The old man had been shot in the back of the head, and a trickle of red brains oozed out of the open wound, staining his silvery hair and beard. Despite this he was still alive, and continued to writhe on the ground, clutching some grass stalks with both hands and endeavouring to drag himself forward. Behind him stood the 'One-Eyed Dragon' Li Erhong, one hand holding a pistol, the other on his hip, baring his yellow teeth in a laugh as he savoured his victim's suffering. Finally one of the bandits watching from the bank, moved to compassion, sent a bullet into the unfortunate's back, and the old man, after one final jerk of his legs, moved no more.

No sooner had Hu Yuying's uncle stopped breathing than from the centre of the village there came a whistle and all the bandits rushed off in the direction of the sound without giving the old man a second look. Ashen-faced, his eyes brimming with tears, Jusheng blindly followed the bandits back into the village, unable to utter a word. Just as he was running past the gateway to his own billet he bumped into Zhao Shizi, Chen Laowu and the others hurrying out of the house, and was beckoned to stop. Receiving from Zhao Shizi a grey-coloured food-bag,

he went with them toward the assembly point in the centre of the village, the horrendous vision of the old man's execution flashing before his eyes and the accusing words, "Hu Yuying shouldn't have run away!" echoing in his brain. Zhao Shizi and Chen Laowu chatted away to him, the former patting him on the head as he talked, but Jusheng, unable to register a word of what was said, merely smiled and grunted to give the impression that he was listening. Among the group of captives he picked out his brother, but far from approaching him actually averted his eyes. Then, as the gang was moving out of the village, Qinsheng managed to flash an eye to signal him over as he was running past the captives and whispered, "Ju, Hu Yuying's uncle has just been shot!" Jusheng nodded, grunted in confirmation, then moved away. On the march, whenever he caught a distant glimpse of his brother, his heart conjured up terrifying images: it was as if his own brother, like that old man, was dying before his eyes, writhing and twitching on the ground, a mixture of brains and fresh blood oozing from his skull.

The sky grew more and more sombre, and heavy clouds pressed down upon the tops of the withered trees surrounding the villages. The gang marched for hours across that wilderness, breasting numerous hills and crossing several frozen rivers without encountering almost a single soul. Then, just as a deep twilight (what Henan people call 'the time when the eyes are confused') was falling over the land, they halted in front of a walled village. While the main body of bandits huddled with their captives a hundred yards or so away in the roadside ditch out of the wind, the boss went forward with several of his men as far as the threshing ground outside the walls. The gates of the village were tightly shut. A number of peasants stood on the walls, the upper halves of their bodies visible as they waited for the talks with the approaching

bandits to begin. Two men known for their powers of persuasion detached themselves from the group of bandits and came forward to the foot of the wall, where they courteously began the negotiations with the defenders, hoping to trick them into opening the gates and save the gang a lot of effort.

“We’re Li Shuimo’s gang,” they began with a wave. “We’ve always had friendly relations with your village. Please be kind enough to open the gates and allow us to camp here for the night. We swear that not a blade of grass will be moved; if anything is touched you can regard us as enemies forthwith.”

The peasants defending the fortress just as courteously refused the request, saying that there was nowhere for them to stay in the village, and that in any case the gates had been sealed with earth. They urged their bandit friends to seek another village to spend the night, but added that they would do their best to supply them with whatever they needed. The negotiations dragged on and on, swaying back and forth until finally the situation became farce. More and more heads appeared on the walls, the bolder ones among the villagers standing on the battlements to gaze down on the bandits below. Not a few of the bandits too approached the foot of the walls, awaiting a chance to scramble up. Finally Liu Laoyi could restrain his anger no longer and began roundly cursing the defenders, who, while returning the curses, spread out quickly left and right along the walls. It was Liu Laoyi too who fired the first shot, and from that moment battle was joined.

From their hiding places behind the battlements the defenders kept up a stream of fire with home-made cannon and pieces of brick and tile, making it difficult for the bandits to approach the walls. One section of the gang, hidden within the temple of the village god just outside

the walls with some stacks of wheat stalks for cover, hurled curses and levelled shots at the defenders; the remainder fanned out to each side so as to completely surround the village. Every time one of the home-made cannon sounded from the top of the wall it was preceded by a fierce red flash. When the besieging bandits saw the flash they immediately flattened themselves to the ground or ran behind one of the wheat-stacks, re-emerging once the sound had died away to resume their cursing and firing. Tao Jusheng had felt a hint of fear at the outset; bewitched by the scene of battle, however, his feelings turned to a mixture of tension and curiosity. Oblivious of any danger, he stood up on the roadside to watch until Rangzi Jiu, keeping his own lookout from a squatting position beside him, slapped him on the thigh with a curse.

“Get the hell down here! If one of those guns gets you you’ll have a mark on your head to prove it!”

“Ju, please come down — standing there the people on the walls can see you!” added Qinsheng in a whisper. “Come sit down here with me!”

“Don’t fret,” said Jusheng with a shake of his head. “Those home-made cannon can’t fire this far.”

Qinsheng went on in an anxious voice: “That’s what you think! They can fire a good few hundred yards! Why must you be so obstinate?!”

“Go squat by your brother!” ordered Rangzi Jiu. “The villagers have rifles too!”

Left with no choice, Tao Jusheng jumped back down into the ditch and stood in front of his brother, from where he was at least able to stick his head out over the side. Although darkness had fallen and he was no longer able to make out the shapes of the bandits engaged in the attack on the village, the gunshots and the sound of curses enabled

Jusheng to make out the firing positions of Liu Laoyi, Zhao Shizi and Chen Laowu. The curses the bandits levelled at the walls were of the crudest kind, giving the impression that they were playing with the defenders. When a particularly vile one aroused the amusement of the other attackers, it would be met by a chorus of delighted laughter. Suddenly someone shattered this relaxed atmosphere of curses and laughter by letting off a succession of rifle-shots, followed by a loud cry: "Pour inside! Come on, let's get pouring in there!"¹⁹⁾ The cry was promptly taken up from all around, sounding to anyone listening as if the entire plain was boiling over with a lust for killing. Interspersed with this terrifying cry, both within and without the walls there arose a protracted, high-pitched roar that in its intensity seemed to set the very ground trembling.²⁰⁾ As both the cries and the roars died away, and as the sound of the rifles and cannon also became sparser, Jusheng could hear Liu Laoyi chanting in a rhythmic voice:

"Pin back your ears you people inside the walls! You've got until 1 a.m. to send out eighteen of your young women! Make sure they have greasy faces, badly-bound feet and double-fold eyelids!"²¹⁾

"Everybody here has a set of bollocks on 'em. If it's young women you're wanting go on home where your kid sisters are waiting for you!"

Liu Laoyi loosed a shot at the spot where the voice had come from, then continued his chant:

"Unless the women are sent out yours truly is going to smash his way inside, burn all your houses, shoot all the men, slaughter the old and the kids, and carry off all the women pretty or not and pass them round among us!"

"You're pretty cocksure, you bastard, but if you've really got any guts tell us who you are!"

"The name's Liu Laoyi. My home is south of the northern hills, north of the southern hills, in a village with trees, one where the dogs bark. At 18 I entered the water and marched with the White Wolf as far as Gansu and Xinjiang." ²²⁾

No sooner had Liu Laoyi finished speaking than from the battlements there came a great flash as a cannon was fired at the spot where he was standing. As the hiss of the cannon-shell died away, Liu Laoyi cried out in a loud voice feigning surprise:

"Look out lads, they're using tin-can mortars!" ²³⁾ Then he began to wail in a child-like voice, "Shizi, they've gone and shot something off me!"

"What thing's that then?"

"A hair!"

Liu Laoyi's carefree attitude was dissipated, however, by the intensifying battle as the roars and the bloodthirsty cries reached a crescendo, but even after the assault had continued for half an hour the bandits had still not succeeded in breaching the walls of the village. Rangzi Jiu, who had been yelling encouragement for all he was worth, had gone somewhat hoarse. He jumped down into the ditch, pulled out a steel box from his pocket, and from it took an opium pellet which he popped into his mouth. After crunching and swallowing it he giggled:

"Hell it's cold! Why do those people have to be so stubborn when we're out in the open shivering as if we were sieving wheat-chaff?!"

"I wouldn't have believed those ramparts could be so hard to tear!" ²⁴⁾ said Li Erhong angrily.

"What's the hurry!? Think we're going to let them move the entire place? They've got a few tin-can mortars in there with them — who's to say they haven't got one or two modern guns too!"

Just then the boss ordered the captives and some of the bandits to move off to a market a mile or so away, leaving the rest behind to continue the siege. Rangzi Jiu slapped his buttocks, wiped away the snot hanging from his whiskers with the edge of his sleeve, then turned to the captives and their keepers:

“Get a move on! The people in this enclosure aren’t friendly, so we all have to go a bit further and cram some pulp in the market over there.... Count off, tickets!”²⁵⁾

Amid the thickening darkness Tao Jusheng followed the other captives away from the besieged village, marching south along the highway. Though sparser than before, the sound of the gunfire came crisply to them through the night air. Two more villages formed a triangle with the one the gang was besieging, the distance between each no more than a mile or so. As the column passed between them Jusheng overheard from the conversation around him that the village on the left was called Zaozhuang, the one on the right Linzhuang, and the one under attack Liuhuzhuang. The villagers of Zaozhuang and Linzhuang had done nothing to aid Liuhuzhuang, merely sitting by and watching as their neighbour suffered the bandits’ onslaught alone. From within their walls the barking of cur dogs and the sound of clappers drifted toward them, only to be swallowed up by the cold and the inky darkness.

Chapter 19

While the boss and the few bandits not taking part in the attack ensconced themselves in the main building of the house, Rangzi Jiu and his captives crowded into the two side buildings. After the meal

Jusheng was sent by Rangzi Jiu into the main room where he was to sleep with another child named Zhang Mingcai.²⁶⁾ After first spreading a screen of sorghum stalks on the floor, they covered it with a pile of straw and a quilt, and soon had themselves a warm, soft shakedown bed. There was a kindling fire not far away, which bathed their cheeks in a ruddy glow. Against the wall beyond the fire was a large bed, at one end of which the boss and a prosperous-looking guest wearing fox-fur robes lay chatting and preparing opium. In a soft voice, Zhang Mingcai told Jusheng that the guest was a representative from Brigade Commander Ma Wende come to negotiate the band's enrolment into the regular army. Looking carefully at this man's face and listening to his voice as he spoke, Jusheng realised that he was in fact the same battalion commander who had visited them earlier. Not feeling any particular interest in this newcomer, Jusheng lay listening hard to the far-off sound of gunshots and dogs barking until he felt his eyelids gradually growing heavier. At first cockcrow he was shaken awake by a confusion of sound. Chopsticks on bowls, footsteps, the slurping of noodles, gunfire, all blended together into a single cacophony of noise. Opening his eyes he saw a great throng of people crowded around the fire: some were eating, some were filling their cartridge belts, some were tying up the bottoms of their trousers with strips of cotton or lengths of hempen string. He saw too that Uncle Li was back after an absence of several days, a Mauser pistol minus its magazine stuck into his belt. Laughing, Li scratched at his teeth with one finger nail, then threw the offending thread of green vegetable into the fire. The boss was no longer in the room; the gang's number two lay opposite the guest cooking opium, the bridge of his nose still red with cold as if he had just come in from outside. Drawing ostentatiously on his cigarette,

the battalion commander examined Li from the corner of his eye, a secret smile playing around the corners of his mouth. Flicking some ash into the red sandalwood ashtray with a leisurely gesture, he yawned and asked indifferently:

“Your leave not up yet then?”

“It finished two days ago. Yesterday I went back to the city to report, but the old lady said I could take a few more days so now I’m back again.”

“Tomorrow you’d better return with me, it’s not good to take too many days off.”

“Right, I’ll be going back with you tomorrow, Battalion Commander.”

The number two, looking at Li, enjoined him in a tone half serious, half jocular:

“Once you’ve cut into Liuhuzhuang, if you find some pretty black-backed furrow,²⁷⁾ see you don’t keep her to yourself, OK? Send her to the battalion commander with the wrapping unbroken.”

Casting a sidelong glance at the battalion commander, Li giggled but kept his feelings to himself. The number two settled the opium pellet at the opening of the pipe, offered it to the commander, then finished off the pellet in one go and held out the pipe in both hands:

“If you want to ignore me it’s up to you, but I’m talking serious now. If you can provide the commander with a young girl to his taste, you’ll find you won’t regret it.”

“As long as the commander wants a good-looking black-backed furrow from inside those ramparts, she’s as good as found. One? I could find him three or four if he wants them. Second Family Head, how about one for you too?”

“Not for me, you just make sure you find one for the commander.

He likes them young, the younger the better. Aren't you afraid that after you get back home your old ladies are going to cause problems?"

"No way," replied Li, gradually losing all restraint. "No. 1 and No. 2 won't give me any trouble, and No. 3 will just curse me out a bit, ha ha ha...!"

"Go climb on your mother!" cursed the commander, though without a trace of anger. "Coming down here to spend a few days with your mates is one thing, but stealing yourself a woman and taking her home is another!"

In that instant the battalion commander, the number two, and every bandit in the room were brought together by a sense of jovial companionship. So strongly did this harmonious atmosphere affect Jusheng that he quite forgot the fact that he was no more than a captive within the gang, and longed to join them in their assault on the walled village. Suddenly Liu Laoyi burst abruptly into the room, a Mauser in his hand, followed by another bandit whose face was unfamiliar. After a moment Jusheng recognised him as one of the battalion commander's bodyguards who had visited them not long before. With one foot inside the threshold, Liu Laoyi suddenly yelled: "The sharp-mouths are already awake and shooting the air! Volunteers to be pourers get moving!"²⁸⁾ Those bandits who were still in the middle of eating hurriedly put down their chopsticks and bowls and cried one after another, "Time to move out, let's go!" The number two, his opium borer between his fingers, began giving orders:

"No lead-pulling, right? The first one over the wall gets a Mauser pistol!"

"Let's go, let's go!" urged Liu Laoyi.

The bandits rushed out of the room after him, leaving behind just

Li and the battalion commander's bodyguard. Pausing only a few moments to ascertain whether the commander had any particular orders for them, they too exchanged winks and left the room, but as soon as they got outside the commander suddenly hawked a gob of phlegm and sent them a cautionary order:

“Oy, don't go killing people unnecessarily!”

Silence returned to the room. The number two continued preparing his opium, his eyelids closing from time to time as he dozed off involuntarily. On a makeshift bed amid the shadows in one corner slept two family intermediaries, come to discuss terms for their relative's release, and a newly-recruited bandit; beside them sat the number two's bodyguard, his back to the wall, snoring softly. The battalion commander seemed fatigued, for he gave a deep yawn, stretched, then screwed up his eyes and let out two sneezes that made everything on the sandalwood opium tray jump. After wiping the beads of mucus from his nose and lips, he took the opium pipe from the number two's hands and began sucking. Concerned about how the attack on the walled village was going, Jusheng listened for a long time to the sounds from that direction but, hearing only the same sporadic gunfire and the barking of dogs, eventually drifted back into sleep.

The second time Tao Jusheng was startled out of his sleep he rolled over and sat up on the bed, and without even waiting to rub his eyes aimed two energetic blows of his fist at the sleeping Zhang Mingcai, shouting:

“Wake up and listen...! They're pouring, they're pouring!”

Although Zhang Mingcai too sat up immediately, he was so tired that for a long time his eyelids refused to part and he remained limply swaying backwards and forwards until another heavy blow from

Jusheng's fist to his leg caused him to open his eyes wide in surprise. He gazed sleepily about the room in confusion, groaning with annoyance, a strand of saliva hanging from the edge of his chin. Jusheng nudged him with his foot, hissing urgently:

"Listen, they're pouring through, they're pouring through!"

The bandits had just begun their pre-dawn attack on Liuhuzhuang, and the sound of home-made cannon and gunfire filled the air. Amidst all the firing the dare-to-dies, divided into several sections, charged to the foot of the walls, their comrades roaring encouragement from behind until the entire plain resounded with their bloodthirsty cries.

"Over the top! Charge! Pour into the place!"

"Charge! We're in, we're in...!"

"Mow 'em down with your Mausers! Kill, kill! Don't let any of the bastards get away!"

Although the number two and the battalion commander were excited by the sounds of hand-to-hand fighting, for the sake of their image as superior officers they preserved a facade of calm, as if the fact that their subordinates were scrapping at close quarters with the villagers of Liuhuzhuang was a trivial matter. The commander slowly opened his eyes, lit a cigarette, and asked indifferently,

"Are they in already?"

"No, it's too soon. They'll come running to report to me as soon as they cut through the walls."

"Listen, Laoqi..." The battalion commander took up the borer which the other man had just put down and used it to begin cooking a pellet of opium before going on.

"Shuimo aims too high. He's shilly-shallying, doesn't want to make up his mind. The brigade commander sent me here because he wants you

reorganised as soon as possible. Tell Shuimo to forget about his former relationship with the commander and just look at it as something between friends. And not to make things any more difficult for the commander.”

“You’ve got it wrong, Battalion Commander,” said the number two, raising himself to a sitting position. “It was the brigade commander who taught us everything we know, we’re not going to forget that debt. It isn’t that Shuimo doesn’t want to be enrolled; what he reckons is that we still have too few guns, so the extra ones we get from a few more days’ playing will bring the commander more benefits.”

“That’s all very well, but what the commander needs right now is men. Marshal Wu wants him to bring his forces up to division strength as quickly as possible, and that’s all we have to worry about. Don’t go thinking too high, and forget about looking for the main chance. I’ll give it to you straight — time is short; even if the commander lets you go on playing, it won’t be for long!”

“Battalion Commander, I tell you that’s not how it is! And don’t worry, there’s no chance of our getting ourselves enrolled by someone else!”

“I’ve been looking after you guys, but I’m afraid you aren’t seeing things clearly. If you try to keep a foot in both camps you’ll end up pulling the rug from under yourselves.”

“No, Commander, relax, it isn’t like that!”

Tao Jusheng and his young companion had already got their shoes on and were squatting by the fire awaiting the result of the battle. Before long they began to feel hungry. Fortunately for them the basket on the floor still held a few steamed buns, which they toasted over the fire and began eating. Noticing them, the number two asked with an

air of surprise:

“What are you two up so early for then?”

Jusheng replied innocently, “We’re waiting till we can go inside the ramparts with you to take a look around.”

Zhang Mingcai continued: “You will take us in with you, won’t you?”

“What’s the hurry? And what the fuck are you two looking so pleased about?”

After the dare-to-dies had been repulsed several times by the cannon and the steady rain of bricks, the attack was temporarily suspended. During the lull both attackers and defenders exchanged feverish curses from their respective positions, at the same time emitting high-pitched roars intended to intimidate the other side. At the third cock-crow just as the sky was beginning to lighten, Li Shuimo made a circuit of the walls on horseback, then ordered the dare-to-dies to take up their positions once again. At the same time he loosed three shots in succession from his Mauser, the signal for the all-out attack to begin.

Having concluded in the course of the night’s fighting that there were no modern guns in the village after all, the bandits’ courage was further enhanced. One section of the gang focused their rifle-fire on the battlements, making it impossible for the defenders to raise their heads and providing cover for the dare-to-dies to charge forward. Some of the latter carried ladders, others doors, while still others ran forward in pairs with a square table carried over their heads. Without bothering to fire their weapons, they ran for all they were worth toward the foot of the village wall. From time to time a cannon would find its mark in one of the doors, and while the door, fashioned from elm, would be too thick for the shot to penetrate, its force would be sufficient to bring the men beneath almost to their knees. As soon as

the first ladder was propped against the wall a dare-to-die clambered quick as lightning up to the battlements, only to be stabbed through the shoulder by a red-tasselled spear wielded by one of the defenders and sent hurtling to the ground beneath. A second and a third followed him up, only to suffer the same fate. The men carrying tables ran to an empty house close against the walls and used them as a platform to climb up onto the roof, hoping to be able to scale the wall from there, but they too were discovered by the defenders and beaten back by a rain of bricks, tiles, stones, and jars filled with lime. During the attempts to scale the walls both the home-made cannon inside and the rifles outside were used but scarcely, and the exchange of curses between dare-to-dies and defenders also ceased, leaving only the frenetic yells of encouragement from those bandits set to cover the attack. So tense was the battle that in the surrounding villages not a crow was to be seen and no dog dared to bark.

If it had not been for Rangzi Jiu's timely invention of a new kind of weapon, many more of the dare-to-dies would certainly have been wounded. When the initial attack had begun at first cock-crow he had gleefully run off with Li Erhong to watch the fighting, but before very long slapped the other on the shoulder and exclaimed, "They're not going to be able to pour through. You and I have to go back and think of another way." Back in the market they knocked open a small fireworks shop and put together several packages the size of steamed dumplings consisting of gunpowder wrapped in mulberry-leaf paper. After sticking a fuse in each they carried them back to Liuhuzhuang. "All you have to do is light the fuse like this," they told the dare-to-dies, "And throw them up onto the walls like a grenade." Following these instructions, the dare-to-dies recommenced their assault. Seconds

after the first package landed on the walls it exploded with a bright red flash, burning all the defenders nearby and creating total panic and confusion. Taking advantage of the mayhem, the other dare-to-dies used their ladders and doors to scale the walls, from where, sitting astride the battlements, they opened fire with their Mauser pistols on the remaining defenders. Liuhuzhuang had fallen.

When the number two heard the report he leapt up from his bed and said to his guest: "Battalion Commander, you have a good sleep. I'm off to have a look." Hastily pulling on his shoes, he hurried outside pistol in hand, followed closely by one of his bodyguards, Tao Jusheng and Zhang Mingcai, and lastly the newly-recruited bandit, the latter's eyes still heavy with sleep. Jumping over the ruins of the town wall, they ran off in the direction of the glare of fires and the screams of battle that marked the village of Liuhuzhuang. At that moment, as the sun began to peep over the horizon, the sky above them became flushed with the colour of blood.

Chapter 20

Some of the defenders, seeing the bandits break into the village, leapt quickly over the wall and fled, but unable to break through the cordon they were cut down in the wheat fields. A hundred yards away Jusheng and his party saw one young man strip the last shreds of burning clothing from his body and jump from the northeast corner of the wall. Stark naked but for a red-tasselled spear in his hand, he ran for his life along the ditch beside the highway toward Zaozhuang. Since neither the number two nor his bodyguard carried a rifle, and the distance was too great for their Mauser pistols, they could do nothing but shout

and watch as the man disappeared into the distance.

Entering by the already-opened east gate, they came across an old peasant lying in the road, his cotton tunic stained with blood, still struggling fitfully and moaning with pain. A shot from the bodyguard cut off his struggles, but his arms and legs continued to twitch, and the number two kicked him over to the side of the road. Zhang Mingcai tugged at Jusheng's sleeve: "Look, he's still not dead!" Jusheng, feeling keyed up yet hoping to demonstrate his courage to the number two, picked up a wooden pole that was lying on the ground and brought it down on the old man's head. Even before he had begun the stroke he was gripped by a mixture of fear and regret for what he was about to do; and afterwards he flung the pole away from him. Nevertheless, the number two had a word of praise for his deed: "Good kid, for a youngster you've got what it takes!" Zhang Mingcai too, not wanting to be thought weak, ran to pick up the pole, but unlike Jusheng his face was ashen and his legs were trembling. Although he hurled the pole at the old man's body, it missed completely and went clattering into the roadway. Panting, he smiled wanly and ran back to clutch hold of Jusheng's hand. Jusheng took one last look at the old man's corpse then hurried after the others. For years after he would find that the memory of his brutal deed refused to go away, particularly the old man's last groan as the pole hit him and the one white staring eye in his wrinkled face.

Twenty or thirty yards further on, an elegant residence, its black-lacquered doors shut tightly against them, stood shrouded in silence. It seemed that none of the bandits had yet passed this way, for the door bore neither bullet holes nor the scars of swords. And yet, in the tiny pond that was set in front of the gateway were strewn the bodies of

several small children. The thin layer of ice over the surface of the pond had been shattered, and the children's blood dyed the water red. In the centre of the pond where the water was only knee-deep sat a poor-peasant girl in her early teens clasping to her a little boy of five or six. One side of her face covered with fresh blood, she sat watching the approach of Jusheng and the others with staring, terror-stricken eyes. She was shivering all over with the cold, and the constant chattering of her teeth could be plainly heard. Although the little boy's face was buried in her breast, his body was covered with blood and there was no sign of movement. When the bodyguard moved to finish off the girl with his pistol he was stopped by a gesture from the number two. Just then a newly-recruited young bandit wielding a pig-butcher's knife came running out of a nearby hut, crying fawningly to the number two:

"Second Family Head, at last you've arrived! The family head and the other brothers are all over that way." He gestured with his blood-stained knife in a northwesterly direction. "They're still shooting!"

"Whose doing is this?" demanded the number two, looking at the pond.

"I cut down twelve in one go!" replied the new recruit in a tone that was both boastful and ingratiating. "Here are seven of them, and if Second Brother Xue hadn't stopped me that little girl over there would have been 'back in her native place' long ago by now!"

Skirting the pool and the elegant residence, the number two led Jusheng and the others westwards. Gunfire could still be heard, and from several already burning houses billowed thick smoke amidst which could be heard the hideous shrieks of a woman and a child. As they were passing a vegetable garden Zhang Mingcai suddenly screamed

with fright and clutched Jusheng's arm tightly. In the same instant the entire party came to a halt, gazing at an open latrine beside the road. Above the surface of the muck protruded the legs of a child, clad in green trousers. Its feet, one bare, the other wearing a red shoe, were still moving. When one of them remarked that this must be the work of a new recruit they all cursed the perpetrator roundly. While they were staring involuntarily at the twitching of the tiny legs there came the sound of footsteps behind them. Whirling around, they saw Liu Laoyi chasing three peasants armed with swords and red-tasselled spears who were running for their lives toward the vegetable garden. A rattle of shots from the number two and his bodyguard brought down one of the peasants, but the others veered off towards the north and ran into a narrow lane between two houses from which thick smoke was just beginning to billow. Liu Laoyi beckoned to Jusheng with a laugh: "Come on kid, let's go catch us some live ones!" Then he set off in pursuit toward the lane and disappeared in the smoke. Jusheng, the number two and the others hurried away from the vegetable garden toward the direction where the gunfire seemed heavier.

The boss, Xue Zhengli and several more bandits were laying siege to a house, calling out to its occupants, "Lay down your arms and we'll spare your lives!" From the roof of the house, already set fire to at several points, black smoke poured and flames licked at the sky. The upper storey of the main building was evidently being defended by a number of peasants. Ignoring both the bandits' shouts to lay down their weapons and the rapidly spreading fire, they continued their life-and-death defence of the building in desperate silence, maintaining a hopeless fusillade with their home-made cannon. After exchanging a few words with the boss, the number two led Jusheng and

the others further away westward as far as the wall on that side to spy out the land. In the southwestern corner of the village they came upon the bodies of numerous recently killed defenders scattered higgledy-piggledy on top of and at the foot of the wall; in many cases their blood had still not had time to freeze despite the cold early-morning wind. Beside one tin-can mortar lay the corpses of three men and a woman, the latter still grasping a can of gunpowder in her hand. Another young woman, her hair dishevelled and her face blackened with mud to lessen the chances of her being raped, lay hacked to death with her baby inside a broken-down shrine. Continuing round to the south gate, they found a group of peasants still desperately defending a courtyard against the attacking bandits, and jumping down from the wall found an alley that enabled them to skirt the area.

When they returned to the site of that elegant residence, they found two bandits on the roof trying frantically to put out a fire that had just caught in the eaves of one of the side-buildings. Although the flames were quickly extinguished, the number two demanded angrily of the bandits:

“Whose lousy work is this, setting fires wherever he feels like?”

“We don’t know who set the fire,” replied the two bandits.

“Fucking hell, why doesn’t the bastard find out whose house it is first?!” cursed the number two. “You two stay here and keep an eye on the place, don’t let anyone lay a finger on it!”

On the northeast side of the pond was a small shed around which several bandits had gathered. Walking past, Jusheng and the others discovered Rangzi Jiu inside the shed engrossed in raping a young woman. The number two gave a cheerful curse:

“Rangzi Jiu, I curse your ancestors back through eight generations!

While everybody else is outside fighting, you're hiding in here making yourself at home!"

The bandits grabbed hold of Jusheng and Zhang Mingcai and began to pull them towards the shed, shouting merrily, "Make way! Let the kids have a good look!" Zhang Mingcai, his face flushed with embarrassment, struggled free and fled from the crowd of people. Jusheng, once inside the shed and able to see clearly what was happening there, aimed a vicious kick at Rangzi Jiu's naked buttocks, turned around and fled through the crowd. Outside he almost ran into the arms of a young girl, her hair in disarray, being dragged along by the battalion commander's bodyguard and the man named Li. As Jusheng veered to one side, the pair pulled the girl into the shed to another shout of approval from the crowd. Just at that moment they began to hear scattered yells from the centre of the village:

"Get ready to leave the water! Get ready to leave the water!" ²⁹⁾

A wave of movement went through the crowd outside the shed, but even while calling for everyone to move out, they still lingered reluctantly where they were. The number two asked a bandit who was approaching them from the western side of the village,

"Why are we in such a hurry to leave the water?"

"The soldiers are almost here, we have to move fast!"

The bandits crowded in and around the shed erupted into activity as they commenced their withdrawal. The number two led Jusheng and the others out of the gates towards the market where they had spent the previous night. In their wake streamed the rest of the gang, some leading cattle, some dragging women along, some laden with bundles. Crowding through the gates or jumping from the top of the wall, they fired their rifles at random into the air. Only one small

A CHINESE BANDIT NOVEL : *LONG NIGHT* (2)

group, including the boss and Xue Zhengli, had yet to vacate the village. Not until the number two yelled a curse from atop a grave mound did the bandits cease their haphazard firing.

NOTES

- 1) Hu Yuying was another student from Xinyang who had been captured at the same time as Tao Jusheng. His uncle had been sent out by the family to plead for mercy from the bandits, but instead had himself been taken captive and was being held for ransom alongside his nephew.
- 2) Since peasants were generally short of ready cash, the bandits in this way guaranteed not to press them immediately for what they demanded.
- 3) Smaller bandit gangs, known as 'upstarts' (*baye*), tended to be much crueller than larger ones, by whom they were generally despised (YXY). Henan bandits replaced the word 'bandit' (*tufei*) with 'ditch-digger' (*tangjiang*) because of the former's negative tone. For more information, see Part One of this translation, pages 85-6.
- 4) The 'first degree' (*kuaixing*) meant putting someone to death as quickly as possible to spare them too much suffering; the opposite was the 'third degree' (*manxing*). More conscientious bandits tended to regard the latter method of execution as barbarous.
- 5) For superstitious reasons, bandits used the phrase 'to send home' (*songhui jia*) as a euphemism for the act of killing someone.
- 6) In bandit slang, cockerels were known as 'sharp-mouths' (*jianzuizi*) and to crow was replaced by 'shoot air' (*fangqi*). The boss was known as 'family head' (*dangjiade*). See Part One for details.
- 7) Bandit captives were referred to as 'tickets' (*piao*), and their prison as the 'ticket office' (*piaofang*). Rangzi Jiu's responsibility within the gang was to oversee the captives. For details, see Part One of this translation, and also my book, *Bandits in Republican China*.
- 8) For details on Wu's connection to this story, see the Introduction to Part One of this translation.

- 9) 'To open paces' (*yizi fangxi*) was a bandit slang term meaning to walk quickly.
- 10) 'Red Heads' (*hongtou*) refers to the expedition led by the Obedient King Lai Wenguang which in the closing years of the Taiping Rebellion (1850-64) passed within the borders of Dengzhou en route west toward Shaanxi. The name derived from the red turbans which the fighters bound around their heads. The 'White Wolf' (*Bai Lang*) was the name of the leader of a peasant rebellion in the early years of the Republic. Said to hail from Baofeng county in south-west Henan, the 'White Wolf' was a military genius whose quick movements, feinting tactics and capacity to inflict defeats despite being severely outnumbered not only allowed his band to roam over several provinces but also sent tremors through the regime of President Yuan Shikai. Even now the impression left by his activities remains strong among the peasants of Henan and Shaanxi (YXY). For more information on the 'White Wolf', see my book, *Bandits in Republican China*.
- 11) Bandit slang referred to the wall around a village as the 'ramparts' (*weizi*), and to mountains as 'seats' (*jiazi*).
- 12) The 'wind at the gate' (*weimenfeng*) was the bandits' argot term for when their escape route was obstructed by the enemy.
- 13) One *qing* was equivalent to 6.6 hectares, and one *mu* to 0.0667 hectares.
- 14) In my part of Henan, unlike some other places, the term ne'er-do-well or 'bare stick' (*guanggun*) did not refer simply to a man with no ties. It implied rather a loafer, one who was quick to combine with others, who enjoyed stirring up trouble, who lived by gambling, etc. In the north of Shaanxi province the same kind of people were called *erliuzi* or 'bums'. In Henan the appellation was not entirely negative: com-

binning with people in order to help others was also a social activity characteristic of the 'bare sticks'. Historically speaking I would classify them as a corruption of the 'knights-errant' (*youxia*) element produced by the feudal landlord class (YXY).

- 15) In northern Chinese speech, names beginning with *er* or 'two', like '*erdan*' meaning literally 'two eggs', implied simple-mindedness, but were often applied as nicknames even when the individual was not altogether stupid (YXY).
- 16) These peasants were members of a secret society organised for village self-defence, which stipulated that, after drinking a potion claimed to make them invulnerable, members were not permitted to speak but could only make the sound "Ha!" (YXY).
- 17) In bandit jargon, giving up banditry was referred to as 'washing the hands' (*xishou*). Since the authorities tended to be harsh even toward former bandits, giving up banditry was not as simple as might be supposed.
- 18) 'To climb Mount Liang' (*shang Liangshan*) was another popular euphemism for the act of taking to banditry. The term came from the name of the hideout of the famous heroes of the classic bandit novel 'Water Margin' (*Shuihu zhuan*).
- 19) Bandit slang referred to the penetration of the village walls by the gang as 'pouring' (*guan*), because it resembled the pouring of liquid into a bottle.
- 20) It was the custom of the peasants of west and southwest Henan when tensely engaged in work or hunting or fighting to let out a strident, stirring roar (YXY).
- 21) Liu here is poking fun at the standard of attractiveness of most village 'beauties'.

- 22) The expression 'enter the water' (*xiashui*) was a euphemism for taking up banditry. Once again Liu is playing with the defenders, but he is also careful not to reveal too much about himself. Incidentally, the White Wolf's trek to the west in 1914 did not get as far as Xinjiang. See my book, *Bandits in Republican China*, for details.
- 23) The 'tin can mortar' (*guanr pao*) was a variety of makeshift cannon dating back to the Ming and Qing periods. It remained in use among Henan peasants until the Northern Expedition of the mid-1920s (YXY).
- 24) Bandit slang used the expression 'tear the ramparts' (*siweizi*) instead of 'break through the walls'. A 'torn-up ticket' (*sipiao*) was also the bandits' term for a captive who had been killed.
- 25) 'To cram some pulp' (*tian rangzi*) was the bandits' slang term for 'to eat'. Since the usual word for 'food', *fan*, sounded similar to another meaning 'criminal', a rude reminder to the bandits of their illegal existence, *rangzi* was substituted for it. The taboo applied equally to personal names: Rangzi Jiu for example, was originally named Fan Jiu.
- 26) Zhang Mingcai had been captured at the same time as Tao Jusheng and later made to act as the servant of another of the band's chiefs.
- 27) 'Black-backed furrow' (*hei jiliang gouzi*) was the bandits' slang term for a young girl, deriving from the custom for unmarried girls to wear their hair in a long braid down the centre of their back.
- 28) The 'pourers' (*guanshou*) were those bandits who volunteered to lead the assault on the walls. Since it was such a hazardous undertaking, these dare-to-dies were usually offered considerable rewards.
- 29) 'To leave the water' (*chushui*) was the bandits' euphemism for leaving the scene of an attack.

GLOSSARY

This glossary contains Chinese terms and the names of historical figures introduced in the present text, but excludes the names of characters in the novel. Terms already listed in Part One have also been excluded.

Bai Lang (Lang)	白狼 (朗)	manxing	慢性
baye	霸爷	mu	亩
chushui	出水	qi	启
erdan	二蛋	qing	顷
erliuzi	二流子	shang Liangshan	上梁山
fangqi	放气	Shuihu zhuan	水滸传
guan	灌	siweizi	撕围子
guanggun	光棍	weimenfeng	围門风
guanr pao	罐儿炮	weizi	围子
guanshou	灌手	xiashui	下水
hongtou	红头	xishou	洗手
jiazi	架子	yizi fangxi	义子放稀
kuaixing	快性	youxia	游侠
Lai Wenguang	賴文光	Zhuge Kongming	诸葛孔明

.....

For more information on the world of Chinese bandits, see my book:
Phil Billingsley: *Bandits in Republican China* (Stanford University
Press, 1988)

A Note on the Pronunciation of Chinese Names and Terms

Most letters are pronounced roughly as written, with the exception of
the following:

- c = ts as in 'its'
- q = ch as in 'chin'
- x = hs as in 'shin'
- si = sir
- zi = 'zer as in 'Tizer'