

“Never The Twain Shall Meet”

ROBERT BOWLES

It has been over a year since I last saw Lu, yet today whenever I pick up a paper and read of trouble in India, Palestine, or China — especially China — I see again before me that homely yellow face with its broad, friendly grin, and the deep network of tiny, delicate wrinkles crinkling about the calm, slanted, brown eyes which saw so much and told so little. I can see the mild laughter, and maybe a trace of pity, slipping forth from Lu's usually inscrutable eyes, and I can hear again the soft, even tones of his voice as he spoke the few words which I shall remember the rest of my life—remember and wonder about.

Lu was Chinese and his full name was Kai Cheng Lu. But with the ease and familiarity of Americans, we nicknamed him Lu. Kai had been in the United States seven years, spoke perfect English, and was a graduate of Michigan University with an M. S. in Civil Engineering. He received his citizenship and his greetings from Uncle Sam almost simultaneously. With typical Army efficiency, Lu was assigned as a combination messenger-office boy to our staff, with me, the proud possessor of a high school diploma, his superior. It was typical of his nature that Lu did that menial job to the best of his ability, with no complaints; and yet I knew that he ached to put his recently acquired knowledge to work for his new country.

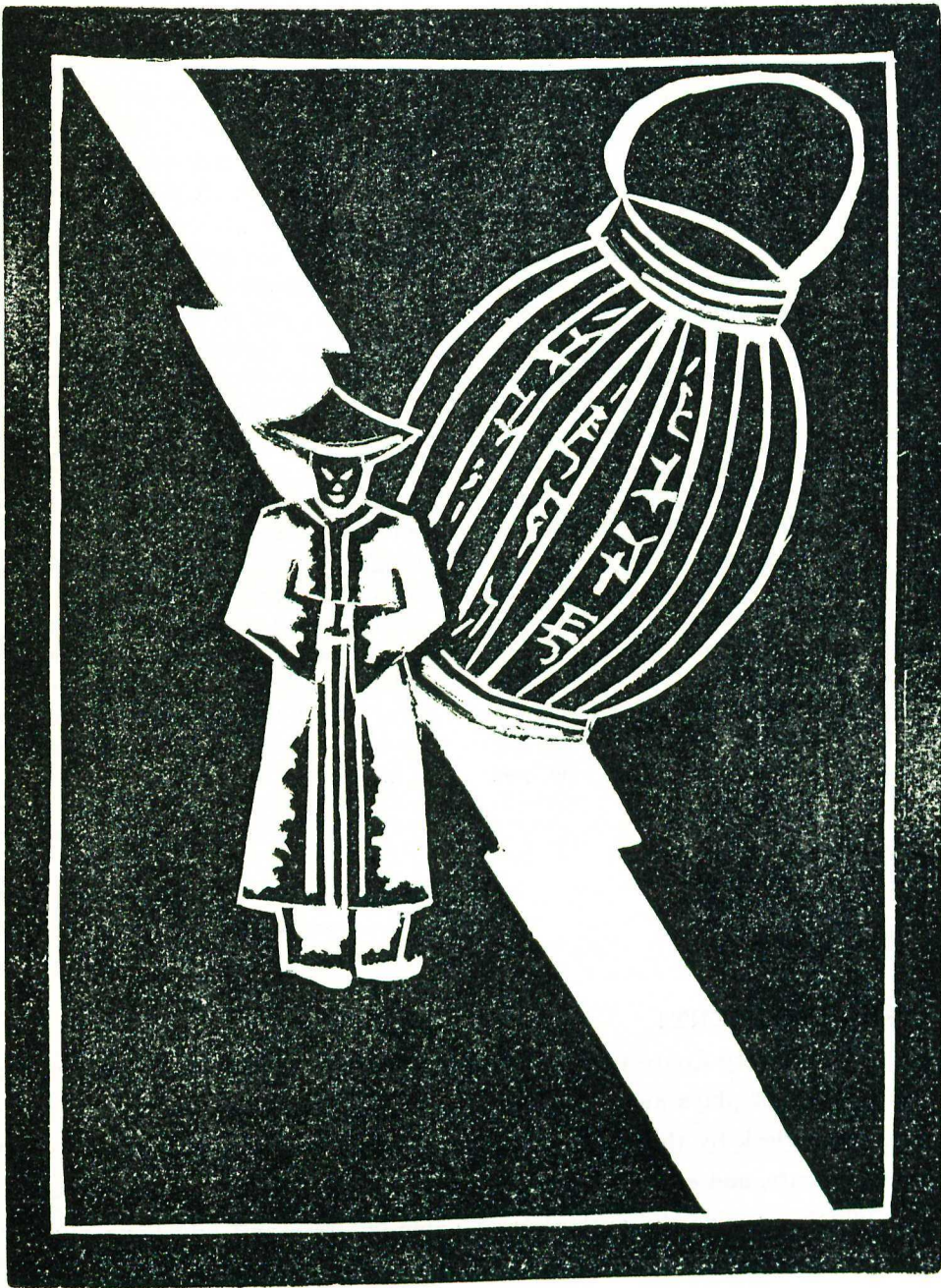
Lu might have been anywhere from eighteen to forty; at least, to me his smooth, olive face held no hint of his age. When I first saw him, I thought him about twenty-one; later, when I came to know him, I was sure he was near forty. By his own admission he was twenty-seven,

but you could never express in years the wisdom and experience of the man.

I had known Lu seven months when he left to return to China. We had, I believe, been as good friends as was possible for two people with as widely diversified backgrounds as ours, and yet it wasn't until the week before Lu left that I felt I really knew him.

We were sitting in my room after “chow” chatting as had been our habit for the past few months. Lu was telling me how he had finally untangled the snarl of red tape, which he had been patiently unknitting for several months, and had secured his discharge and transportation home. He was returning to China after eight long years. Did I really see excitement and the shadow of memories etching that calm face, or was it the light? I couldn't tell. Lu began to speak in soft, quiet tones of his life in China and I listened as the story of a little town, a few miles from Peiping, unfolded before me — the story of a small town, with plain, ordinary people, perhaps a trifle poorer than you or I know, and a loving family and friends and a girl. It was the same story I'd heard a million times before from raw-boned, honey-voiced Southerners; from lean, tanned, drawling Westerners; from precise-accented New Englanders. Yes, it was the same story I'd heard wherever I went in the Army and found people, like myself, far from home.

Then Lu took out his wallet and held forth a faded picture to me with the simple words, “My father.” I was staring at the picture of a very old man (eight-two, Lu said) with a wrinkled, yet youthful face. To me he looked like an ancient Chinese



philosopher with his long, white beard and his flowing robe, sitting there sedately with crossed legs. I could not picture him as the father of my modern friend; and yet, there was in his face that quality which bridges time and race, and I thought suddenly of my grandfather whom I could barely remember.

It was then that Lu's voice eased into my thoughts with the words which I shall never forget. "My friend," he said, "as soon as I reach home I am going to settle down with my father and simply do nothing for one, maybe two years. Then, when I have rested and thought things out, I will make some plans. Perhaps, in your way of thinking, I am lazy. But I shall not waste the time I spend resting. There are many little things I can do, at leisure, around home. And I must decide whether I will return here, to my new country, or stay in China and use the knowledge I have learned from you to help my people. It is a big decision, my friend, and will require a lot of thought."

He went on in his quiet way as I started to protest. "This country, my country, is a wonderful place, and you

people are a wonderful people. But you have forgotten how to rest and relax. For eight years now I have been keeping pace with you, and each night I have thought that surely tomorrow would bring some rest, some slowing down of this pace which keeps you too busy to plan ahead. My race has never considered time as an enemy, as you do. It is not something for us to race and get away from, but it is something to use and to enjoy. All of us have our allotted amount of it, to spend as we wish, and no amount of trying will increase our portion. Now, I shall join my father, to rest and think for a while."

Was that the youthful look which I had glimpsed behind that white beard of Lu's father? Did that explain the smooth, untroubled brow; the unruffled calmness; and the patience of my friend? These thoughts were rioting through my brain as I told Lu good-bye. They are with me today as I read how my country is attempting to settle problems throughout the globe — problems the world has always faced. And I think often of Kai Cheng Lu and his "one, maybe two years" rest—to think.

ANNOUNCEMENT!

The Literary Contest closes Monday, April 15. All short stories, essays or one-act plays and groups of poems must be placed on Mrs. Wesenberg's desk by this date. The manuscripts must be double spaced, in triplicate, and entered under a pen name with a sealed envelope attached which contains the author's real name, address and telephone number.