

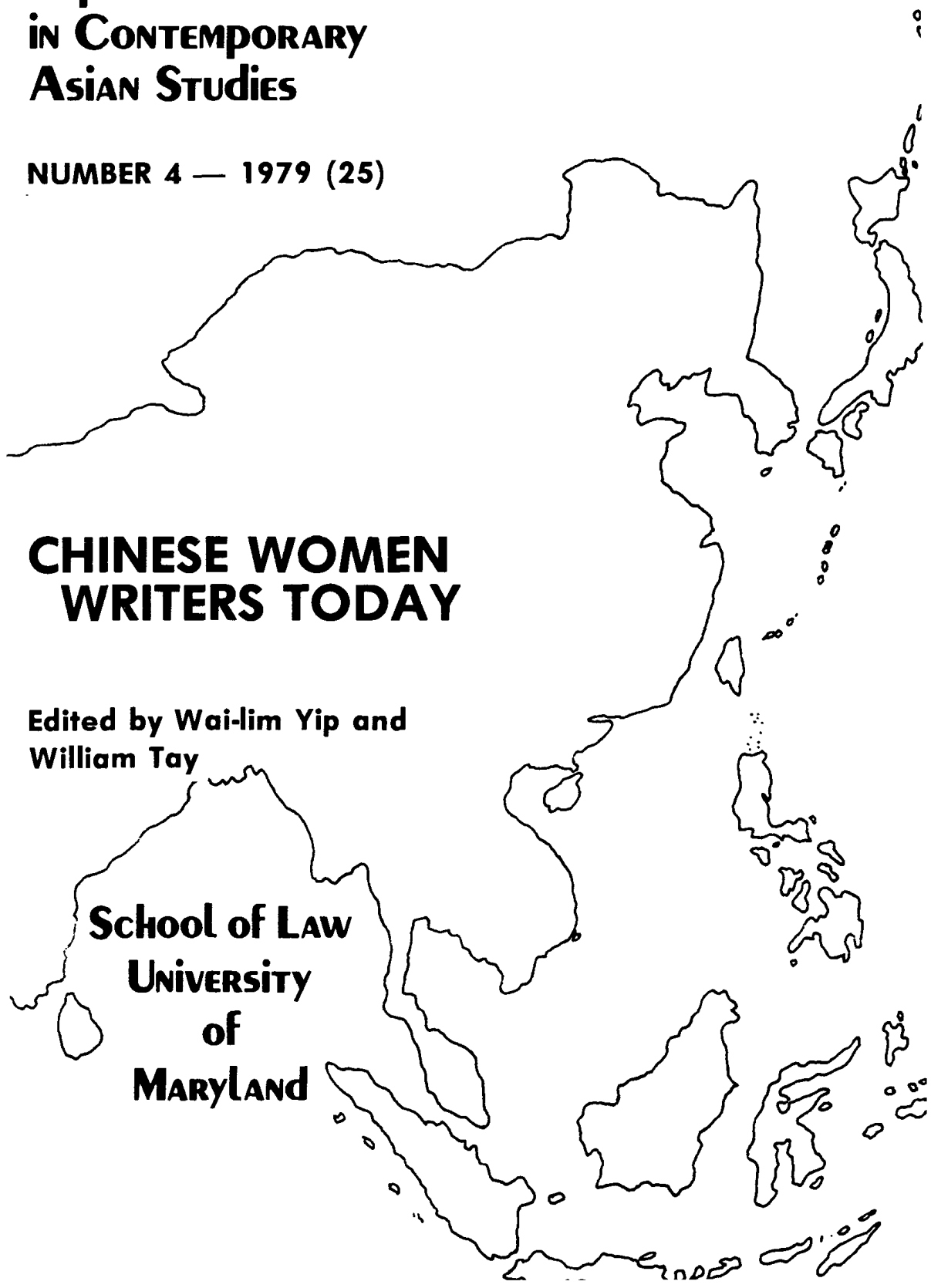
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**CHINESE WOMEN
WRITERS TODAY**

**Edited by Wai-lim Yip and
William Tay**

**School of LAW
UNIVERSITY
of
MARYLAND**



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Chinese Women Writers Today

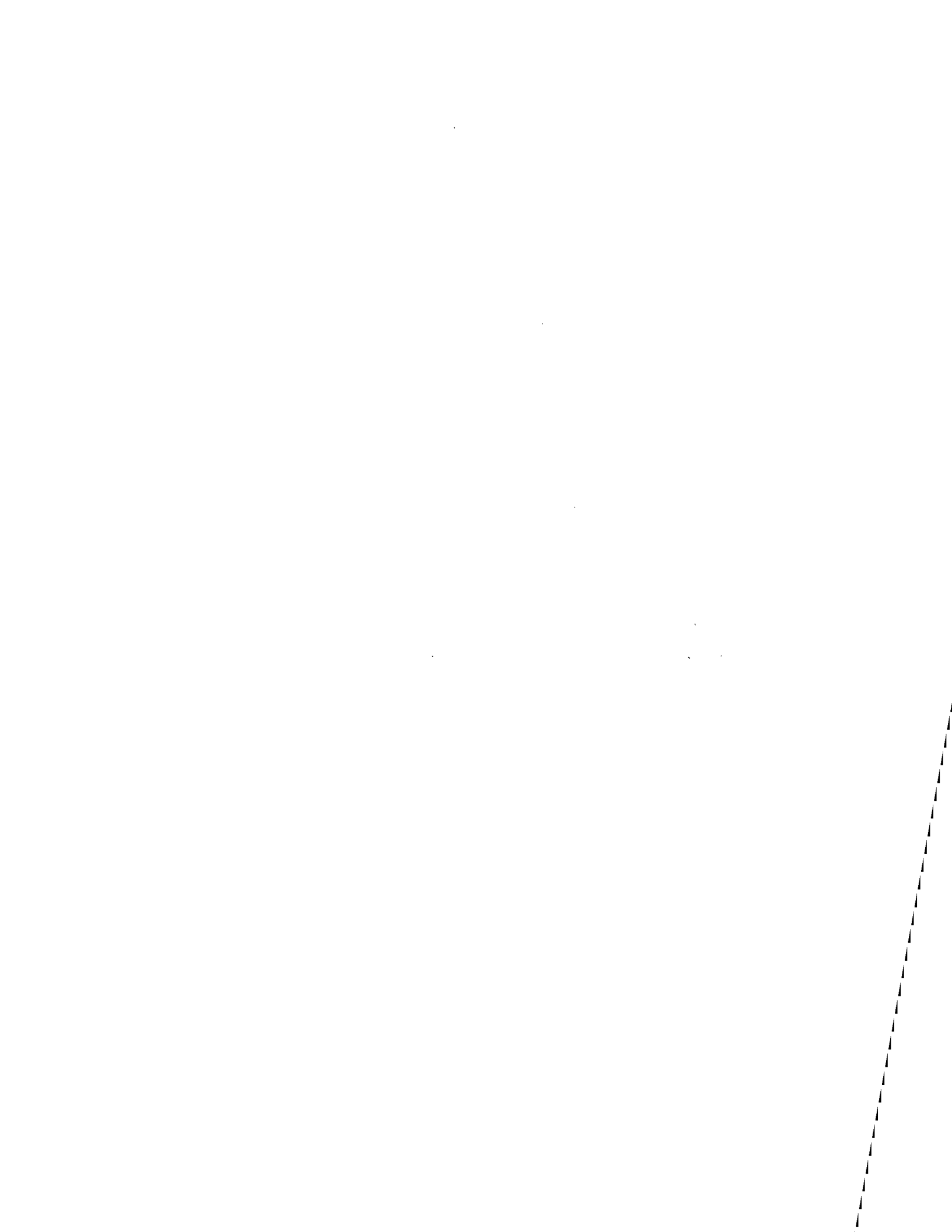
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PREFACE

WAI-LIM YIP

This is not a programmatic feminist anthology. Represented here are selected examples of the fine sensibilities of Chinese women writers of the sixties. These voices speak to a number of questions arising from the torrential changes in recent Chinese history. For example, one may ask: as China moves rapidly from a unified agricultural state to a slowly separatist society threatened by the blind advocacy of industrialization and commercialism of the capitalists, what kind of *raison d'être* have contemporary Chinese women salvaged from the inevitable clash between traditional values and new attitudes ushered in by the tides of the West? What kinds of roles have women envisioned for themselves in this odyssey through Hades toward a new Ithaca?

The call for the emancipation of women was made in the 1920's under the banner of Ibsenism. Hundreds of Noras, who did not hesitate to assert their independence in the face of a perplexed China, got lost in a world not ready for them; and yet these pioneers opened up a new world for women intellectuals of subsequent decades to speak their minds freely and participate in many key positions in the building of a new social structure. What dimensions have these new voices and perceptions added to the Chinese intellectual horizon?

As the *yin* principle in Nature complements and supports the *yang*, so feminine sensibility has a profundity from which men, by immersing themselves in its depths, can achieve a fuller equilibrium. Classical Chinese poetry would have been abrupt "mountains" if there had been no "waters" (or "rivers") to soften the landscape and make it more complete and balanced. Many poets have learned from this feminine sensibility, this boundless movement of feeling-into-things, this sympathetic power of emulation, and through it, they have been helped toward surmounting whatever impediments standing in their way toward fulfillment. Rather than masculinizing themselves as a gesture of protest, Chinese women writers have asserted themselves by refining their self-sufficient feminine sensibility and have succeeded in commanding an enduring admiration and respect from their masculine counterparts. To what degree has this marvelous sensibility been maintained, nourished and refined by subsequent Noras? As Ling Chung's *Orchid Boat: Woman Poets of China* and the selections she has made for this volume have shown, there is

surprising continuity of this creative sensibility even among those writing from the "new, liberal" point of view.

One must not be misled into thinking, however, that Chinese men, or for that matter, gentlemen, have always been advocates of this ideal-woman image. The roles most women played in traditional China have been, at best, passive and submissive, in spite of the emulation of their perception by certain poets and scholars. This is no place to blame Confucius, who, in adopting the hierarchical norms from the feudalistic Chou Dynasty, had perhaps not understood the consequences or anticipated the degree to which most women were destined to play these roles for centuries. One is tempted to ask, however, if most contemporary Chinese women outside the intellectual world still have to play these roles. More intriguingly, in what way has the conception and the rationalization of such roles affected the perception of these women and that of women authors who write about them or about themselves?

Twentieth-century China has been a scene of constant war, separation and exile, throwing men and women into traumatic crises of fear and uncertainty. How do contemporary Chinese women perceive themselves in the breakup and disruption of their culture and consciousness? How do they manage to make sense to themselves as human beings and to the world that is devouring them? If they become victims of these turbulent events, are they victims because they are women, or are they victims of war like everyone else?

These are only a few of the many questions that need to be answered. To say that the present selection has responded to all these questions would be presumptuous. It is, however, the intention of the editors of this volume to provide at least part of the answers, and this anthology must then be seen as part of a continuous process of documentation of the significant voices of contemporary Chinese women. We hope that, in the future, with the help of other scholars, a complete tapestry of their contribution might eventually be woven.

La Jolla, 1978.

WOMAN POSSESSED

OU-YANG TZU

It was quiet in the dormitory. Ch'ien-ju lay open-eyed in her bed, listening to the light, rhythmical breathing of the other six girls in the room. She turned, lifted herself a little, and took a look at the alarm clock on her desk. In the dark she saw it was two-thirty already.

But the bed next to hers was still empty. Mei-ling was not back yet.

Ch'ien-ju had been counting the minutes since midnight, when they switched off the light according to a university rule. Lying awake and staring into darkness, she had become more and more worried as the time passed by. Why? Why isn't Mei-ling back yet? she thought. What could she be doing at this hour? Could it be that she's with him again?

Ch'ien-ju was aware that Mei-ling, whether intentionally or not, had stayed away from her for the past few weeks. She wondered how things really stood between Mei-ling and Chao Kang. If the other night she hadn't happened to catch them together in front of the dormitory, she wouldn't have dreamed that they were actually seeing each other. That evening, near midnight, she was coming back from the library when suddenly she saw them getting out of a taxicab. Hurriedly she hid behind a tree, and she watched them go up together toward the dorm. Reaching the door they halted, exchanged a few words, and Mei-ling smiled in a somewhat coquettish way. Then Chao gave her a hug, and in a minute he was gone. This incident had unsettled Ch'ien-ju and for the first time she sensed the seriousness of the matter.

And she was responsible for all this. She had drawn the two of them together in the first place, then had given them one chance after another to develop feelings for each other. She saw it coming, yet instead of attempting to smother the fire when it was just a spark, she had let it burn freely into a blaze. So her instinct had been right — Chao was the irresponsible type she had considered him to be. Yet she didn't realize how far she had gone until that moment she saw him hugging Mei-ling. Now Ch'ien-ju was full of misgivings.

But I did plead with Mother! she thought with bitterness. How I begged Mother to think twice! I told her, not that I was so very much against the idea of her remarrying, but that I didn't want a man like Chao to be my stepfather. Yet Mother wouldn't listen.

She just looked sad and shook her head, as if she were no longer the master of her own fate. No, Ch'ien-ju, she said, again and again. It's no use; it's all settled now. . . .

Mother's remarriage had smashed the image of perfection Ch'ien-ju had held of her mother ever since she was a little girl. She could not forgive Mother for disappointing her so. Oh, how she had always adored her, and regarded her as the most wonderful woman in the world! For one thing, Ch'ien-ju was very pleased that she looked like her mother, rather than her father. She loved everything about Mother: the slender figure, the oval face, and the gentle yet persistent character. But what had always fascinated Ch'ien-ju most of all was a kind of facial expression very peculiar to Mother — a remote, wistful look bordering on melancholy. Such an expression would steal upon Mother's face once in a while, for no obvious reason; then Mother would appear lost in fantasy, as if far away in another world.

To Ch'ien-ju, Mother had been the personification of virtue itself, and up to her marriage, she had never made a single mistake. Mother was always right, always. Her heart seemed so pure, so clear, so totally free of guilt. All the friends and neighbors had very high opinions of her, and they praised her and respected her. Yet they kept a distance from her because she was so perfect, so persistent in her virtue that they could not help feeling belittled in her presence. It was as though she were their mirror, their conscience.

Mother was the retiring type, and had always been quiet and withdrawn. She would take a trip once a month, to Tainan, in the southern part of Taiwan, and spend a few days there with her own mother who had never been in good health. It was a long trip back and forth, and Mother invariably looked exhausted when she returned; yet never once had she failed to go, such being her filial piety. Except for the monthly trip, however, Mother always stayed home in T'ao-yüan, a small town twenty miles from Taipei. Ch'ien-ju's father had also been a person of quiet disposition; therefore, they never had had much of a social life.

Never once had Ch'ien-ju seen her parents quarrel. She couldn't remember them ever having arguments of any sort. During their twenty years of marriage, they had always lived in peace, and loved and respected each other like an ideal couple. The sudden heart attack of Ch'ien-ju's father, and his consequent death two years ago, had been a great shock to Mother. She refused to see anyone, locked herself in the room, and cried for

seven straight days. When she finally emerged from her room, her cheeks had sunken, her eyes were swollen.

Again Ch'ien-ju turned restlessly in her bed. She buried her face in the pillow. Could it be that the blow of Papa's death was such, she thought, that it affected Mother's nerves in some way? Otherwise, what could have brought about such a change in Mother?

A couple of months after Papa passed away, Ch'ien-ju entered National Taiwan University in Taipei. She had been living in the university dormitory since then. Accustomed as she was to being an only child and having her own way, she hadn't really enjoyed the dormitory life. It was exasperating to share one big room with seven other girls, with no privacy at all. She had been very homesick at first, and could hardly wait for the weekend to come so she might go home and spend time with Mother. To all appearances it had not taken long for Mother to recover from the blow. Ch'ien-ju had been delighted to see her sunken cheeks become full again, and was pleasantly surprised one weekend to find on Mother's face a healthy glow that was completely new to her. Ch'ien-ju further noticed that, more often than ever, the peculiar dreamy expression which looked so beautiful on Mother would come and go without any warning. Again and again, while talking to Ch'ien-ju, Mother would stop in the middle of a sentence; and all of a sudden she was absent-minded, remote, inscrutable, with softness in her eyes and the shadow of a smile around her lips. At such moments it was as if Mother were expecting something, yearning for something, or lost in some distant sweet memory.

Ch'ien-ju never got over the shock and hurt she had felt the day she received the short note in which Mother informed her of her intention to remarry. Not even one whole year had then elapsed since Papa passed away. In the note Mother had not explained anything, simply stating the fact that she intended to remarry, and asked Ch'ien-ju to come home at once to meet her future stepfather. Ch'ien-ju could not believe it, for she had never dreamed Mother would consider remarriage, let alone so soon after Papa's death. She was extremely indignant. Besides, that Mother had made such a big decision without consulting her in advance hurt her very much indeed. But she had hurried home according to Mother's wish, and for the first time met the man who was to become her stepfather.

She rejected him at first sight. Chao seemed vain and flippant, and Ch'ien-ju got the impression that he was not a

responsible man. He was certainly good-looking with his tanned complexion, straight nose and very firm lips. His eyes were dark and bright, very much alive under his thick, black brows. He wore his hair medium long, brushed meticulously backward, and he smelled of cologne of some foreign brand. Tall and slender, he appeared in his early forties, just about Mother's age. Mother introduced him as a former university classmate, now a professional photographer. There was in Chao the smugness of a would-be-artist, which annoyed Ch'ien-ju a great deal. Ch'ien-ju also resented the way he kept staring at her when speaking to her. She saw frivolity and self-complacency in his shining eyes.

But what vexed her the most was the manner in which Mother behaved toward this man. Apparently Mother was extremely eager to please him. She would laugh sheepishly, cringing a little, and would steal glances at him as if to see whether she had his approval. It seemed as though, for some reason, Mother were apologetic to the man, as though she were a little afraid of him. Ch'ien-ju was disgusted, and her hostility toward Chao increased. It upset her greatly to see Mother, who used to hold her head high in the confidence of her own virtue, now being reduced to a nonentity in the presence of a man who didn't seem to deserve her at all. Mother practically acted like a child who had done something wrong, and was waiting for punishment. Ch'ien-ju felt ashamed for her, and couldn't help hating Mother a little for throwing pride away like this.

However much she tried, Ch'ien-ju failed to understand Mother. What did Mother see in Chao anyway? Could it be just his looks? Yet it was hard to believe that a sensible woman like Mother would judge a person by his appearance. Furthermore, Mother was over forty now, not an impulsive teenager; it was therefore quite unlikely that she would decide upon marriage simply because the man looked handsome. Ch'ien-ju concluded that it had to be Chao's doing, that Chao had taken advantage of Mother's loneliness and talked her into marrying him.

How many times, after meeting Chao, Ch'ien-ju had implored Mother to reconsider the decision! How she had begged her not to give herself to a man who appeared so far below Papa's standard! Ch'ien-ju had made no secret of her dislike for Chao, and had told Mother in so many words that he seemed unreliable, that she was sure he wouldn't make a good husband. She pleaded with Mother to sell the house and move to Taipei, so the both of them could live together. Or if Mother was reluctant to sell the house in which she had spent so many years of happiness with Papa, Ch'ien-ju was

quite willing to come home and live with her, and commute to Taipei every day, provided that Mother would give up the idea of remarrying. But all these words had been in vain. Mother would just shake her head in a resigned manner, and stare vacantly into the air. "No, Ch'ien-ju," she'd say, "it's no use, all is settled now." And she would look so melancholy, so untouchable.

Within a month after Ch'ien-ju met Chao, Mother was married. Ch'ien-ju was having her mid-term exams, so she had excused herself from attending the wedding. Later she learned that it was quite a simple ceremony, with just a handful of people invited. Then they went away to Sun-Moon Lake for a honeymoon, and came back two weeks later to settle down in T'ao-yüan. Chao used to live in a small town near Tainan, but after marriage had moved right into Ch'ien-ju's home. He seemed to Ch'ien-ju more like a loafer than a professional photographer. Despite the fact that his photographs did appear occasionally in the newspaper, Ch'ien-ju got the impression that most of the time he was just fooling around with a camera slung over his shoulder.

Outwardly Ch'ien-ju accepted Mother's marriage, but deep down inside she could never forgive Mother for disappointing her. She avoided going home as much as possible, but at the same time she felt hurt by the fact that Mother had not specifically asked her to return home. For some reason Mother had ceased to write as often as she used to; and when she did write, it would be just a few lines scribbled on a piece of paper, saying they were fine, asking how she was doing, and that was about all. Never once did Mother ask for an explanation of why she had not gone home. Nor had Mother expressed any wish that they should get together more often. When Ch'ien-ju did go home occasionally, she'd remain in her own room most of the time, so she would not disturb Mother and Chao. Of course she never called Chao "Father." She had avoided calling him at all. When talking to Mother, however, she would refer to him by his name. Sometimes, she'd just say "your husband."

Again Ch'ien-ju lifted her head from the pillow. The alarm clock now showed ten past three.

Still Mei-ling was absent.

Ch'ien-ju felt the burden of her conscience weighing down upon her. If Mei-ling was again with Chao, at this hour. . . . She was afraid to think any more. She believed that a girl like Mei-ling would find Chao charming and attractive. There had been a lot of gossip about Mei-ling, something about her father fixation. It was said that every time Mei-ling fell in love, it was with a *man*, rather

than with a boy. Ch'ien-ju remembered how Mei-ling had blushed, how her eyes had twinkled, the minute she was introduced to Chao. And Chao's quick response hadn't escaped Ch'ien-ju's notice either.

Lying quietly in bed, Ch'ien-ju now was full of regret. She was very sorry she had invited Mei-ling to her home last spring vacation. But how was she to know that things would turn out this way? Mei-ling's parents lived far away in P'ing-tung, the southernmost city in Taiwan, and Mei-ling didn't think it worth the train fare to travel back and forth for just a few days' vacation, so she had decided not to go home but to stay in Taipei. Learning this, Ch'ien-ju invited her along to spend the holidays together in T'ao-yüan, thinking it a good idea to have a companion so she wouldn't have to face Mother and Chao all the time by herself. She had meant no harm at all. Was it her fault that Mei-ling and Chao hit it off at first sight?

And yet, no matter how Ch'ien-ju tried to get away with it, she knew in the bottom of her heart that she was the one responsible for it all. While it was true that she had no dubious motive the first time, she could not say as much for herself when she invited Mei-ling to T'ao-yüan again, and again, and again. It was as if she wanted to prove to herself as well as Mother that she was right, that Mother was wrong, as if she wanted to punish Mother for disappointing her by proving that she, Ch'ien-ju, had been right in her judgment about Chao. Therefore, when she noticed Mei-ling and Chao exchanging meaningful looks, she felt among other things a sense of gratification. "Oh, Mother, I told you so!" she wanted to scream. "Didn't I tell you so!"

The room door creaked and opened slowly. In the dark Ch'ien-ju distinguished Mei-ling's figure coming in. Mei-ling closed the door quietly behind her, then groped forward without making any noise. She reached her bed, took off her dress, her shoes. In a minute she was already in bed.

"Mei-ling," Ch'ien-ju said, softly.

Mei-ling did not answer.

"Mei-ling," Ch'ien-ju said again.

"Yes?" Mei-ling answered. "You are not sleeping yet?"

"No. I was worried about you."

Mei-ling pulled the blanket around her and turned the other way, toward the wall.

"I'm tired," she said.

For a while neither of them spoke.

"You went to a movie?" Ch'ien-ju pursued.

Mei-ling was silent for a few seconds.

"That's right," she replied.

Ch'ien-ju knew very well that all the movie houses in Taipei had been closed for hours by now. Yet she said nothing. She was afraid to ask any more. It was ominous enough that Mei-ling would say nothing voluntarily. And then, Ch'ien-ju had no intention of forcing Mei-ling to tell a lie.

The next morning, Ch'ien-ju was surprised to receive a letter from Mother.

"Ch'ien-ju, my darling daughter:

"It has been many months since I thought of writing you this letter. I've delayed it again and again until today, simply because I have so much to say but don't know where to begin.

"Dear Ch'ien-ju, I know well enough that my remarriage displeased you. I'm also aware that you don't like your stepfather. My marriage seems to have estranged you from me, and I suffer a great deal for it. How many nights I lay awake, thinking of you! Oh, Ch'ien-ju, if only you knew how much I love you! You are my only child, my only hope. It's sad enough to have lost Papa. I really don't want to live, Ch'ien-ju, if you, too, should desert me.

"In case you think my remarriage has affected in any way my intense love for you, you are very much mistaken. Mother loves you all the more. Ch'ien-ju, please come home! Please come and see me as soon as possible. Mother wants to touch you, look at you.

"Love,

"Mother"

Tears sprang to Ch'ien-ju's eyes, blurring her sight. The letter touched her to the depths of her heart. With a pang she realized how unfair she had been to Mother. Oh, I've got to make it up to her! She thought. I've got to make it up, even though it might be a little too late. . . . Ch'ien-ju at once decided to take the afternoon off, and in an hour she was already on her way to take a bus back to T'ao-yüan. She figured it would be easy to find out from Mother whether Chao had spent last evening at home. If he had, all was well. If he had not, it could mean serious trouble. In that case she would make a full confession, and beg Mother for forgiveness.

Then, coming back, she would have a serious talk with Mei-ling, and make her stay away from Chao forever.

When she reached home Ch'ien-ju was astonished at the change in Mother's appearance. She had not seen Mother for about a month, and now, she looked so much older! Mother did not seem surprised to see Ch'ien-ju come home on a weekday, and welcomed her with a sad, tender smile on her face. Mother was thinner now, her cheeks sunken, her lines deeper. Looking at her, Ch'ien-ju felt pricks of conscience.

She looked around to see if Chao was home.

"Oh, he isn't home," Mother said, smiling a little. "He had to go to Taipei yesterday, for some newspaper assignment. He won't be home until the weekend."

Ch'ien-ju felt her heart contracting.

"Tell me, Ch'ien-ju. How're you doing?" Mother asked in a concerned manner. She held Ch'ien-ju's hand and they went together to sit down on the sofa. "Have you been busy studying?"

"Well, so-so," Ch'ien-ju replied. Then she pressed Mother's hand. "I got your letter this morning."

Mother smiled gently.

"That's fine," she said. "Let's get our supper started first, all right? Then we'll talk."

They spent a couple of hours fixing supper, talking and laughing all the while. All the happy memories of the past came back to Ch'ien-ju, and once again she was the lucky girl secure in the warmth of a loving mother. Never had she felt closer to Mother than she did now. She did most of the talking, telling Mother about the university, about the examinations, about dormitory life in general. Several times, however, she caught an absent-minded look upon Mother's face, as if Mother were not listening, or had difficulty concentrating.

After supper, Mother made some jasmine tea, and again they went to the living room and sat down together on the sofa. Ch'ien-ju hesitated; she could not decide whether she should open her heart to Mother. How she would like to tell Mother everything, to unburden herself of all the guilt and beg for Mother's forgiveness! Yet she hesitated, because she knew no matter how she put the blame on herself, she could not avoid hurting Mother by telling her about Chao and Mei-ling. Hadn't she hurt Mother enough already? How could she ever think of adding any more to her sorrow?

"Mother," she said. "Let's talk about you for a change. How have you been? Haven't you lost some weight? You don't look very well, you know."

Mother gazed at Ch'ien-ju, tenderly, sadly.

"I've been thinking of you a lot," she said, hesitating. "Take last night for example. I lay along in bed, unable to sleep, and I kept imagining what you could be doing far away in Taipei. Is she studying? I said to myself, or maybe she's having some fun?"

"Oh, Mother!" Ch'ien-ju laughed. "Don't you know I spend every weekday evening in the library? It's quite routine with me, my life there in the university."

Mother smiled a bit, sipped some tea. She held the teacup for a while, and stared at it vacantly. Her faint smile lingered around her lips.

"That friend of yours," she said, "that Mei-ling—"

Ch'ien-ju started.

"Was she with you last evening, in the library?"

Blood rushed up to Ch'ien-ju's head. All of a sudden she realized Mother knew about Chao and Mei-ling. Mother was pale and motionless, waiting for the answer.

Ch'ien-ju couldn't stand it any longer. Tears started to stream down her face, and she burst out crying miserably.

"Mother, Mother, she said sobbing. "It's my fault — I'm to blame—"

Suddenly, Ch'ien-ju felt her head seized, pushed back by violence. Through tears she saw Mother leaning over her, sternly, clutching her, nearly choking her. Mother looked awful, face ashen, lips jumping, cheeks twitching. She was staring at Ch'ien-ju dangerously.

"You, you saw them?" she uttered, huskily. "Where did they go? She, she, did she spend the night?" Her eyes protruding, she still tightened her hold on Ch'ien-ju.

But the tension lasted only a minute. Mother soon calmed down, and at once let go of Ch'ien-ju. Apologetically, she laid one hand upon Ch'ien-ju's knee.

"I frightened you, didn't I?" she said, softly. "I am sorry, Ch'ien-ju. But you see, I do know about it. I guessed he'd been seeing that friend of yours."

So Ch'ien-ju started to talk. She told Mother everything. There was no evidence, she explained, that Mei-ling was with Chao last night. Things might not be so bad as they imagined. She assured Mother that in any case, as soon as she went back to the campus,

she would talk to Mei-ling and make her stop seeing Chao any more. She implored Mother not to be too hard on Chao. Even if he had seen Mei-ling a few times, she said, she was sure he loved nobody but Mother.

"But the most important thing, Mother, is will you please forgive me." Tears again came to Ch'ien-ju's eyes. "It's my doing, to have brought Mei-ling home like that, so they had a chance to get together. It must be that subconsciously I was a little jealous of Chao, both for my own sake, and for Papa's sake. So I set a trap for him. Do you understand, Mother? Can you forgive me?"

Mother gazed at her, sorrow on her face.

"Certainly, Ch'ien-ju, certainly," she murmured. "You are a good child."

"No, Mother, I'm not good, I'm so ashamed," Ch'ien-ju said. "I'm ashamed to confess that in addition to being jealous, I also wanted to prove that I was right in my judgment about Chao. Don't you remember, Mother, that I told you before you were married that Chao was not worthy of your love, that he wouldn't make a good husband? Well, I felt I had to prove I was right, or you'd think I criticized Chao out of spite and jealousy. Then you'd consider me a selfish daughter, and I'd despise myself for giving you reason to think so. But, Mother, now I know better! Now I know it's selfishness in the truest sense to try to justify myself at your expense!"

Mother seemed very much moved, but she also looked as though she could not quite understand.

"Ch'ien-ju," she said, pondering. "You know, you are a very conscientious girl."

"Oh, Mother!" Ch'ien-ju cried, "I'm only asking for your forgiveness!" Her only wish was that Mother would scold her a little, and then forgive her. But instead of scolding her, Mother insisted she was a good girl, and this hurt her all the more. She decided that Mother had not understood her.

"Mother, you don't understand," she said, in an effort to convince Mother of her guilt. "Maybe I still haven't made myself clear. Listen, it's like this. Besides trying to justify myself, I think I had an even more ignoble motive in bringing Mei-ling home with me. It was almost as if I wanted to give you some punishment, some kind of revenge—"

Mother jumped, recoiled to the end of the sofa. A look of horror came upon her face.

"Punishment—! Revenge—!" She murmured, shrinking further away.

Ch'ien-ju slid off the sofa, and knelt down on the floor in front of Mother. She put her hands upon Mother's lap.

"Please, Mother, forgive me!" she cried. "Now I know I was wrong; I know I had no right to feel the way I did! But, Mother, I was so disappointed in you! You had always seemed like a saint, so perfect, so virtuous. Then you had to marry a man who isn't worth your little finger! And so soon after Papa's death!"

"Retribution!" Mother mumbled. "Retribution!" She sat petrified, staring straight ahead of her, not paying any attention to Ch'ien-ju.

All at once Ch'ien-ju was seized with panic. It struck her that Mother would never forgive her now. Full of anxiety she grasped Mother's hands, and started shaking her a little.

"Mother, listen! Now I know I was wrong!" She cried hastily, fearful that Mother would not be convinced. "Now I realize there must be something about Chao, something special and good, or you wouldn't have chosen him in the first place. It's just that I'm too young, too ignorant, to be a fair judge of character. What right had I anyway, to be disappointed in you? Oh, Mother, I promise you, from now on, I'm really going to try to like Chao. I'll try to like him a great deal so the three of us can get along together beautifully—"

Gently but firmly Mother withdrew her hands.

"Ah, Ch'ien-ju, you were right all along," she said sighing, slowly shaking her head. "You judged him right, saying he wouldn't make a good husband."

"Oh, Mother, please?"

"You were quite right about him," Mother said, ignoring Ch'ien-ju's protest. At this instant Mother was overcome with extreme sadness; her voice sounded remote, ethereal, as if from out of the world. "He has always been like this, undependable, irresponsible. He was born this way; I know him only too well. But I love him. I am fated for him. All these years, I've loved him, madly, desperately; I couldn't have lived without him. It has been well over twenty years now—"

"Twenty years!" Ch'ien-ju was aghast.

"For more than twenty years, not a day has passed without my loving him, my thinking of him. When I met him the first time, in the university, I knew at once that there was no more me existing. There was no more me, except my passion and eternal love for him, for him alone. Nothing mattered any more, but to love him, and love him. Yet he is the most depraved of men — he has always been. A dandy he is, and a loafer; never would he stick

to a job or a woman. There's nothing he despises more than the institution called marriage. He would not be tied down, but would keep mistresses, and abandon them when he got tired of them. Such is the man that I am destined to love. And I have no choice, but to love him, to live and die for him—"

"Mother, please don't say any more," Ch'ien-ju cut in, fidgeting. She could hardly believe her ears. "You don't have to tell me all this—"

"But I want to tell you all this," Mother said, staring at Ch'ien-ju with empty eyes. She sounded calm, distant. "I want you to know that I am not the perfect and virtuous woman you've considered me to be. I deceived your father all his life. And I've deceived our friends and neighbors, and all the people in the world, except him."

Ch'ien-ju stood up.

"Mother," she said, "let me get you some more tea." She snatched the cup and turned to go.

Mother caught her by the dress.

"No, don't go," Mother said, and forced her to sit down again on the sofa. Then a smile of mockery came to Mother's lips.

"Now, Ch'ien-ju, stay where you are," she said. "Now that I have enough courage to speak out, why don't you have enough courage to listen? This is a good chance for you to learn to face reality. It's high time that you open your eyes and take a good look at the real woman that is your mother. If you don't listen now, you'll never have a chance to know me. Now, Ch'ien-ju, listen carefully. I deceived your father all his life. I never loved him, not for a single day, a single minute. If I was broken-hearted when he passed away, it was not because I had any grief for his death. No, I did not mourn for him. I was mourning for my youth — the twenty years of my youth that was wasted for that man!"

Ch'ien-ju avoided looking at Mother. She had recovered somewhat from the shock, and now she was puzzled.

"Twenty years of youth!" Mother sighed. "What kept me going all those years was my monthly rendezvous with *him*. Why do you think I went to see your grandmother so often? It was just once a month, and he had nothing to lose, so, of course, he was not against the idea. In this way I lived, month after month, always counting the days, waiting, and waiting, for the next rendezvous to come.

"And all the time people would take for granted that I was a saintly woman. They'd consider me a model wife, a model mother. Your poor father, all his life, was so sure of my love that I felt

sorry for him. We always lived in peace, your father and I; never quarrelled once in twenty years. But if you consider that love, Ch'ien-ju, you're quite mistaken. I never fought with Papa simply because I never cared; it was total indifference on my part. Ah, Ch'ien-ju, you cannot understand. You can never understand unless one day, like myself, you fall desperately in love with a man. But nobody in the world could possibly love a man the way I love him — so fiercely, so violently. Let me tell you something: True love is a terrible, terrible thing. It is nothing but an eternal torture."

Mother paused. She was looking into the air, eyes dreamy, vacant, face enveloped in sadness. Suddenly Ch'ien-ju felt great pity for her.

She moved closer and gently put her arm around Mother.

"Mother," she said. "In spite of everything, I do know one thing. You must have suffered a great deal." She was not quite sure what else she felt besides pity. She had no time to think yet. But anyway, she thought, Mother's suffering should have been enough to atone for whatever sin she committed. . .

"Eternal torture," Mother continued, murmuring. "Ah, those fits of jealousy and madness! . . . I was jealous of everyone he laid his hands on. I could have gone berserk and bitten each one of them, like a rabid dog. But I didn't dare to make a scene. No, Ch'ien-ju, I didn't dare to provoke him. I might lose him altogether that way."

"But Mother, he married you at last," Ch'ien-ju said. "It proves that you are the only one he really cares for."

Mother shook her head, weakly.

"Do you want to know? Do you want to know how he came to marry me?" An ironic smile came to her face. "I begged him to. I begged him, and explained to him that it was to his advantage to marry me. He had squandered just about all the money his parents left him; and I told him if only he married me, this big house would belong to him. Then he'd have me as his servant, his slave, to wait on him as if he were a king. He could do whatever he liked; I wouldn't say a word. I further promised to let him go whenever he chose to leave me. No obligation, no responsibility. Oh, Ch'ien-ju, I had to beg and beg before he finally agreed!"

Ch'ien-ju felt sick to her stomach. Suddenly Mother appeared like a stranger to her; she hardly knew her any more. Mother was completely absorbed in herself, and seemed no longer aware of Ch'ien-ju's existence.

"How many times I begged him, in the past twenty years!" She continued. "I begged him and told him he didn't have to marry me, but just take me as his mistress and I'd be more than satisfied. If he'd just give me a couple of years for us to spend day and night together, then when he was tired of me, I'd die a happy woman."

She turned to Ch'ien-ju abruptly, her eyes full of sarcasm.

"Do you know, Ch'ien-ju?" she said. "During those twenty years, if only he had agreed, if only he had uttered the word 'yes,' I wouldn't have waited another day. I'd have abandoned you and Papa, and gone running to him, not losing a minute."

Ch'ien-ju felt a wave of nausea coming over her. She stared at the distracted woman sitting next to her, and couldn't believe it was her mother. Still she refused to believe what she heard.

"Oh, Mother, you don't mean it, you can't mean it," she said. "Anyway, Mother, I know you love me. You said you loved me."

Mother took a peek at Ch'ien-ju, as if she didn't understand. Then she sighed. The sarcasm in her eyes was gone. She now looked ashamed, and lowered her head.

"I'm very sorry, Ch'ien-ju," she said in a tired voice. "You are a good child; I don't deserve to have a good child like you. But now that I've told you all, it's just as well that I be completely honest with you. I'm sorry, Ch'ien-ju, but I've never loved you. My love for him is too heavy for me to bear already; how could I have any strength left to love anyone else? If my love for him were taken away, I would be empty shell. There's nothing inside me at all."

"But you said it! You said you loved me!" Ch'ien-ju protested. "You said so in the letter!"

For a while Mother gazed at her as if confused. Then again she let out a sigh.

"Oh, that letter!" she said, shaking her head a little. "Ch'ien-ju, I'm very sorry. But I'll tell you the truth. I wrote that letter yesterday simply for the purpose of winning you over so I could persuade you to intervene on my behalf, and make Mei-ling return him to me. I've promised not to interfere with his affairs, so I must use you to stop them. Oh, Ch'ien-ju, you don't know what I've gone through! Every time he left for Taipei, I'd start imagining things, and I'd see them together making love. I'm getting old, I can no longer compete with a young girl like Mei-ling. I live in constant fear that he'll say one day he's tired of me, that he wants to move out. That would be the end of my life."

Ch'ien-ju stood up. She was dizzy and felt like vomiting. She wished she could hate Mother, but she couldn't. She had only pity and contempt for her.

All of a sudden, Mother was on her knees in front of Ch'ien-ju.

"I beg you, Ch'ien-ju," she implored, her hands held tightly together in a prayerful position. "Please, please make Mei-ling give him back to me, promise me, won't you? I know you have every right to punish me, but I beg you, Ch'ien-ju, please, have mercy on me. Kick me if you wish, or beat me to death, but please, please, don't use Mei-ling to punish me. Promise me, won't you?" She looked totally exhausted, aged and ugly.

"All right, I promise you," Ch'ien-ju replied hurriedly, not looking at Mother. Now her only wish was to get away, to be rid of this pitiable bewitched and demented woman.

"I don't ask for your forgiveness; I don't deserve it," Mother said, wearily. She reached out for Ch'ien-ju's hand, but on seeing her wince, withdrew her hand and lowered her head.

"But please don't hate me too much," she continued, slowly, feebly, looking down. "And please don't hate him either. I have no way to be sure, but it could be — it just could be — that he is your real father."

As if fleeing for her life, Ch'ien-ju escaped from the she-animal kneeling on the floor, dashing out of the room, out of the house, into the street. She did not stop once, nor did she look back, but kept on running, running, down the street, toward the bus station. She was afraid to slow down, but ran faster and faster as if chased by a phantom. From her forehead, her neck, from all over her body, she felt cold perspiration oozing and dripping.

—Translated by the author

THE PRISONER'S KEEPER

Ts'UNG SU

"Some of us are prisoners; the rest of us are guards." — Bob Dylan

The guards dragged him in and threw him onto the bare cement floor like a piece of soiled rag — torn, shriveled and drenched. He was a young man in his late twenties with pale outstretched thin limbs like dried twigs covered with winter frost, and when his skeletal body hit the cement, it made creaking sounds as if some of his bones were breaking.

The guards, muttering to themselves and cursing the heat, left hastily. Outside the cell's barred window, a white sun beamed down relentlessly upon the sandy courtyard with a radiant fever as smoldering as the thin opaque haze emitting from the scorched earth.

The jailer called after the departing guards: "Hi. What's he's in for?"

"Sabotage!" one guard shot back as he scurried off.

Poor bastard! They don't make them as good as they used to. They sure don't. The jailer shook his neat shaven head, and measured the wet, torn heap on the floor with cold sunken eyes. A tinge of sadness almost surged inside him; he shook his head again. Times have changed, but only for the worse. They don't even make though criminals anymore. Years ago, when they were brought in, some of them were as wild as untamed broncos, shouting and yelling, jumping up and down, cursing the committee, the interrogator, the guards and all their blood relatives.

Now look at this one, the jailer thought contemptuously. On the ground the prisoner hardly moved, an immobile heap of shriveled flesh, flung about in a tortured form. His only sign of life was a trickle of blood from an open wound on his temple streaming down his cheek. Poor bastard! So you couldn't take the job they did on you! Like they say, if you can't stand the heat, stay out of the kitchen. If you can't take it, why break the law in the first place? The jailer thought contemptuously to himself. He had no sympathy for these prisoners, these losers. In his work during the past ten years, he had seen them come and go. Some endured, some perished; some were defiant, some timid, some were strong, some weak, but in the end, they were all reduced, more or less, to that same heap of dirty rag on the cement, naked and impotent in its own helplessness and uncertainty. It was his duty to see to it

that they were well-guarded in their six-by-eight hole of a cell. One had a job to do. One had to survive.

On the ground the prisoner stirred ever so lightly. Like a dehydrated primeval creature, he tried with effort to move his limbs. With deep concentration, he pulled himself up, while retracting his twig-like legs as if they had taken on a life of their own. He retreated to the corner where the walls met, and with anxious eyes darting everywhere, looked about, not knowing where he was. When his gaze met the jailer's, his eyes filled with a fearful desperation. The jailer felt uneasy and turned his neat shaven head towards the window. In the silence that elapsed, the prisoner muttered something.

"What?" the jailer barked impatiently.

"Water," came the faint reply.

The prisoner, his parched lips parted and quivering, gulped down the water shamelessly.

Water seemed to have revived the prisoner, who sat in the corner and regarded with regained interest his surroundings and the jailer. He started to talk about the circumstances surrounding his arrest almost with light-hearted nonchalance, and seemed most anxious to find an audience in the jailer.

"Your work permit expired, you don't have a travel permit, and you are in the wrong economic zone; that's a triple offense! And you're not worried!" the jailer remarked incredulously.

"You see, I'm looking for my brother, I was anyway . . . and I have to bring him home with me. My mother was dying. You've got to understand, I have to bring my brother home with me. . . ."

The jailer looked at the condemned man almost with pity. Poor bastard, he seemed not to fully comprehend the seriousness of the crime with which he was charged: suspicion of sabotage and subversion at a time of severe drought and famine in the North, a crime punishable by death.

"My brother, the twin, the twin who has made good . . . you see, my brother is my twin, whom I have not seen for the past fifteen years . . . he left home and came up North when he was fourteen, a spunky little kid, took off one day just like that. You know, I've always admired his guts . . . always so determined and so sure of himself, the survivor-type, you might say. That was in the beginning of the new order when chaos and confusion were everywhere, people fleeing in all directions like locusts in a storm. . . ." the prisoner rattled on, lost in his own reminiscences.

A twin indeed! The jailer walked towards the window. Through the barred window, the immense outside world was cut into tiny thin slices of white glare and unrelenting heat. Under the white sun, the withered earth cracked like an old woman's winter countenance. The jailer felt restless. It must be the heat, the whiteness of the August afternoon! Twins are one of nature's oddities, an aberration, a departure from normalcy. A double, a shadow, a connection. An extension of one's self. Or a curse, a scold, a reflected image. An eternal reminder of one's fragility and mortality. A look into the past. An echo. Yes, an echo, an echo, an echo. . . .

"You know it's illegal to travel without a permit; then why did you do it?" the jailer suddenly blurted out with anger.

"I told you. I've got to bring my brother home; you see, he is our only and last hope. Yes, he is!"

"So you know your twin is in this region?" the jailer asked gingerly.

The Prisoner nodded, closing his eyes. Conversation seemed to have tired him. He leaned back his head and nestled his body against the corner of the walls which cupped him like two hands.

"Sure you would recognize your brother?" The Jailer asked.

"Oh, yea, I certainly would . . . you see, we are not identical twins, but somehow, by a strange quirk of nature, funny in a way, we both have a bean-sized birth mark on the inner thigh of our left leg . . ." the prisoner drawled on without opening his eyes.

A mark! The jailer jerked his body like a suddenly released jack-in-the-box. He started to pace the bare cement floor. His soft sandaled feet made light rustling sounds like those of an autumn wind chasing curled leaves. He stopped and looked at his prisoner, whose inert body had the gauntness of an unfinished scarecrow, yet whose pale fleshless face took on a stange mask of almost innocent tranquility. With hatred, he looked at the prisoner; then abruptly resumed his pacing.

"Cat and mouse!" the prisoner suddenly blurted out. With eyes wide open and grinning, his hatchet face was distorted into a death mask.

"What!" the jailer stopped dead in his pacing, his face flushed crimson red, eyes glaring wild with untold fear.

"Cat and mouse!" the prisoner repeated, "It was a secret game my twin and I used to play . . . with one chasing the other in a cricle . . . but as soon as the chaser overtakes the chased, the latter presses on and becomes the chaser. . . ."

Yes, indeed! The game, the chase, the course of a full circle. The chaser becomes the chased, the hunter becomes the game, the prisoner becomes the jailer, the image becomes the reflection, life becomes death.

“Don’t you ever do that again! You with your stupid game and your non-existent twin! Don’t you ever startle people like that again! For a condemned man, you talk too much!” With that, the jailer stormed out, clanking the gate behind him.

The prisoner shook his head, and chortled to himself. No harm done. I tried that trick on everybody and anybody I met. Just a long shot. One in a million. Just in case I tried on the right person who recognized the secret, the code word, the mark and the bond. Just in case.

The second morning at dawn the guards came in and dragged the prisoner out, blindfolded him and shot him. The shots rang out in the dry morning air like lone firecrackers heralding the new dawn. “Did he talk? Did he talk? Did he say why he came up North?” The jailer asked one of the interrogating officers in the narrow corridor.

“Hell, no, pretty stubborn fellow, even at the very end, still insisting he came up north to look for his brother, ha, a twin yet,” the officer shook his head and walked away.

The jailer walked out into the sun. The white rays beat down upon the prisoner’s body like numerous shimmering whips of steel. He went over to the body, kicked one of its legs that stretched out in its helpless finality.

Poor Bastard! Got yourself caught and killed, poor bastard! He muttered to himself. Suddenly an impulse struck him. Bending down, he rolled up the trouser on the corpse’s left leg. His hands quivered and stopped in mid-air. There it was, a bean-sized blemish, like an ingrained ink mark! He stood up, straightened himself up and scurried off.

That day the jailer was seen wobbling and limping about doing his chores, clanking gates and locking doors. His ancient face, cut deep and furrowed with dark wrinkles, was devoid of expression. Having been scratched and scrubbed by the jailer all morning whenever he was left alone, a bean-size mark on the inner thigh of his left leg became swollen and blossomed into a red feverish new-born wart.

A DAY IN THE LIFE OF AUNT CH'ANG-MAN

SHIH SHU-CH'ING

New York's Forty-second Street was as filthy as ever. The ground, full of bumps and hollows, was covered with grimy scraps of paper and fruit peelings. Garbage bags, a nauseating sight, were piled all along the street as well. Ch'ang-man cautiously picked her way over the clean spots, afraid of stepping on dog droppings with her new shoes she was wearing for the second time.

"People can be just as foul as dogs," Ch'ang-man grumbled to herself, "turning a perfectly nice street into this wretched mess!"

Ch'ang-man threw a few malevolent looks at the blacks loitering about the street. You're the ones who've done it. On Park Avenue, where she worked, there were few blacks around, just the guards watching the doors or the janitors and elevator operators in the high rises, and these were fully dressed in crisp, clean uniforms. They may have been black, but at least they were somewhat human, not like that crowd of loafing bums with nothing to do over on Forty-second Street. If they didn't ooze with oil from the filth, then they were dressed up in some strange attire with one piece hanging from the waist, another draped over the shoulders — blacks just the same. Those who went in and out of the fancy residences along Park Avenue were also more seemly. Take the delivery men, for example. They knew enough to use the service elevator at the rear and press the bell at the kitchen door. If some black rascal pushed the bell at the front door by mistake which sounded in the living room, Ch'ang-man would open the door, put her hands on her hips in a shrewish pose, and immediately give the black rascal such a scolding that his sharply contrasting black and white copper-bell eyes began blinking away.

The people who walked up and down Park Avenue were all respectable ladies and gentlemen, like the lady Ch'ang-man worked for, who never went out without hat and gloves. The master, dressed in a dark suit, silver-haired very refined and elegant looking, would hand Ch'ang-man the briefcase he carried when he came in and even said, "Thank you, Mary."

"Mary" was Ch'ang-man's Western name. She would take the briefcase, straighten her shoulders and reply, "You're welcome, sir."

That's just how formal and courteous upper-class Westerners were. There on the street Ch'ang-man unconsciously straightened

her spine and lifted her neck up when suddenly a torn sheet of newspaper came flying over from an angle, and, with a smack, covered Ch'ang-man's face. She stumbled forward a few steps and snatched the grimy, tattered newspaper from her face to find that she already stood at the door of Number 1649.

Ch'ang-man furiously crumpled the torn newspaper into a ball and flung it to the ground. Still not satisfied, she even stuck her foot out and vehemently stamped on it, wishing she could have trampled it to pieces.

"Hey, baby, you waiting for me?"

Just as Ch'ang-man was pushing the door open to go in, a towering black man in dark purple trousers, swaying on his feet, came rushing at Ch'ang-man from the side, ready to grab her with his long ape-like arms.

"Humph, drunken fool, clown." She threw a look at the drunk but afraid he would reach out and grab her, Ch'ang-man hastily dodged and slipped inside the house.

From the other side of the dirty, bespecked pane, Ch'ang-man watched the drunk chase after her, put his hands against the door frame, and lower his head. She raised her eyes and her gaze landed right on the drunk's thick swollen black lips. She next heard a splashing below, and her line of sight swept downward with the noise. Ch'ang-man was abashed, her face crimson, and so mortified she didn't know where to hide.

According to a superstition held by country folk, accidentally running into a sexual act between a man and woman brought bad luck. She had never thought this black fool would urinate right there on the street in broad daylight, and of all things, Ch'ang-man had run into it. That really was bad luck, especially when at the very moment she turned around, the black fool even reached out and knocked on the pane, pointing toward his private parts as if to show off. Ch'ang-man spat several times in succession. Country folk said that by spitting, one rid oneself of bad luck. Her mind, however, had been thrown into turmoil.

With her back against the glass, Ch'ang-man stood dazed. She was in a long, narrow corridor with an icy cold terrazzo floor. The walls were painted in grey acrylic, and stairs led up to the second floor. The stairs, which were of rusty iron, swayed and shook when anyone walked up them. Like other old buildings in this part of New York, the ceiling was very high, and a chilly draft of air seeped in from somewhere. Ch'ang-man could never keep from cursing herself when she came in here. She managed to get only one day off a week, and of all places she had to come

here. Previously, before Ah Hui had come to New York — before K'un-sheng, her damn fool husband shipped out so that there was no telling what had become of him — Ch'ang-man, imitating elderly American women, used to sling a shopping bag over her arm and take a subway downtown to Chinatown for a stroll by herself. There a long line of temporary stands were set up along the sides of the streets. With her shopping bag in hand, Ch'ang-man often spent the whole day walking and choosing cheap items to buy. Her bag would soon be filled with all sorts of things, but nothing she could really use. But she could pass the time this way, and besides, as a grand lady with money to spend, she could put on airs in front of the sellers, picking fault with this item or finding another too ugly, indulging her craving to play boss and order people around. As a maid for Western woman, her "yes, yes" and constant head-nodding all day long were too much to bear at times.

Calming herself, she went up the stairs. There were two doors in the front, both tightly shut. On the left lived a man from Hong Kong whom Ah Hui called Lao Li. Whenever she saw him, Ch'ang-man would at first eye him coldly, then say to him, "Why, don't you take a look at yourself in the mirror? You're so skinny, your chest sticks to your back, obviously a starved one." Ch'ang-man was quite pleased with herself for having thought up this name: "Yes, Starved One."

It was only in Ah Hui's apartment that she had occasionally seen Starved One. She knew he lived in the opposite apartment, but as for its interior, Ch'ang-man had never seen it. Last Sunday, as she was coming up the stairs, Starved One happened to open the door and come out, and Ch'ang-man stole a glance inside. It gave her such a shock that she hastily retreated and went downstairs where she stood blushing furiously.

"That Starved One certainly has low tastes. How could he put up such a thing?" Ch'ang-man said to herself, for when she had peered inside, she saw nothing but a woman's huge bare buttocks taking up the entire wall. In her hurried glimpse, it seemed as if the woman were facing inward, her face not visible. The exaggerated fat buttocks took up half the canvas. When Ch'ang-man's heartbeat had slowed somewhat, she couldn't help wondering whether the bare buttocks were those of a Western woman or one of her own.

"Must be a Western woman to be so shameless."

I.

Ch'ang-man nodded twice with complete confidence. Neither she nor K'un-sheng would ever dare such a thing. The damn fool was a sailor, a seaman, sailing the high seas all year long, occasionally returning to New York to stay two or three nights. Ch'ang-man told him that Westerners particularly disliked impropriety in their maids and wanted K'un-sheng to stay out of sight until Mr. and Mrs. Macoby had turned off the lights and gone to bed before opening the kitchen door to let him in.

K'un-sheng, who had been drinking all evening in a bar, grabbed the doorknob, and with a lurch forced his way into the kitchen. If Ch'ang-man hadn't quickly held him up, K'un-sheng would certainly have buckled at the knees and fallen on all fours like a dog. When, after enduring him all evening, she finally managed to get a good look at him, Ch'ang-man found him reeking of wine and jabbering nonsense, she was inwardly furious. If she behaved as she would have in the Chinese countryside, she would certainly have put her hands on her hips and made a scene. But now that she was living under someone else's roof, she had to move about stealthily, keep her voice down, and not talk so loudly. She simply had to hold her temper and force herself to bear up for she still hoped to get the damn fool into the bed. Also, that damn fool K'un-sheng had quite a temper. If provoked, he might stagger out the door, probably cursing her indistinctly through his teeth: "Aren't you great! What's so wonderful about this old black hole? I'm not staying here. I'm going back to the bar and have a rousing goddam drink with my mates!"

"Since you are so drunk, just where are you going to pour the yellow juice?" Ch'ang-man wanted to let out a few rough oaths of her own, but the tears came rolling down in spite of herself. Grudgingly, all she could do was sigh and weep. She didn't know how many thousands of times she had pleaded. After such a long absence, they finally had a chance to see each other. Ch'ang-man counted the days and painfully suffered the separation hoping that when they were together for two or three days, they would really talk and have a good time. Why did he first have to fill his belly full of wine every time? While she continuously scolded, she helped him onto the bed, loosened his clothes, and applied a damp towel wrung out in ice water to his forehead, hoping to sober him up a little so she could have a chance to make love with him. Wasn't this what she's been hoping and longing for all this time? And in the end, what? Ai, forget it

II.

Why should she keep thinking about such things today? Ch'ang-man shook her head in an effort to rid these thoughts from her brain. She inserted her own key into the keyhole; the door opened, and she was in the kitchen. For all intents and purposes, she had entered through the back door. The structure of this house was unusual, being long and narrow from the kitchen to the living room with a bedroom in the center — a long strip like a corridor. To enter by the front door, one had to go up the fire escape outside, and, since access was usually from the back, the front door had been blocked up. The living room was used as Ah Hui's studio, and he had hung huge pictures all over the front door windows. A newcomer just stepping into the living room would have thought there was no door at the front.

Ch'ang-man put down the handbag she had been tightly clutching, took off her new shoes, changed into a pair of slippers she had left there, rolled up her sleeves, and went to the cupboard to begin washing dishes. The kitchen gave her the feeling of coming home. The bowls and chopsticks, pots and dishes were all Chinese, like the ones Ch'ang-man had been accustomed to using a dozen years ago at her home in the country. She dabbed the cloth into some soap powder, picked up a scorched pot, and began vigorously scrubbing it.

The Macoby's kitchen was different. Though Ch'ang-man had begun doing housework for Westerners living in Taipei while she was in Taiwan, after seven or eight years even until today, she still didn't know how to use many of the gadgets in a foreigner's kitchen, to say nothing of all those appliances of varying sizes and shapes. When Ch'ang-man lived in the country, not understanding that electricity could burn, she had reached out to pick up the iron and burned a scar in her palm which was still visible. From then on, she was terrified of electrical appliances, telling her employers that she was afraid to touch anything. In Taiwan the Americans for whom she had worked were less fussy since they were living abroad, and many of the things were local products Ch'ang-man was familiar with, but it was different when she came to New York. Besides the most ordinary kind of toaster, there were can openers, an egg beaters, meat-grinders, food warmers, and all sorts of things. Ch'ang-man approached them with both fear and hatred, but there was nothing for her to do but to grit her teeth and learn how to work each of them, one by one. Preparing a meal was like waging a war. She ached all over and became so tense she broke out in a sweat, even in wintertime.

Ch'ang-man straightened up the bachelor Ah Hui's kitchen quickly. In a few moments she had washed all the chopsticks, bowls, pots, and dishes. As she turned around to get the broom, she noticed Ah Hui standing at the door of the bedroom, yawning repeatedly.

"Auntie, when did you come?"

"Just now. Are you up?"

The scene of the black man urinating at the door suddenly floated into mind, while the man before her, younger and more handsome than her husband, stood there lethargically with the air of one just awakening. Ch'ang-man didn't dare take another look at him. For some reason, her face began to redden, and she feared she had revealed one of her innermost secrets.

"What time is it, Auntie?"

"What time?" Still not looking at him, she pretended to lower her head to sweep the floor saying, "The sunshine is on your buttocks." As soon as she mentioned the sun, Ch'ang-man's heart warmed and her whole body perked up.

Chung Hsing-hui's eyes, red from working late into the night, shifted right and left as though seeking the sunlight. The room was dark and dim with only a small window on the right. The pane was covered with thick greyish dust, while a high wall next door blocked the only pitiful ray of light.

"In our village, whenever anyone tried to coax a reluctant child out of bed, he would always say, 'the sunshine is on your buttocks!'" Ch'ang-man chuckled happily.

Not understanding why she was so joyful, he muttered, "Hum, hum."

"Do you have any clothes you want washed?" With this she tried to grab the dirty clothes Chung Hsing-hui was clutching in his hands.

"I'll do it, Auntie. I'll wash them myself." He declined embarrassingly, clutching the clothes more tightly.

"You're still being so polite with Auntie?" Her eyes, outlined with eyeliner, darted at him in a flirting fashion. "You'd be that way with your own Auntie? Quick, give them to me."

Chung Hsing-hui resisted. "A few underclothes. I'll wash them myself."

As if cajoling with a child, Ch'ang-man feigned anger. "Come, are you going to give them to me or not? You're fighting with Auntie over a few pieces of clothes?"

At this she reached out and tried to grab them away again.

Chung Hsing-hui dodged, trying his best not to bump into Ch'ang-man, and the things he was clutching in his hands fell to the floor. It was two pairs of men's underpants. Ch'ang-man was stunned and glanced at him in embarrassment. Chung Hsing-hui stood there looking even more at a loss.

"A grown man already married and still acting like a child," said Ch'ang-man to herself as she stooped down to pick the underpants from the floor. Chung Hsing-hui again came over and tried to grab them back but Ch'ang-man stopped him.

"Go see if there's any more. I'll wash them together." Holding the clothes, she started into the bedroom.

"Auntie, there aren't any more. Don't go in." Chung Hsing-hui tried to stop her. "I washed everything the day before yesterday."

Ch'ang-man ignored him and continued walking. Chung Hsing-hui gave up and stood aside.

Without even looking at him, Ch'ang Man-yi knew the expression on the young man's face. She was not welcome here, and Ah Hui had hinted several times that the next time Ch'ang-man had a day off, it might be better if she went shopping as she had before. He could not bring himself to come out directly and say that he didn't want her to come because Ch'ang-man had a distant relationship with Ah Hui's wife — a relationship so remote that not even a ten-foot noodle could tie them together. Before his wife's family moved to town and prospered, they were an influential family in the country. In that little village of a single family name, everyone was related, and Chung Hsing-hui, like his wife, called Chang-man "Auntie."

Ch'ang-man had been married to a man in the country who later left her to live openly with a local prostitute. If that wasn't bad enough, the prostitute was reputed to have the mouth of a pig, waist as big as a bucket, and ugly beyond description. Furious, Ch'ang-man went to Taipei to work as a maid.

First she worked for Chinese homes, then someone told her it was more comfortable to work for foreigners. Ch'ang-man went off in a burst of confidence to study English with the *ah mah* of a Western family, and as soon as she had mastered a few phrases of daily conversation, was introduced to a Western family. She earned money, decked herself out elaborately, and on holidays put on her new clothes to show off her new-found glory at home. Later, she worked for a very kind foreign wife. When Ch'ang-man learned that many *ah mahs* accompanied Westerners to their homelands, Ch'ang-man became quite excited at the thought of

going abroad. She pleaded with her kind-hearted employer and after going through all kinds of difficulties, the family finally managed to bring her to New York. At first, the conditions agreed upon were that the family would take care of the plane fare, and their only demand was that she take the youngest child to kindergarten. Ch'ang-man of course, readily agreed.

The second day after her arrival in New York, Ch'ang-man wrote a long letter home in crooked, winding script describing in great detail to her relatives in the country the bustling scenes of New York. She resolved to make people envy her and wanted even more to make her husband who had abandoned her, drool with envy because she had met with such success. Ch'ang-man even went so far as to say this in her letters. Having won this victory, she later lost her enthusiasm for working in the kind woman's home. Relying on her ability in English, Ch'ang-man quickly made friends with a black maid who worked in the apartment next door. From the black maid she learned that there were different kinds and classes of Americans. But this was of little moment. What mattered was that there were labor laws in America designed solely to protect maids from being persecuted by their employers. The black maid told her how courteous her missus was to her and that her way to and from work and even a vacation once a year was paid for by her employer. At this Ch'ang-man suddenly realized it all, and crying that she had been deceived, forgot all the trouble the family had gone through at first to bring her to America, to say nothing of the plane fare. Ch'ang-man decided to "jump the manger" and to work in a "real American" family. The kind woman had lived in Taiwan and learned the stinginess of the Taiwanese. That would never do. Furthermore, whereas they had seemed like such big shots in Taiwan since the people they socialized with were all from the embassy, once they got to America, the husband became a middle-level employee at a large company, and they were merely very ordinary members of the middle class. Ch'ang-man, however, thought her own situation very similar to the story people told of a young Westerner who had come to Taiwan and bragged to a girl about how rich and famous he was in America. It later turned out that he was a shoeshine boy. The illusion dissolved, and Ch'ang-man couldn't adapt right away.

That day, with four children pulling at her skirt to keep her from going, Ch'ang man-yi let fall a few tears, too, and in a very Western manner, consoled the mistress she had served for five years.

"Miss, I have my own troubles. You understand, Miss. You can understand."

The missus was wearing the then popular large sunglasses which covered up half her face so that her expression was not visible. Ch'ang-man pulled open the little brats' hands and left without a backward glance.

After this she changed jobs several times, everywhere fighting with her employer for equality, demanding higher wages and, most important, settling with her employer at the start on the number of days of vacation and travel expenses. Ch'ang-man planned that whenever she wanted to go out, she would go with K'un-sheng, the place to be decided upon by him. Men worked outside and knew more about the fun spots. Ch'ang Man-yi went a step further in her dreams: if K'un-sheng agreed, she would simply quit working altogether. Then she could really enjoy herself. On her return, there'd be no fear, in any case, of her not finding a job. There were more than enough rich Americans who went to employment offices to find a housekeeper, and the list of those registering was quite long. Ch'ang-man was confident she had nothing to fear. Her only complaint was that the money she had set aside for a vacation began to accumulate and she never had a chance to take a trip.

Ch'ang-man sat on the edge of Ah Hui's bed. The two pairs of dirty underpants let out a masculine odor, which unknowingly had been held by Ch'ang-man to her breast for some time.

III.

There was a knock at the door. Following her maid's instinct, Ch'ang-man stood up and hurried over to open it. She had just reached the door of the bedroom when she saw the door had already been opened a crack, and "Starved One" from across the way squeezed in through the crack.

"Starved One," Ch'ang-man curled her lips in disdain. She couldn't understand why Ah Hui always made friends with such people, saying it meant nothing to be well-known in Hong Kong, that he had come to New York just to play the piano and try to make it in the musical world. Try to make what. Humpf. Just look at him. He couldn't even get enough to eat and had starved himself into that miserable state. Ch'ang-man had used just such words to taunt Chung Hsing-hui to his face. The youth, his pale face scrubbed blue, made no response and pretended not to have heard.

Last Sunday Ch'ang-man sat in the single worn chair in the living room which served as a work room. It was the kind of chair

dentists used in treating their patients. It had probably been thrown out as trash, and Ch'ang Hsing-hui had picked it up and brought it back. As soon as she came in, Ch'ang-man chose this seat. The other chair in the work room was the one Chang Hsing-hui sat on while painting. He sat working, his brush in front of the canvas. Watching the motion of his brush sweeping on the canvas made Ch'ang-man think of how in the country she used to sweep up rice shells in front of her house with the bamboo broom.

"That starved friend of yours, what's the use of coming here. He can't even keep his stomach full." Seeing Ah Hui made no response, she went further, "Huh, all that paint-water — can you drink it? Phooey!" She became more aroused as she spoke, and even gave the can of oil by her foot a kick.

Chung Hsing-hui's puffed up his cheeks a few times like a fish having trouble breathing, but clinched his teeth and said nothing.

"Ah Hui, a man with a wife and family can't just play around with this all day. You'll have to find a proper occupation so you can send money home for a plane ticket as soon as possible." Ch'ang-man let out an exaggerated sigh, "That poor niece of mine is waiting anxiously for you to bring her over!"

As Chung Hsing-hui had his back to her, Ch'ang-man could not see his reaction. Thinking the other had been affected by her words, she began hammering away with renewed vigor.

"Find a job and earn some money properly! Send it home so Fen-fen can come. Then I won't have to come over all the time, running around to both places—"

"Auntie, I can get along quite well by myself. Haven't I always said so? I don't want to trouble you. You'd rather not come on your next day off?"

"Auntie annoys you by coming. But as for me, I can't rest easy. Just look at you. You've been here only a few months and that hair of yours is as long as a convict's. If you go on mixing with people like that, humph!"

Chung Hsing-hui, who was working his brush back and forth over the canvas, stopped abruptly and jerked it backward. The paint sprayed over the floor like a meteoric shower. The back of Ch'ang Man-yi's foot was splattered by several drops. She cried out in surprise and jumped up.

"Ah Hui, you're crazy. Don't put so much force into it, all right? You've splattered me all over." She ran out yelling, got a cloth and came back wiping all the way. Chung Hsing-hui flung the brush to the floor in a fury.

The house was so run-down that it didn't even have a door, so the old woman could come and go without hesitation as if she were in her own home. The only way Chung Hsing-hui could get rid of her was to leave. He couldn't even stay in his own home. Ch'ang-man was a shadow. She sat down imperiously at the head of Ah Hui's bed and now appeared in his kitchen.

"Hello, Auntie."

"Starved One" greeted her, interrupting the conversation. Ch'ang-man merely threw him a disdainful look, raised her head and neck a few inches, and nodded stiffly by way of a greeting.

"Starved One" stood awkwardly to one side, vigorously rubbing his hands.

"I'm having Lao Li for lunch," Chung Hsing-hui said in a deliberately loud voice.

Ch'ang-man's face took on a very ugly look. She pursed her lips, but her hands were busy. She took down from the shelf a bag in which remained but a little rice, took out an empty pot, and purposely holding the sack of rice very high, poured it clattering like roasted beans into the pot. "Starved One" couldn't stand it.

"I'm going back over, Lao Chung," he said, turning to go.

"Wait a moment." He opened a drawer, groped around for a long while, then finally pulled out a half-sized dirty candle.

"Take this for now. I'll get a pack of them later at the corner."

Under Ch'ang-man's relentless gaze, "Starved One" timidly took the half-sized candle and slipped out as though making an escape without even shutting the door securely.

"Lao Li, come right over!" Chung Hsing-hui called after him.

"Don't shout. You afraid he won't come when there's food around?"

Ch'ang-man's voice was not low, and the man at the head of the stairs could certainly hear it.

"Auntie—"

"What, did I say something wrong?" She gave a snort, then blurted out, "What's he borrowing candles for?"

"He needs them."

"In broad daylight, he lights candles?"

"Who knows. Probably his room's too dark?!"

She could still picture quite vividly the woman's large plump white buttocks on the wall which she had glimpsed through the door crack last time.

"His room shouldn't be so dark! You mean there aren't any windows?"

"Dunno!" replied Chung Hsing-hui curtly.

"Ah Hui—"

He knew the old woman wouldn't give up. "All right, all right, I'll tell you. He wants to light them in the evening when he plays the piano. O.K.?"

"He lights candles in the evening? What for?" Ch'ang-man was filled with suspicion. "He keeps the lights off and instead lights a candle?"

The Macobys often placed a silver candlestick in the center of the dining table during dinner in order to create an atmosphere. What was "Starved One" doing lighting candles like that?

Chung Hsing-hui said no more and leaving Ch'ang-man, he started to go inside. Ch'ang-man strode across and cut him off.

Each held his position for a moment. In the end it was Chung Hsing-hui who surrendered.

"This morning someone came and cut off his electricity," he said.

Ch'ang-man was a little taken aback.

"His electricity was cut off?" Suddenly, "Oh, I know. It must be he owes the electricity bill and hasn't paid it."

"Now you can rejoice."

The youth roughly dropped the remark and walked away. Ch'ang-man stood dumbfounded a moment, then turned and went to wash the rice. She began turning things over in her mind. If "Starved One" has fallen this low, Ah Hui should come to his senses when he takes stock of him. This was a good opportunity. Later on she must sound him out again. He'd surely agree this time! She washed the rice, put it in the Tatung electric rice cooker from Taiwan and dried her hands. Feeling quite gratified, she went inside.

As soon as she stepped inside, Chung Hsing-hui, who was lying on his bed lost in thought, sprang up. Throwing a blank look at the approaching Ch'ang-man, he returned to his studio and sat down before his canvas.

Ch'ang-man followed him in, ignoring the young man's apparent wish not to be disturbed. She sat down imperiously on her old chair. Neither spoke. After a moment of silence, Ch'ang-man could stand it no longer.

"Ah Hui, it's not that I want to nag you, but have you thought about what I said last week?"

Chung Hsing-hui pretended to be wholly engrossed in his painting.

"This morning, the manager of the building came up to me on his own to ask whether you wanted it or not. I have to give an answer after all!"

"Auntie, let's not talk about that." The youth was nearly pleading.

"We can't just not talk about it. Are you coming or aren't you? *You* can keep putting it off day after day, but people ask me about it. *I* can't do that. Stuck in the middle this way, I can't carry on properly." Ch'ang-man grumbled unceasingly, "Going in and out all day long, I don't know how many times we meet. I feel embarrassed every time I see that manager."

"Auntie, how many hundreds of times do I have to tell you? I'm just not going. Go on back now and tell him that I'm not going. Won't that settle it?"

"You really won't go? You really mean that?"

Under Ch'ang-man's interrogation, Chung Hsing-hui was a little shaken.

"If my friends found out, I'd be laughed down."

"What's there to laugh at? What would make people laugh is not being able to pay your electric bill and having your electricity cut off. That would be really glorious." She gave a couple of mirthless laughs. Chung Hsing-hui didn't dare turn and look at her.

"Auntie, don't start bringing other people into it. Lao Li didn't do anything to you. Why keep on about him?"

"What, I can't speak of him? Is he gold? Or silver?" Ch'ang-man's face darkened and her cheekbones stood out more prominently than ever. "Ah Hui, the way you muddle along from day to day without any decent job, holed up here all day long painting that nonsense—"

Knowing the youth was about to lose his temper, Ch'ang-man directed the conversation squarely at his weak point, "Oh, I really am worried for you. Fen-fen is left all by herself in Taiwan. Ai, somehow or other you must find a proper job and bring her over right away!"

At the mention of his wife, Chung Hsing-hui was disturbed. "Auntie, but of all jobs, to have to take that one."

"What's so bad about being a doorman? When you first came, didn't you go work as a gas station attendant?"

"Yes, for a month, and I got so tired I didn't know which way was up. When I went to sleep at night, all I smelled was the stink of gasoline."

"So now you know, don't you!" she said, assuming an experienced air. "Did you think it was so easy to get by in America?"

"Who said I came here to get by? I'm an artist, I came to paint."

Ch'ang-man ostentatiously shrugged her shoulders, in imitation of the Western show of disdain. "An artist!" She bared her teeth and smiled wryly.

"Yes, I'm an artist." The brush swished back and forth without stop over the canvas. It was as though he were trying to prove something to himself. "I'm an artist. At least in Taiwan," he reminded himself again, as if to bring back his already lost confidence.

"Taiwan, humpf." Ch'ang-man, who had been away from Taiwan for over ten years was like so many Chinese lost and adrift abroad who for a variety of complicated feeling deliberately and unrealistically reduced Taiwan to a tiny dot barely worth the mention. Later when they found an excuse, what was there about Taiwan worth longing for? Better to wander about abroad than go back there.

A hissing sound came from the kitchen. Probably the soup in the pot was boiling over. Ch'ang-man dashed out, taking two strides in one, still not forgetting to drop the remark, "Give it some thought. Ai, Fen-fen is so pitiable!"

Chung Hsing-hui held his head and buried his face between his knees.

Ch'ang-man returned to the kitchen, shut off the gas, took out the hot bean cheese, pickled cucumbers, and other side dishes such as dried radish she had bought in Chinatown, then fried a plate of greens and hastily got the lunch together. There wasn't even a dining table, so she just had to place the little dishes on the refrigerator and in the sink.

"Lunch is ready, Ah Hui."

After a moment Chung Hsing-hui finally appeared at the door leading from the bedroom to the kitchen and propped his elbow against the upper part of the doorframe.

"Auntie," he asked, "would I have to wear a uniform?"

Ch'ang-man, caught off guard by this abrupt question, didn't understand immediately, and turned it over in her mind for a good while before turning around. "Oh, you mean as a doorman? Of course you'd have to. Didn't I tell you? They said that if you agreed, they could get one from someone who's no longer using it and alter it to fit you."

The triumphant Ch'ang-man brightened and smiled.

"Ah Hui, so you've finally come round. I'll go tell them tomorrow. Oh, what time will you start work? Tell me so they can arrange it."

Chung Hsing-hui retreated.

"Auntie—"

"Wh-at?" she asked, drawing out the word. Ch'ang-man's gaze was piercing.

"Nothing." Dropping his eyes, he said, "I need some time — to get ready."

"To get what ready? Come see me tomorrow. I'll take you over. If the uniform fits, you can start tomorrow."

"Tomorrow? But that's too soon."

Ch'ang-man ignored him.

"Being a doorman is so easy. You put on your uniform, wait on the street, and when someone comes up, you hurry up and open the door. Bend your shoulder, wave your hand a little and with a great show of respect, let the person in."

As Ch'ang-man gave a demonstration to accompany her words, Chung Hsing-hui contracted his brows in a frown. At the sight of her obsequious, fawning manner, a mutter formed on his lips, but he kept it to himself.

"Well?" Ch'ang-man persisted. "You'll come see me tomorrow?"

"Lunch is ready," said Chung Hsing-hui, changing the subject. "I'll go get Lao Li."

IV.

"Starved One" really did look starved. He stood there timorously, furiously rubbing his hands together until blood-red patches appeared. Ch'ang-man actually felt sorry for him and said pleasantly, "Eat while it's hot, Mr. Li!"

When "Starved One" heard her address him this way, he reacted with surprise to her unexpected kindness and seemed even more ill at ease, merely saying, "Yes, Auntie, yes, Auntie."

Chung Hsing-hui couldn't stand it. "Lao Li, why be so polite. Come on and eat!"

The three stood in the kitchen eating. Occasionally, when someone's chopsticks knocked against another pair which had reached out, the two holding the chopsticks could not help smiling with embarrassment, and the whole atmosphere seemed quite harmonious.

"Lao Chung, how are you coming?"

"Very slowly, very slowly. I have to go stroke by stroke according to the photograph. It takes time and hurts my eyes."

Ch'ang-man met a pair of eyes covered with blood threads and barely able to open.

"To do realism takes real craftsmanship. It's not easy!"

Chung Hsing-hui acknowledged, "I still haven't grasped the secret."

"But you just got here. It's early yet. Stay a while longer. Go to the galleries downtown and look around. I've heard my painter friends say that's the real center."

"I'm afraid that by the time I get it, some other style will be popular in New York."

"Starved One" let out a faint sigh. "You're right. Things change too quickly. By the time you've mastered neo-realism, it might not be fashionable anymore."

"Isn't it tiring always to be running after other people?"

Ch'ang-man found all this talk quite boring. Let the two dreamers go on. Maybe if "Starved One" talked some more about his luckless plight in New York, it would serve as a dash of cold water on the newly arrived Chung Hsing-hui, and tomorrow he would see Ch'ang-man to get the uniform and become a doorman like a good boy.

Letting them talk on, Ch'ang-man, feeling relieved, went back to the living room and sat on her old chair, the one for dental patients, raised her head and rested it against a cushion in back, meaning to rest for a while.

She was just about to close her eyes when the large painting on the west side of the room suddenly assailed her eyes. It was different from the buttocks "Starved One" had hung up. Ah Hui's painting was not very realistic. The colors in his painting were stark — dark blue and a red the color of dripping blood. Usually when Ch'ang-man sat there, she would throw an occasional glance at the pictures on the wall, but she had always seen only a blurry form with liquid reds and blues flowing around on the canvas and wasn't able to distinguish its subject matter. Before, she had always thought Ah Hui was just slapping on paint without producing any particular shape, just painting some wavy, crooked lines. Now that she got a good look at it, Ch'ang-man's face burned.

"Ah Hui has painted — the middle is rather complicated — why, it's a woman's—"

Ch'ang-man was so embarrassed she didn't dare think about it any longer. Ah Hui had been away from Fen-fen about half a year, so no wonder he thought about her and even painted her. How really shameful! Ch'ang-man turned her face away. There was another painting next to it, also of a woman's—

Ch'ang-man suddenly sat up straight. She could take no more and quickly strode out of the studio. The sound of men's voices came from the kitchen, and she inadvertently stood still, afraid her private thoughts were exposed. Holding her flushed face in her hands, she sat down on Ah Hui's bed. Nothing but bad luck all morning: First, it was that black publicly urinating on the street, then those huge buttocks of "Starved One's," and now this thing of Ah Hui's. She lay down slowly, her hands unconsciously reaching downward. That damn fool K'un-sheng! Who knows what ocean or sea he had drifted to by now. The last time he returned to New York, Ch'ang-man urged him to retire. A sailor's life wasn't fit for human beings. Barely fifty years old, already his back was beginning to be hunched, the sun and wind producing as many lines on his face as in a spider's web. Ch'ang-man rubbed his large, rough hands and said in sorrow and pity,

"Once you're retired, we can get together. You've spent the first half of your life wandering about. Ai, how much more time do we have left?"

Ch'ang-man kept on and on, telling K'un-sheng he should relax and not worry about the money. After working as a maid for so many years with food and lodging provided by her employer and continuously putting aside her wages, she had saved quite a bit.

But her husband screwed up his eyes at her.

"Goddam, you forget everything else and just think all day long about getting on with men."

Ch'ang-man gave him a violent pinch. They were then on the bed. Rubbing his sore thigh, K'un-sheng begged for mercy.

"Where are your ears? I mean that when the retirement check is gone, what are we going to eat? Sea water?"

Ch'ang-man liked her husband's provincial accent, whatever it was. She spread her fingers and ran them through K'un-sheng's twisted beard, stroking it.

"Silly! Why are you worrying so much? Damn fool!" She threw him a petulant glance. "You — all you have to do is just to go on living with me."

In the end, the fool cruelly walked out on her, leaving her so lonely and forlorn she couldn't get to sleep at night.

She semi-dozed on Ah Hui's bed. Men's voices drifted in now softly, now loudly from the kitchen. Ah Hui had arrived in New York full of vigor, ready to make a career, energetic and filled with a fighting spirit. Ch'ang-man turned over. That little Ah Hui was fresh and vibrant all over. But who'd ever want those things he painted? Even hung in a Western couple's bedroom they'd be considered too bold. If women saw them, they would be absolutely mortified. And as for men? They'd rather buy a photograph of a beautiful woman in the nude, like K'un-sheng who stuck such a nude torn from a calendar in his wallet. The fool said that sailors even plastered the walls in their cabins with them. Ah Hui's painting was far uglier than those nudes. That dripping blood and somber blue — who'd want to buy it?

She muttered to herself. She lost track of how much time has passed, but was dimly aware that a figure seemed to be bending over her. Ch'ang-man suspected she was dreaming, yet the figure seemed to be bending very low, almost about to climb onto her. Ch'ang-man opened her eyes wide and quickly sat up with a start.

It was Ah Hui.

"You gave me such a fright!" Putting her hand against her thumping chest, she looked sidelong at the intruder.

As though he had accidentally intruded into a woman's bedroom, Chung Hsing-hui began to feel unaccountably guilty.

"Auntie, I just came — I don't know—" he began desperately making excuses.

"My goodness, how could I have lain here? I even fell asleep."

Amazed that she could have slept on a man's bed, Ch'ang-man quickly got up, then hurriedly smoothed out the wrinkled sheets.

"What ever could have gotten into me?!" Ch'ang-man muttered. Ah Hui and she smiled at each other as if they had done something to be ashamed of, guiltily avoiding each other's gaze.

After a moment, Ch'ang-man said

"Ah Hui, did you get enough to eat?"

"Yes."

"Starved One—" she quickly corrected herself, "What about your friend? That Mr. Li?"

"He's gone back."

"Oh."

"I came in to get my coat. I didn't expect—"

"What, you're going out, not painting anymore!"

Thinking she was denigrating him again, Chung Hsing-hui ignored her and reached his hand over the top of her head to take

his jacket down from the wall over the bed. He put it on and started out.

"Where are you going?"

Chung Hsing-hui spread his hands out and shrugged his shoulders. "Out to take a walk, get some air."

"Then I'll look after the house for you."

"Don't trouble yourself about it." The youth gradually regained his composure. "Lock the door when you go out. I have a key."

"Good. I haven't taken a walk for a long time."

"Then go ahead. You don't often have a day off."

"That's true. K'un-sheng promised me next time he returned he'd take me to a movie. Ai — when he comes back—"

The youth said nothing.

"Ah Hui, aren't there a lot of movie houses around here? Every time I go back, the neon lights are always flashing, and it all looks so lively."

"You want to see a movie, Auntie?"

"Yes, but I can't go by myself! I'll wait for K'un-sheng to come back and take me." After a pause, "Ah Hui, where are you going?"

"Nowhere special, just walking around."

"The streets are full of people. Where can you walk?"

"Do you want to go to a movie?"

"Yes!"

He heard himself saying, "Want me to go with you?"

Before Chung Hsing-hui could change his mind, Ch'ang-man picked up her purse, put on her shoes, and followed him out.

V.

The sun had been out for some time, spilling brightly on the dirty old buildings like scattered bits of cotton. Times Square, besides being a hotbed of violence, crime, and vice, was also a center for cinema and theater in New York and, for that matter, the whole world. Chung Hsing-hui took his aunt past one movie theater after another. They stopped to read the movie posters on the wall but couldn't decide which one to see. Ch'ang-man looked and looked, peered and peered, but still couldn't make out a single word on the posters. Her English was limited to a few phrases applicable to the kitchen as well as the few a maid must understand; these she had been repeating over and over for ten to fifteen years, and that's all she knew. Ah Hui seemed to be reading the posters earnestly, but having just come from Taiwan, what did he know of those words?

Ch'ang-man had become hot from all the walking and took off her sweater. Chung Hsing-hui, too, pulled out his handkerchief and wiped the beads of sweat from his forehead again and again. Finally Ch'ang-man could take it no longer.

"Ah Hui, just pick any one! Aren't we going to see one anyway."

They went up to the nearest theater and without paying attention to what was showing — Ch'ang-man was too tired even to look at the movie poster — they went in.

Though it was Sunday afternoon, the huge movie theater was quiet and deserted. When her eyes had grown accustomed to the darkness, Ch'ang-man saw that of the small audience, eight out of ten were black. Her heart skipped a beat. Since coming to America, Ch'ang-man had very rarely gone to the movies. Without anyone to accompany her, even if she had been bolder, she wouldn't have dared to sit alone in a dark theater.

Before, in the country, Ch'ang-man had been a frequent movie-goer. In those days, seeing a movie was a big event. She always put on her prettiest clothes, slipped into the plastic sandals then popular in the country, and went in a group with her best girl friends from the neighborhood to see the movie. When she was still a young girl, Ch'ang-man had been famous in the country for her craftiness. A matchmaker who had come to make a match for her was talking to her mother outside. She mentioned that the man's family wished to see her first and asked where they could meet. Ch'ang-man, who had been secretly listening to everything from behind the screen, suddenly walked grandly out.

"If he wants to see, he can come to the movie theater!"

Pointing at her with the toothpick in her hand, the matchmaker said half jestingly half vexed,

"Now, Ah Man, it's dark in the movie theater; how can he see you there?!"

Eventually, Ch'ang-man's reputation grew, and it wasn't until she was nearly thirty that she made a half-hearted marriage to a carpenter. Her carpenter husband used his fists and great strength to take care of the loose-tongued, difficult Ch'ang-man. After one good beating, no matter how fierce she had been, all she could do was wail and sob and hide in the corner. After she had endured three months of beatings, her husband took up with the back-alley whore, and Ch'ang-man no longer had to suffer his beating, for he never even returned home.

Ch'ang-man heaved a sigh. What was the point of thinking about things which had happened ten or fifteen years ago? She

had just been daydreaming. Ch'ang-man changed her position and got ready to watch the movie. Only the same few people were still in the bleak theater. She had been sitting there for a while now, but not one person had entered. The few blacks, however, went to the washroom, one after another, as though by turns. Ch'ang-man was filled with suspicions. In the darkness, she sensed Ah Hui sitting next to her, restlessly moving about.

A man and woman appeared on the screen. The man was black. The woman, nearly half a length taller, led a Pekingese along as she entered a room with the man. Inside, there was nothing but a round bed. As soon as the woman went in, she began taking off her clothes. When all that remained was a black pair of panties, the man walked over to her and violently tore them off with one hand. The woman stood there stark naked — Ch'ang-man couldn't believe her eyes — and the man also took off his clothes in two or three seconds, and pressed the woman down on the bed, ludicrously spreading his small, ash-black body over her.

My God! So there are such things as this! Of all the movies, the two bumpkins had hit upon a pornographic film. Ch'ang-man's intuitive reaction was to get up immediately and walk out. She still believed in her country superstition that if one bumped into a sexual act in broad daylight, it would bring bad luck. She felt she should run out immediately and spit a few times in the gutter.

Just as she was about to get up, the woman suddenly turned her head around on the screen and faced Ch'ang-man. The woman's narrow golden face was covered with tiny white hairs which, along with those somber blue eyes, made her seem like a demon the more one looked at her. It was as though she were winking seductively at Ch'ang-man.

"Ah Hui! We—"

Before she could finish, the woman's body suddenly lurched upward and began twisting about like a snake. She closed her eyes, her mouth opened slightly, and her whole body sank into a quiver. This expression made Ch'ang-man, who had been about to get up, go weak, and she sat back in her seat paralyzed. For the next ten minutes there were scenes after scenes with different couples in different positions and different groans. Ch'ang-man sat tightly gripping her knees, experiencing wave after wave of joyful torture, unable to move.

She did not know how it happened, but at the same moment, Ch'ang-man and Chung Hsing-hui both ran out of the theater as

if on cue. It was already dusk outside but not completely dark. The two who had just watched a pornographic film unexpectedly exchanged glances, then turned their heads. Though they walked together, a large gulf opened between them, like a couple who had just come out of a hotel, returning to the world after it was over, not daring to get close because of their guilt, afraid their secret impropriety would be detected.

Fortunately, the sky had already darkened. The city noise and smog made the sky seem so low that it nearly covered the tops of the tall buildings, and the faces of the people passing by on the street were also blurred because of the color of the sky. When they passed the *New York Times* building, Ch'ang-man said,

"Let's make a turn and get some food. There's nothing to eat for tonight."

She didn't wait for any reaction from Chung Hsing-hui. "There's a butcher shop in the neighborhood which stays open very late," said Ch'ang-man. "Let's go get some meat."

Like a couple returning home late, the wife thought about the evening meal on her way home. A picture of a man and wife busily preparing dinner together in the kitchen appeared before Ch'ang-man's eyes. The young husband, his sleeves rolled up, was helping his wife wash the vegetables—

"Auntie, I think—"

"It's a wholesaler. The meat's very cheap there. I know."

Like a bossy wife who treats her husband's remarks as so much nonsense, she quickly walked over on her own. Chung Hsing-hui stayed back by himself, and she didn't know what he was thinking.

The butcher's was on the corner and took up two or three storefronts. Through the open main door, one could see a roomful of hanging beef just like a slaughterhouse. On the walls hung a row of half carcasses of lamb still dripping with blood as though newly slaughtered. There were also a few livestock heads, the sight of which was enough to give one a shock. While she was buying the meat, Ch'ang-man watched Chung Hsing-hui out of the corner of her eye. The youth had also apparently been struck with fright at the roomful of meat. He stood there dumbfounded.

"You haven't been here before? It's so close. Didn't you know about this shop?" Ch'ang-man paid the money. "The meat here is much cheaper than at the supermarket."

"You just said."

Ch'ang-man took the meat she'd bought and stood with Chung Hsing-hui, who was staring at the animals the man had dismembered and cut to pieces.

When they looked all they wanted, "Ah Hui," Ch'ang-man said suddenly, "Ai, just look, isn't the color of the meat a little bit like your paintings? It's all red too . . ."

At this unexpected comparison, Chung Hsing-hui threw Ch'ang-man a curious look which gradually turned from surprise to anger.

"I'm going back," he said in an utterly incensed tone of voice. "Auntie, you—"

"All right, all right, go back. We'll go together."

The youth didn't turn his head. Carrying the meat, Ch'ang-man followed after him. She went no more than two paces, then stopped. She knew perfectly well she wasn't welcome. Ah Hui had tried to get rid of her again and again. From his tone and behavior he had expressed this in a way that couldn't have been more obvious. Why was she so devoid of shame that she had to go back to that hole. Was it because she had no place to go? She didn't care to hide in that black little cave behind her foreign mistress' kitchen on her days off, and she didn't want to wander aimlessly about the streets all day carrying a shopping bag like before. Whatever else that could be said, Ah Hui was her relative, and so Ch'ang-man was lucky to have a place to go. At least she had someone she could talk to. In this kaleidoscopic New York, besides that K'un-sheng, who occasionally came back, there wasn't a single person Ch'ang-man could talk to.

How could she make Ah Hui so impatient? With her coming once a week like this, Ah Hui at least had one decent meal to eat, and had her to clean his apartment and straighten up this hole a little. And yet she annoyed him so . . .

While Ch'ang-man was standing at the intersection lost in thought, an old black man who looked like a mountain goat, came staggering up to her.

"Hey, baby, why don't you come along with me, heh, heh . . ."

Seeing the terror-stricken Ch'ang-man, the black man began to laugh with glee, showing the whites of his eyes and watching her blink. Ch'ang-man clutched her purse to her bosom, and, as if charging through a heavy siege, rushed past the black, chasing straight after Chung Hsing-hui.

She really didn't have any other place to go.

VI.

They had dinner in the kitchen again. The two were unavoidably together once more. They each held a bowl and faced each other in silence, neither willing to speak, both eating with

great concentration. Several times their eyes met, just for an instant, then each looked away. A few times Ch'ang-man, unable to stand it, wanted to speak, but when she saw the other's face, she too kept her mouth shut and said nothing.

After carelessly eating his rice, his mouth still stuffed full, Chung Hsing-hui went into his bedroom as if to escape. Ch'ang-man washed the dishes in the kitchen, listening to the youth's footsteps going around and around inside like a caged animal. Ch'ang-man shook her head. She absently noticed her image reflected in the glass above the sink. Under the weak light she could just make out the outline of a face. The dim light covered Ch'ang-man's large nose and broad mouth. Reflected in the glass was a duck egg-shaped face which, in the dimness, had a certain beauty to it.

Ch'ang-man began to feel unaccountably sorry for her pretty face. That K'un-sheng — who knew what continent or island he had drifted to now! For all she knew, at this very moment he probably had his arms around some half-naked native and was sleeping on some isle under the moonlight or perhaps flirting with some waterfront barmaid. And as for her, she was pretty miserable. How could she get involved with a prodigal, foolishly hoping that the day would come when he changed his mind and let Ch'ang Man-yi tie him down with money so that there'd be some hope for the rest of her life. But instead, the damn fool made a joke out of her pitiful hopes. Ch'ang-man was really a little angry at herself. In fact, what was so great about that damn fool? Before she met him, Ch'ang-man had gotten along for four or five years by herself. Of course that was not a life for anyone to live. At night when she couldn't get to sleep, she would get up and turn frantically about the room, working herself into such a state she nearly ran out into the street, took her clothes off before everyone and screamed,

“Take me, get me! I can't stand it any longer!”

Naturally, she never dared to do such a thing, but she had been appalled by her crazed thoughts. K'un-sheng appeared at a point when Ch'ang-man was just on the verge of going mad.

Ch'ang-man twisted the rag in her hand, deliberating the matter with herself. Having a man just caused her to suffer more. When he wasn't around, it was harder to bear than before. Like this time, how long had it been since K'un-sheng had been back? Several months. Whether he would return or not was still a question. When Ch'ang-man tried to use her money to tie him down, she never thought she'd end up scaring him away.

So K'un-sheng wouldn't come back again?

She stood in the center of the kitchen twisting the rag, her thoughts becoming more and more disturbed. The desire to run out and take her clothes off in the street arose again, especially today after going through so many related scenes and then, finally, sitting in the dark movie theater where she could hear her own shortened breath become coarser and coarser—

She remembered there was a man in the house.

Chung Hsing-hui, his legs stretched out, lay stiffly on the bed, his hands cradling his head, his eyes closed. When Ch'ang-man entered, the youth did not even lift his eyelids. She didn't know whether he was asleep or pretending to be. The bedroom was very small, and with an extra person, it seemed very crowded. She stood a while in front of the man's bed, blushing guiltily. She felt she should shift her gaze away from his body and do something. Ch'ang-man raised her hand to take down the overcoat above Chung Hsing-hui's head.

The youth's eyes were wide open.

"Auntie, I didn't do it on purpose, you know," he said lightly, letting out his breath.

"You were upset! I know."

"No, I mean that, that — movie, even I didn't know—"

Ch'ang-man couldn't help sitting down at the foot of the man's bed.

"Never mind, never mind," she mumbled.

"It was very embarrassing—"

"I know," She sat by the man's feet. The reclining youth sensed the weight of another person pressing down on the bed.

"Ai, the world has changed. They're even showing that sort of thing to people," Ch'ang-man said without meaning it. "Just think. So disgraceful!"

She sighed, while in her heart she felt inexplicably gay.

"It's absolutely shameful," she said, beginning to smile without even realizing it herself.

"Ah Hui, is that the first time you ever saw that?" she asked softly.

The youth didn't respond.

"That was the first time for me," she said bashfully. "They like doing that. Western women are more daring. They don't care about shame. If it were us, now, we'd never dare!"

When she finished, she chuckled a couple of times. The man on the bed never responded. His elbow covered his eyes. This way

Ch'ang-man could not get a good look at the expression on his face.

They were silent for a moment.

"Not just Western women. Japanese are a lot like that too." Ch'ang-man squinted at the man's strong, youthful long legs. "I've read some Japanese books. When I was a girl, I often read novels by Japanese. Everything is described in great detail there! Have you ever heard of the book *The Tale of Genji*?"

The youth gave a light shake of his head.

"It's about court romances. There are several places where it talks about older women who have close relations solely with young men. Actually, there's nothing wrong with that—"

She sat anxiously awaiting an answer from the man on the bed. A moment passed, but there was no response. Ch'ang-man's head and chest gradually bent downward until they almost touched the man's feet.

"Ah Hui—" she called in confusion.

Suddenly, the man on the bed sprang up and drew his feet away from Ch'ang-man's chest. Without support, Ch'ang-man fell heavily onto the bed.

"Ah Hui, don't go, Ah Hui—"

She heard the bang of the door closing and footsteps descending the stairs, then gradually receding in the distance till she heard nothing. Ch'ang-man crouched there, clutching at the sheets wrinkled by the sleeping man, and began noiselessly sobbing.

—Translated by Jeanne Kelly

TWO WOMEN OF CHINA — MULBERRY AND PEACH

HUALING NIEH

The following excerpt is from a novel dealing with what it was like to be Chinese in the twentieth century, a story of the metamorphosis of a Chinese woman's psyche during the turbulent times of contemporary China. An innocent girl growing up during the unprecedented massacre of Chinese people by the Japanese aggressors, the heroine was also caught in the civil war between the Communists and the Nationalists which sped up the destruction of traditional values. Internal pressures between the two political systems within China, constant war, as well as the crushing impact of Western egoistic, separatist ideas upon China's ancient culture threw the heroine off her balance who ended up suffering from a split personality, a symbol of modern China.

The heroine, speaking now as Mulberry now as Peach, relates her own story as if it were about somebody else, long dead. The book is divided into four parts, each dealing with a different period of her life: flight from the Japanese aggressors; flight from the Communists on Mainland China; flight from Taiwan and the flight from the American Immigration Service. Each part, inhabited by a different group of characters, can stand by itself with Mulberry, i.e. Peach, providing the continuity.

Characters in the following excerpt

Mulberry (sixteen years old) — During the Japanese aggression, Mulberry was running away from home with her lesbian friend, Lao-shih. Mulberry was the offspring of a tragic marriage. Her father became impotent as the result of a wound in a battle between rival warlords. Her mother, formerly a prostitute, had an affair with the family butler and began to abuse her husband and children. This had some traumatic effect on Mulberry in the present and later stages of her life. As the story opens, Mulberry was on her way to Chungking, the wartime capital of China.

Lao-shih (eighteen) — A dominating, mannish girl about Mulberry's age whose father was suffocated in the huge tunnel where people hid from the continuous Japanese bombing of Chungking in the summer of 1941. She, too, was going to the wartime capital.

The old man (*in his sixties*) — *A symbol of traditional China, he had been constantly on the move from the Japanese since they occupied Peking, his home, in 1937.*

Refuge student (*in his twenties*) — *As the representative of the generation who grew up during World War II, he was patriotic, aware of his rootless condition, and rebellious against the old system represented by his father. Through him and the frustrations and tensions he experienced was revealed the inevitability of the coming revolution.*

Peach-flower woman (*not Peach in the Novel proper, in her twenties*) — *she represented the natural life-force, vital, exuberant, sensuous and enduring, that had enabled the Chinese to survive thousands of years of war, revolution and natural disaster.*

These people were stranded on a boat at one of the most dangerous gorges on the Yangtze River shortly before the end of the Sino-Japanese war in 1945. The gorge was an area where some important historical events took place in ancient times.

The stranded boat is symbolic of China in the 1940's waiting for some force to get it moving again.

MULBERRY'S DIARY

Chu-t'ang Gorge on the Yangtze River (1945)

(Excerpt)

The twelve oarsmen tug at the oars. Their gasps are almost chants, "*Ai-ho, ai-ho!*" Black sweat streams down their bodies, soaking their skin, plastering their white trousers to their thighs. Their calves bulge like drumsticks.

The captain yells from the bow. "Everyone, please be careful. Please stay inside the cabin. We're almost to Yellow Dragon Rapids. Don't stand up. Don't move around."

Some men are struggling to tow our boat through the rapids, filing along the cliff and through the water near shore, the tow-line thrown over their shoulders padded with cloth, hands

gripping the rope at their chest, their bodies bending lower and lower, grunting a singsong, "*Hai-yo hai-yo*," as they pull. Their chant rises and falls with the "*ai-ho, ai-ho*" of our crew. The whole mountain gorge echoes as if it were trying to help them pull the boat up the rapids. It's useless. Suddenly white foam sprays the rocks and a white wave crashes down on the boat. The two-line pullers and the oarsmen stop singing. Everyone stares at the water. The men use all their strength to pull tow-line, curving their bodies, bending their legs, heads looking up at the sky. Pulling and pulling, the men are pinned to the cliff, the boat is pinned to the rocks, twisting in the eddies. The rope lashed to the mast groans.

The captain starts beating a drum.

It's useless. The men are stooped over, legs bent, looking up at the sky. The boat whirls around on the rocks. One big wave passes by, another one rushes forward. The boat is stuck there, twisting and turning. The drum beats faster; it's as if the beating of the drum is turning the boat.

The tow-line snaps. The men on the cliff curse the water.

Our boat lurches along the crest of a wave, bobbing up and down, then lunges downstream like a wild horse set loose.

There's a crash. The boat stops.

The drum stops. The cursing stops.

We're stranded on the rocks.

* * * * *

First Day Aground.

Two rows of rocks rise out of the water, like a set of bared teeth, black and white. Our boat is aground in the gash between the two rows of teeth. Whirlpools surround the rocks. From the boat we toss a chopstick into the whirlpool and in a second the chopstick is swallowed up. Beyond the whirlpools, the river rushes by. One after another, boats glide by heading downstream, turn at the foot of the cliffs and disappear.

The tow-line pullers haul other boats up the rapids. They struggle through it. The tow-line pullers sit by a small shrine on the cliff and smoke their pipes.

"Fuck it! Why couldn't we get through the rocks? All the other boats made it." Refugee Student stands at the bow waving at the men on the cliff. "Hey . . ."

A wave billows between the boat and the cliff.

"Help."

No response.

The oarsmen squatting in the bow stare at him.

"Hey. All you passengers in the hold, come out." He yells to the cabin. "We can't stay stranded here waiting to die! Come on out here and let's decide what to do."

Peach-flower Woman comes out of the cabin holding her child. Lao-shih and I call her Peach-flower Woman because when she boarded the boat that day, she was wearing a flowered blouse, open at the collar, some buttons undone, as if she were about to take off her clothes at any moment.

The old man follows her out.

As Lao-shih and I scurry out of the cabin, Refugee Student claps his hands. "Great. Everybody's here. We must shout together at the shore. The water is too loud."

The old man coughs and spits out a thick wad of phlegm into the river. "Please excuse me. I can only help by mouthing the words. I can't shout."

"Something wrong with your lungs?" asks Refugee Student.

The old man's moustache twitches. "Nonsense. I've been coughing and spitting like this for over twenty years. No one's ever dared suggest that I have TB." He forces up another wad of phlegm and spits it into the river.

"If we're going to yell, let's yell," I start shouting at the tow-line pullers on the bank. "Hey!"

There's no response. Lao-shih picks up a broken bowl from the deck and hurls it at the bank, shouting: "You sons of bitches. Are you deaf?"

The bowl smashes on the rocks.

Peach-flower Woman sits on the deck, nursing her child. The baby sucks on one breast, patting the other with its hand in rhythm with its sucking, as if keeping time for itself, pressing the milk out. Drops of milk dribble onto the baby's plump arm. Peach-flower Woman lets her milk dribble out. With a laugh she says, "Us country folk really know how to yell. That's what I'm best at. Hey — yo—"

The tow-line pullers on the bank turn around and stare at our boat.

"Go on singing. Sing. Don't stop now!" The old man waves to Peach-flower Woman. "You sound like you're singing when you shout! If you don't sing, they'll ignore us."

"Hey — yo—"

"Hey . . . Yo . . ." The mountains echo.

"Send — bamboo — raft—" shouts Refugee Student. Peach-flower Woman, the old man, Lao-shih and I all join in. "Send — bamboo — raft—"

"Send . . . Bamboo . . . Raft." The mountains mock our cry.
The tow-line pullers wave at us and shake their heads.

"Na — yi — na — ya—"

"Na . . . Yi . . . Na . . . Ya . . ."

We point to the bamboo on the mountains. "Cut — bamboo—"

"Cut . . . Bamboo . . ."

They wave again and shake their heads.

"Na — yi — na — ya—"

"Na . . . Yi . . . Na . . . Ya . . ."

"Cut — bamboo—"

"Cut . . . Bamboo . . ."

They wave again and shake their heads.

"Na — yi — na — ya—"

"Na . . . Yi . . . Na . . . Ya . . ."

"Cut — bamboo — make — raft—"

"Cut . . . Bamboo . . . Make . . . Raft . . ."

The men on the cliff stop paying attention to us. The oarsmen squat on the deck, eating.

The captain finally speaks. "What good will a raft do? There are rocks all around here. A raft can't cross."

"How come our boat landed here?"

We're lucky." says the captain.

"If you're in a great disaster and you don't die, you're sure to have good fortune later!" says the old man. "Let's sing to the bank again!"

"Ho — hey — yo—"

"Ho . . . Hey . . . Yo . . ."

"Tell — the — authorities—"

"Tell . . . the . . . Authorities . . ."

Two of the two-line pullers start climbing the mountain path.

"Good," says the old man, "Those two will go tell somebody. Go on singing."

"You sure know how to give orders! But you don't make a sound," says Refugee Student.

"Forget it," Lao-shih says, "Here we are fighting for our lives. Let's not fight among ourselves."

"Hey — you — there — hey—"

"Hey . . . You . . . There . . . Hey . . ."

"Send — life — boats—"

"Send . . . Life . . . boats . . ."

The two men on the path stop and turn to look at us.

"Good," says the old man, "They'll do it."

"Na — na — hey — yo—"

“Na . . . Na . . . Hey . . . Yo . . .”

“Send — life — boats—”

“Send . . . Life . . . Boats . . .”

The two men on the path turn again and proceed up the mountain. Two others stand up.

“I’ve been steering boats in these gorges my whole life. I’ve only seen capsized boats, never life-boats,” The captain puffs away on his pipe.

“A boat approaches us, riding the crest of a wave.

“Na — na — hey — yo—”

“Na . . . Na . . . Hey . . . Yo . . .”

“Help! — help!—”

“Help! . . . Help! . . .”

The boat ploughs over another large wave, wavers on the crest and glides down.

“There’s an air raid alert at Feng-chieh,” someone shouts to us from the boat as it passes, turns a curve, and disappears.”

A paddlewheel steamboat comes downstream.

“Hey, I have an idea!” says Refugee Student as he runs into the cabin.

He comes back out carrying the peach flower blouse. He stands in the doorway of the cabin, the collar of the blouse tucked under his arm; he stretches out a sleeve and playfully tickles the arm hole as the blouse billows in the breeze.

“You imp,” laughs Peach-flower Woman. “You’re tickling me. You make me itch all over.”

Refugee Student waves the blouse in the air. “I’m going to use this blouse as a flag. Come on, everyone, sing! The steamboat will see it in the distance and hear our song. Come on. Sing: ‘Rise, up you who will not be slaves’.”

“No, no, not that Communist song. I don’t know these new songs,” says the old man.

“Well, let’s sing an old one, then. ‘Flower Drum Song’,” I say.

“OK!” Lao-shih races over to pick up the drumsticks and pounds several times on the big drum.

We sing in unison.

A gong in my left hand, a drum in my right Sing to the drumbeat, chant to the gong. I don’t know other songs to sing Only the flower drum song. Sing now! Sing. Yi — hu — ya — ya — hey—

Refugee Student waves the blouse. The old man taps chopsticks on a metal basin. I beat two chopsticks together. Lao-shih beats the drum. Peach-flower Woman holds her child as she sings and sways back and forth.

The steamboat glides by.

We stop singing and begin shouting. "We're stranded. Help! Save us! We're stranded! Help!"

The people on the boat lean against the railing and stare at us. Two or three people wave. The boat disappears.

The water gurgles on the rocks.

"It doesn't do any good to sing!" The captain is still puffing on his pipe. "Even a paddlewheel wouldn't dare cross here. There's only one thing left to do. The oarsmen will divide into two shifts, and day and night take turns watching the level of the water. We have to be ready to push off at any moment. As soon as the water rises over the rocks and the boat floats up, the man at the rudder will hold it steady and the boat will float down with the current. If the water rises and there's no one at the rudder, the boat may be thrown against those big rocks and that'll be the end of us."

Lumber planks, baskets, basins, and trunks drift down towards us with the current.

"There must be another ship capsized upstream on the rocks." The captain looks at the black rock teeth jutting out of the water. "If it rains, we'll make it. When it rains, the water will rise and when the water rises, we'll be saved."

Someone has lit a bonfire on shore.

The sky is getting dark.

* * * * *

The Second Day Aground.

The sun glistens on the rock teeth. The water churns, almost boiling, around the rocks.

"It's so dry, even the bamboo awning creaks," an oarsman says.

* * * * *

Our cabin is beneath the awning. It has a low, curved roof and two rows of hard wooden bunks, really planks, on each side. The oarsmen occupy the half at the bow. That half is always empty; they are on deck day and night. The passengers occupy the half in the stern. Our days and nights are spent on these wooden planks. The old man and Refugee Student are on one side. Lao-shih,

Peach-flower Woman and I are on the other side. "The Boys' Dormitory" and "The Girls' Dormitory" are separated by a narrow aisle. The old man has been complaining that we are brushing up against each other in the cabin and goes around complaining that "men and women shouldn't mix." So he has ordered that men can't go bare-chested and women can't wear clothing open at the neck or low in the back. His own coarse cotton jacket is always snugly buttoned. Refugee Student doesn't pay any attention to him and goes around naked from the waist up. Peach-flower Woman doesn't pay any attention either. She always has her lapels flung open, revealing the top of her smooth chest. The old man puffs hard on his water pipe, although there's no tobacco in it, and makes it gurgle. "Young people nowadays!"

The old man sits in the cabin doorway all day long, holding his water pipe, looking up toward the small shrine on the shore and occasionally puffing a few empty mouthfuls on his pipe. Refugee Student paces up and down the aisle which is only large enough for one person to pass.

Lao-shih, Peach-flower Woman and I sit in the "Girls Dormitory" and stare at the water around us.

"Hey, you've been going back and forth a long time. Have you got to a hundred yet?" asks Lao-shih.

"Ninety-seven, ninety-eight, ninety-nine, one hundred. OK, Lao-shih, it's your turn."

Lao-shih paces back and forth in the aisle.

Silence.

". . . Ninety-five, ninety-six, ninety-seven, ninety-eight, ninety-nine, one hundred. OK, I'm done. Little Berry, your turn."

I walk up and down the aisle.

Silence.

"Ninety-three, ninety-four, ninety-five, ninety-six, ninety-seven, ninety-eight, ninety-nine, one hundred. OK, Peach-flower Lady, your turn."

She paces up and down with the baby in her arms.

Silence.

The old man begins murmuring, "Rise, rise, rise, rise."

"Is the water rising? Really?" Lao-shih and I leap down from the bunks and run to the doorway, jostling each other as we look.

"Who said it's rising?" The old man taps the bowl of his pipe.

"Didn't you just say it's rising?"

"What are you all excited about? Would I be here if the water was rising? I said, 'rise, rise,' because it's not rising. This morning, that little shrine was right next to the water, about to be

flooded. But look, it's still safe and dry by the edge of the water. July is the month that waters rise in the Chu-t'ang Gorge. It's now mid-July and the waters haven't risen. So here we are stuck in this Hundred Cage Pass."

"Hey, I've already counted to a hundred and five," laughs Peach-flower Woman.

"You're done then. It's my turn again." Refugee Student jumps down from his plank and starts pacing in the aisle again. "Hundred Cage Pass! The name itself is enough to depress you! Hey Captain," he yells, "How far is this Hundred Cage Pass from Pai-ti-ch'eng?"

"What is Hundred Cage Pass?"

"What's this place called, then?"

"This place is near Yellow Dragon Rapids. It doesn't have a name. Call it whatever you like!"

"Call it Teeth Pass, then," he mutters to himself. He calls out again. "Captain, how far is this place from White Emperor City?"

"Only a couple of miles. Beyond that are Iron Lock Pass, Dragon Spine Rapids, and Fish Belly Beach.

"Captain, can we see White Emperor City from here?" the old man asks.

"No, Red Promontory Peak is in the way."

"If only we could see White Emperor City, it would be all right."

Refugee Student laughs. "Old man, what good would it do to see White Emperor City? We'd still be stranded here between these two rows of teeth."

"If we could see White Emperor City, we could see signs of human life.

"We've seen people since we ran aground. The tow-line pullers, the people on the boats, the people on the paddlewheel, but none of them could save us."

"I've been sitting here all day. I haven't even seen the shadow of a ghost on the bank."

Lao-shih shouts from the door, "There's another boat coming."

The five of us rush to the bow.

The people on that boat wave at us and shout something, but the sound of the water breaking on the rocks is too loud and we can't understand what they're saying.

"A lot of . . .?"

"On the way?"

"It must be that a lot of rescue boats are on the way."

"Yeah, a lot of rescue boats are coming!"

The boat glides away.

"A lot of rescue boats are coming?" says the captain. "A lot of Japanese bombers are coming."

We scurry back into the cabin.

In the distance we hear faint thunder.

"That's not aircraft, that's thunder."

"Right, it's thunder. It's going to rain."

"When it rains, the water will rise."

The thunder approaches. Then we hear the anti-aircraft guns and machine guns. Bullets pock the water, spitting spray in all directions. The Japanese bombers are overhead. Lao-shih hides under her quilt on the bunk and calls out to me. "Little Berry, Little Berry, hurry up and get under the covers."

Suddenly Refugee Student shoves me to the floor and sprawls on top of me.

A minute ago, we were standing in the aisle. Now our bodies are pressing against each other. He is bare-chested and I can smell the odor of his armpits. Lao-shih's armpits smell the same way, that smell of flesh mixed with sweat, but smelling it on his body makes my heart pound. I can even feel the hair under his arms. No wonder Mother likes hairy men; I heard her say that once when I was walking by her door. The thick black hair (it must be black) under his arms tickles me. I'm not even scared of the Japanese bombers anymore.

The bombers pass into the distance.

We get up off the floor. Lao-shih sits on the bunk and glares at us.

"The boat that just passed us has capsized at the bend in the river," shouts the captain from the bow.

"What about the people?" asks Refugee Student.

"They're all dead! Some drowned, some were killed by the Japanese machine gunfire."

"I wish everybody in the world were dead," says Lao-shih, still glaring at Refugee Student.

I go back to the "Girls Dormitory." Lao-shih strains to scratch her back.

"I'll scratch it for you!" I stick my hand up under her blouse and scratch her back.

"That's good, just a little bit higher, near the armpit." I scratch the part between her armpit and her back. She giggles. "It tickles! Not so hard. It tickles." She has only a wisp of hair under her arm.

Refugee Student is pacing up and down in the aisle. He raises his head. "Bombers overhead, the Gorge below. So many boats capsized. So many people dead. Nobody cares if the boats capsize, or if people die. They are playing a game with human lives!"

"May I ask a question?" says the old man. "Who's playing a game with human lives?"

Refugee Student, taken aback, says, "Who? The government. Who else?"

"These gorges have been dangerous for several thousand years. What can the government do about it?"

"We're in the twentieth century now! Sir, have you heard of the invention of the helicopter? Just one helicopter could rescue the whole lot of us. A place like the Gorges should have a Gorges Rescue Station. As soon as we get to Chungking, we should all sign a petition of protest and put it in the newspapers. We have the right to protest. We're victims of the Gorge!"

The Peach-flower Woman laughs on her bunk. "Sign our names to a petition? I can't even write my own name."

"I'll write it for you!" Lao-shih eyes me. I take my hand out of her blouse.

The old man sits on his bunk, rocking back and forth. "It's a great virtue for a woman to be without talent. A woman is . . ." he is seized with a coughing fit and gasps for breath.

Lao-shih mutters. "Serves him right."

Refugee Student looks at the old man and shakes his head. He turns to Peach-flower Woman. "I'll write your name down on a piece of paper. If you copy it every day, by the time we get to Chungking, you'll have learned how to write it."

"Forget it! Forget it! Too much trouble." Peach-flower Woman waves her hand. "I'll just make a fingerprint and when we get to Chungking, my man can write my name for me!"

"When we get to Chungking, I'm going to turn somersaults in the mud!" says Lao-shih.

"When we get there, I'm going to walk around the city for three days and three nights." I say.

"When we get to Chungking, I'm going to go running in the mountains for three days and three nights!" says Refugee Student.

"When we get to Chungking, I'm going to play mahjong for three days and three nights!" say the old man.

"Hey, look at that big fish!" Peach-flower Woman points at a big fish which has just leapt out of the river onto the deck.

"A good omen! A white fish leaps into the boat!" The old man shouts, "We'll get out of here OK."

The five of us turn to look at the shrine on the bank.

The shrine is still high on the bank, far from the water's edge.

"There's a shrine, but nobody offers incense. It would be better if we tore it down," says Refugee Student.

"You ought to be struck down by lightning for saying such a thing!" The old man's moustache twitches. "And the fish, where's the fish?"

"The oarsmen just put it in a bucket. We can kill it tomorrow and have fresh fish to eat."

"It must not be eaten. It must not be eaten. That fish must not be eaten." The old man walks to the bow of the boat, scoops up the fish with hands, kneels at the side of the boat and spreads his hands open like a mussel shell.

The fish slides into the river with a splash, flicks its tail and disappears.

The old man is still kneeling by the side, his two hands spread open, palms uplifted as if in prayer.

"Dinner time!" yells the captain. "I'm sorry, but from now on, we're going to have to ration the rice. Each person gets one bowl of rice per meal!"

The two rows of teeth in the river open wider. Even the rocks are hungry!

"One bowl of rice will hardly fill the gaps between my teeth," says Refugee Student, throwing down his chopsticks. "I escaped from the Japanese-occupied area, didn't get killed by the Japanese, didn't get hit by bullets or shrapnel, and now I have to starve to death, stranded on this pile of rocks? This is the biggest farce in the world."

"You can say that again," I say to myself.

Lao-shih sits down beside me on the bunk. "Little Berry, I should have let you go back home."

"Even if I could go back now, I wouldn't do it. I want to go on to Chungking."

"Why?"

"After going through all this, what is there to be afraid of? Now, I know what I did wrong. This disaster is my own doing. I've been thinking of all the bad things I did to people."

"I have, too," says Lao-shih. "Once my father beat me. When he turned to leave, I clenched my teeth and said, I can't wait until you die."

"I cursed my father, mother, and brother that way, too. I can't wait until you die," I say.

"This is the biggest farce in the world," says Refugee Student as he paces up and down the aisle. "The first thing I'm going to do

when we get to Chungking is call a press conference and expose the serious problems of the Gorges. All of you, please leave your addresses so I can contact you."

"Leave it for whom?" asks the Peach-flower Woman. She is sitting on the bunk, one breast uncovered. The baby plays with her breast for a while, then grabs it to suck a while.

We stare at each other. For the first time I ask myself: Will I make it alive to Chungking? If I live, I swear, I'll change my ways.

"Maybe we're all going to die." says Lao-shih softly.

"Hah." coughs the old man, turning his head aside, as if one cough could erase what Lao-shih has said. "Children talk nonsense. All right. Let's do exchange addresses. When we get to Chungking, I invite you all to a banquet and we'll have the best shark fin money can buy."

"If you want my address, then you've really got me there!" laughs Peach-flower Woman. "When we get to Chungking, I won't have an address until I've found my man!"

"Don't you have his address?"

"No."

"Didn't he write you?"

"He wrote his mother."

"Are you married to him?"

"Yes, I'm his wife. When I went to his house, I was really young. He's seven years younger than I am. I raised him. He went to Chungking to study. I stayed at home taking care of his mother, raising his son, working in the fields, weaving, picking tea leaves, gathering firewood. I can take anything, even his mother's cursing, as long as he's around. But someone came back from Chungking and said he had another woman. I can't stand that. I told his mother I wanted to go to Chungking. She wouldn't allow me to go. She wouldn't even let me go out on the street. So I just picked up my baby, got together a few clothes, and took off. All I know is that he is studying at Chang-shou, Szechuan. When I get there I'm going to look for him. When I find him and if he's faithful, we're man and wife forever. But if he isn't, then he'll go his way, and I'll go mine."

"Is the boy his?" asks the old man.

"Well, if he isn't my husband's, he certainly isn't yours, either." She laughs, and lifts the baby up to the old man. "Baby, say grandpa, say grandpa."

"Grandpa!" The old man pulls at his graying beard with two fingers. "I'm not that old yet!" He coughs and turns to Refugee

Student. "If it's an address you want, that's hard for me to produce as well. In June 1937, I left Peking, my home, and went to visit friends in Shanghai. July 7, 1937 the war broke out, and by the 28th, Peking had fallen. So these past few years, I've been fleeing east and west with my friends. When will this war end? I couldn't stay with my friends forever, so I left them. I intend to do a little business between Chungking and Pa-tung. I don't know where I'll live when I get to Chungking."

"My address is the air raid shelter in Chungking," says Lao-shih coldly.

"You're kidding!" says Refugee Student.

"She's not kidding," I interrupt. "Her mother died when she was young. She escaped with her father from the Japanese-occupied area. She went to En-shih to study at the National High School; he went to Chungking and more than ten thousand people suffocated in the air raid shelter. Her father was one of them."

"That's right. The famous air raid shelter suffocation tragedy!" The old man talks as if Lao-shih's father became famous because of that.

Refugee Student looks at me.

"I don't have an address either! My home is in En-shih. I ran away."

"No place like home." The old man takes a gold pocket watch out of the pocket of his jacket and looks at the time. He replaces it in his pocket, and suddenly I remember the jade griffin on my father's watch chain and think of great-grandfather, clutching the jade in his hands as he lay in the coffin. The old man stares at me. "I have a daughter about your age. After I left Peking, my wife died. Right now I don't even know if my own daughter is dead or alive. Everyone has roots. You must go back! I'm going to inform your father, tell him to come get you and take you home."

"You don't know my family's address!" I sit on the bunk, one hand propping up my chin and smile at him.

The old man begins to cough again, and points his finger at me, "You young people nowadays. You young people."

"You sound like my father," laughs Refugee Student. "My father had seven wives. My mother was his legal wife. Father treated his seven wives equally: all under martial law. He calls them Number Two, Number Three, Number Four, . . . according to whoever entered the household first. Number Two was once one of our maids. She is five years younger than Number Seven. They got thirty dollars spending money per month, and every spring, summer, fall and winter, some new clothes. Once a month they

played mahjong. The seven women plus himself made exactly two tables. He took turns spending the night in their seven bedrooms, each woman one night, which made exactly one week. They had more than forty children; he himself can't keep straight which child belongs to which woman. The seven women called each other Sister, in such a friendly way, never squabbling among themselves, because they were all united against that man. Their seven bedrooms were all next to one another, dark and gloomy, shaded by tall trees on all sides. When the Japanese bombed Nanking, a bomb fell right in the middle of the house, and blasted out a crater as big as a courtyard. When the bomb hit, it was the first time those rooms were exposed to sunlight. My mother was killed in that bombing. The six women cried. My father didn't shed a single tear. When the Japanese occupied the area, my father collaborated. I called him a traitor and he cursed me as an ungrateful son. Actually, I don't have an address myself."

We hear muffled thunder in the distance. It might rain. We look at each other, our faces brighten.

* * * * *

Third Day Aground.

"There's thunder but no rain. The Dragon King has locked the Dragon Gate," says the captain. "From now on each person gets only one glass of fresh water a day. We only have two small pieces of alum left to purify the water."

* * * * *

Fourth Day Aground.

Rain. Rain. Rain. We talk about rain, dream about rain, pray for rain. When it rains, the water will rise and the boat will float out from the gash between the teeth.

"I'm so thirsty."

When people say they're thirsty it makes me even thirstier. Here at the bottom of the gorge, the sun blazes overhead for a few minutes, yet we're still so thirsty. No wonder the ancient hunter in the myth shot down nine suns.

The old man proposes to divine by the ancient method of sandwriting.

Refugee Student says he doesn't believe in that kind of nonsense.

Peach-flower Woman says divining is a lot of fun: a T-shaped frame is placed in a box of sand. Two people hold the ends of the frame. If you think about the spirit of some dead person, that

spirit will come. The frame will write words all by itself in the sand, tell people's fortunes, write prescriptions, resolve grudges, reward favors, even write poems. When the spirit leaves, the frame stops moving.

Lao-shih and I are very excited about the sandwriting and fight over who gets to hold the frame and write for the ghost. The old man says he must be the one to hold the frame because only sincere people can summon spirits.

Instead of sand, we use ashes from the cooking fire and put them in a basin. Then we tie the two fire sticks together and make a T-shape. The old man and I hold the ends of the stick. He closes his eyes and works his mouth up and down. The stick moves faster and faster. My hands move with the stick. These are the words written in the ashes:

DEEDS RENOWNED IN THREE-KINGDOMS
FAME ACHIEVED FOR EIGHTFOLD ARRAY

"That's his poem!" The old man slaps his thigh and shouts. "It's the poet, Tu Fu. I was silently reciting Tu Fu and he came. Tu Fu spent three years in this area and wrote three hundred and sixty-one poems here. Every plant and tree in this region became part of his poetry. I knew Tu Fu would come if I called him." Then he addressed the ashes: "Mr. Tu, you were devoted to your emperor and cared about the fate of the country. You were talented, but had no opportunity to serve your country. You rushed here and there in your travels. Our fate is not unlike your own. Today all of us here on the boat wish to consult you. Is it auspicious or inauspicious that we are stranded on these rocks?"

MORE INAUSPICIOUS THAN AUSPICIOUS

"Will we get out?"

CANNOT TELL

"Are we going to die?"

CANNOT TELL

"Whether we live or die, how much longer are we going to be stranded here?"

TENTH MONTH TENTH DAY

“My God, we’ll be stranded here until the Double Tenth Festival. When will it rain?”

NO RAIN

The stick stops moving in the basin.

“Tu Fu has gone. Tu Fu was a poet. What does he know? This time let’s summon a military man. We’re stranded here in this historically famous strategic pass. We should only believe the words of a military man.” The old man shuts his eyes again and works his mouth up and down. We hold the stick and draw in the ashes.

DEVOTED SLAVE TO THE COUNTRY
ONLY DEATH STOPS MY DEVOTION

“Good. Chuko Liang has come. I knew his heroic spirit would be here in the Chu-t’ang region. Not too far from here, Chuko Liang demonstrated his military strategy, the Design of Eightfold Array.” The old man concentrates on the ashes. “Mr. Chuko, you were a hero. Your one desire was to recover the central part of China for the ruler of the Han people. Today China is also a country of three kingdoms: The National government in Chungking, the Communist government in Yen-an, and the Japanese puppet government in Nanking. All of us here on the boat are going to Chungking; we are going there because we are concerned about the country. Now, instead, here we are all stranded in this rapids in a place not far from the Eightfold Array. Is it inauspicious or auspicious?”

VERY AUSPICIOUS

“Good, we won’t die stranded here?”

No

“Good! Can we reach Chungking?”

YES

“How long are we going to be stranded here?”

ONE DAY

"How will we get out of this place alive?"

HEAVEN HELPS THE LUCKY PERSON

"When will it rain?"

ONE DAY

"Mr. Chuko, when we get to Chungking, we will all go on foot to the temple and offer incense to you."

The sticks stop moving.

The old man stares at the ashes. After a long time, he returns from his reverie. "We're stranded in the midst of history! White Emperor City, Eightfold Array, Thundering Drum Terrace, Meng-liang Ladder, Iron Lock Pass. All around us are landmarks left by the great heroes and geniuses of China. Do you know what Iron Lock Pass was? Iron Lock Pass had seven chains more than two thousand feet long crossing the river. Emperors and bandits in the past used those iron chains to close off the river and lock in the Szechuan province. The Yangtze River has been flowing for thousands of years, and these things are still here. This country of ours is too old, too old."

"Sir, this is not the time to become intoxicated by our thousands of years of history!" says Refugee Student. "We want to get out of here alive."

"I'm sure it will rain tomorrow. When it rains, the waters will rise."

"Do you really believe in sandwriting?" I ask. "Was it you writing with the sticks or was it really Tu Fu and Chuko?"

"You young people these days!" He strokes his beard. "Here I am, an old man, would I try to deceive you?" He pauses. "I really believe that heaven cares about us and answers prayers. Let me tell you a story from the *Chronicle of Devoted Sons*. There was a man called Yu Tzu-yu who was accompanying his father's coffin through the Chu-t'ang Gorge. In June the waters rose and the boat which was supposed to carry the coffin couldn't sail. Yu Tzu-yu burned incense and prayed to the Dragon King to make the waters recede. And the waters receded. After Yu Tzu-yu escorted the coffin through Chu-t'ang Gorge, the waters rose again."

"Who's the devoted son aboard this boat?" asks Peach-flower Woman with a laugh.

No one answers.

* * * * *

"How long have we been stranded here?"

"Has it been five days?"

"No, seven."

"Six days."

"Well, anyway, it's been a long, long time."

"The moon has risen."

"Ummm."

"What time is it?"

"If the moon is overhead, it must be midnight. Do you have a watch?"

"Yes. It's stopped. I forgot to wind it. Who else has a watch?"

"I do, but I can't see what time it is. It's too dark."

"It's so quiet. Only the sound of water on the rocks."

"Is everyone asleep?"

"No."

"No."

"Then why don't you say something?"

"I'm so hungry and thirsty."

"There went a big wave."

"How can you tell? You can't see them from here."

"I can hear them. It's very quiet, then suddenly there's a loud splash and then everything's quiet again."

"Can you hear anything else?"

"No."

"Are they still fighting?"

"Who?"

"Those people on the bank."

"Oh, they won't come down here to fight. Mountains on both sides, water below, sky above."

"Hey, everyone, say something. OK? If nobody speaks, it's like you're all dead."

"What shall we say?"

"Anything."

"When it's quiet like this and nobody is speaking, it's really scary. But when you talk it's also scary, like a ghost talking."

"Well, I'll play my flute, then."

"Good idea. I'll tell a story while you play the flute."

"I'm going to play 'The Great Wall'."

"It was a moonlit night. Quiet like this. He woke up smelling gunpowder . . ."

"Who is 'he'?"

"The 'he' in the story. He woke up smelling gunpowder. There were ashes everywhere. Even the moon was the color of ash. When he woke up, he was lying under a large tree on a mountainside. The slope faced the Chialing River. Thick black columns of smoke arose from Chungking on the opposite bank. Reflected in the waters of the river, the black pillars of smoke looked like they were propping up the sky. Between the columns of smoke everything was grey as lead, as if all the ashes in Chungking had been stirred up.

"He stood up, shaking ashes and dust off his clothes. He had just woken up. He had been hiding in the air raid shelter dug into the mountain for seven days and nights. The Japanese bombers had come squadron after squadron, bombing Chungking for more than one hundred fifty hours. More than two hundred people had hid in the shelter. Eating, drinking, defecating, urinating, all inside the shelter. He couldn't stand it anymore and had gone outside. Another squadron of bombers appeared, and he didn't have time to run back to the shelter. He heard an ear-splitting crash and sand scattered in all directions. When he awoke, he saw someone digging at the entrance of the shelter. A bomb had destroyed the shelter. He took to his heels, afraid he might be dragged back by the dead inside the shelter. He ran and ran. He didn't know where he was running to. Only by running could he be safe. Suddenly he heard a voice calling out, 'Let me go, let me go!'

"Hey, keep on playing the flute, don't stop."

"You want me to keep on playing the same song over and over?"

"Yeah. Go on with the story."

"All right. The voice kept repeating, 'Let me go. Let me go.' He stopped, looked all around. There was no one in sight, only some graves. There weren't even any tombstones. He walked to the right. The voice came from the left. He walked to the left. Then the voice came from the right. He walked straight ahead. The voice was behind him. He turned and walked back. The voice was silent. He couldn't keep walking in the opposite direction. That direction would take him back to the shelter that was full of dead bodies. He had to keep going forwards. He heard the voice again. 'Let me go, let me go.' The voice seemed to come from under his feet. He

stopped. It was coming from the right. He walked to the right and the voice got louder. He saw an empty grave. The coffin had probably been removed recently. A woman was lying in the grave, her head sticking out of the grave, her eyes closed, repeatedly mumbling, 'Let me go.' He dragged her out of the pit. Then he recognized that she had been among the people hiding in the shelter. He couldn't tell if she was the ghost of someone killed in an explosion, or a living person who had escaped the bombing. He had a canteen with him. He poured some water down her throat. She regained consciousness. He asked her how she got out of the shelter and into the grave. She stared at him, as if she hadn't heard. She said, 'Tzu-jao, can't you run faster than that?' He told her his name was Po-fu. The woman said, 'Don't try to fool me. Has the soldier gone?' He said, 'The bombers have gone.' She became impatient and repeated over and over, 'I mean the Japanese soldier who tried to rape me. Has he gone?' The man said, 'There are no Japanese soldiers in Chungking.'"

"The flute sounds especially nice tonight. That poor lonely woman looking for her husband and crying at the Great Wall. What about the woman?"

"Which woman? The woman at the Great Wall or the woman in the grave?"

"The one in the grave. Hurry up and tell us the rest of the story. It's like a modern-day Gothic romance."

"OK. The woman sat down, beating the ground with her fist over and over. 'This isn't Chungking. This is Nanking. We've just gotten married. The Japanese have just invaded the city.' The man groped for his watch in his pocket, struck a match, and showed her the name Po-fu engraved on the watch. The woman said, 'Don't try to fool me, Tzu-jao! This is a matter of life and death. Run quick. The Japanese are combing Nanking for Chinese soldiers. They think that anyone with calluses on his hands is a soldier: rickshaw pullers, carpenters, coolies. Yesterday in one day they took away one thousand three hundred people. The dogs in Nanking are getting fat, there are so many corpses to feed on.' The woman looked around and asked, 'Has the soldier gone?' He could only reply, 'Yes, he's gone.' The woman pointed to the river. 'It was on that road through the bamboo thicket. I was walking in front. He was walking behind me. You know, Tzu-jao, we had been married more than a week and you still hadn't been able to touch me. You called me a stone girl.'"

"What do you mean, 'stone girl?'"

"Stone girl. It means a girl who can't have sex."

“Go on, you’re just getting to the best part.”

“The woman kept on talking like that. She said, ‘It happened on that road through the bamboo thicket. I was walking in front. He was walking behind me. In full daylight, he stripped off his clothes as he followed me, throwing his uniform, boots, pants, underwear down at the side of the road. He stripped naked, leaving only his bayonet hanging by his side. When he was wearing his uniform, he seemed so much taller. Naked he looked shorter, even shorter than I am. He ripped off my clothes. He tossed me about like a doll. He threw down his bayonet. Just then, Tzu-jao, you came running up. Don’t you remember? You ran out of Nanking, but you came back into the city. That Japanese was a head shorter than you. When he saw you, he jumped on your back, two hands gripping your neck. He was biting the back of your neck with his teeth. You reached back and grabbed his penis. You couldn’t hold onto it. It was too small. At last you got it. You pulled it back and forth with all your strength. He screamed. Some people from the International Relief Committee came running up. The head of the committee was a German. He ordered the Japanese soldier to leave. But the soldier kept biting your neck. You wouldn’t let go of his penis. Finally the German put out his arm and the Japanese saw his Nazi insignia. He slipped off your back and ran. He didn’t even pick up his clothes or his bayonet.’ ”

“What a good story. Then what happened to her?”

“When? After the rape incident in Nanking? Or after the bombing in Chungking?”

“After the bombing.”

“Her husband and son were looking for her. Just before the bombers hit, her two-year-old son started crying in the shelter. The people in the shelter cursed him and wanted to beat him to death. The father had to take the child outside. The mother was too anxious to stay in the shelter. She went outside to look for her husband and son. Then the bombers hit and bombed the shelter. After the bombing was over, she didn’t know how she got into the grave. She didn’t remember anything. She thought she was in Nanking and was reliving the past. Her husband had gone with their child to the police station to look at the list of the dead. I took her to the police station. She was still suffering from shell-shock and didn’t recognize her husband and child. She said she had just gotten married and didn’t have any children. She still believed she was in Nanking. When I saw that she was reunited with her husband and child, I left.”

"You? Are you telling us a story, or is that something that really happened to you?"

"It really happened to me. We've been stranded here so long that it seems like a story from a former life," says the old man. Refugee Student is still playing "The Great Wall" on his flute.

With the New Year comes the spring
 Every house lights red lanterns
 Other husbands go home to their families
 My husband builds the Great Wall

* * * * *

A big wave passes with a crash. Then it's quiet. Another crash, then it's quiet. Human heads are bobbing in the water, their eyes wide open and staring at the sky. Everything is silent.

A large eagle flies overhead. It circles the heads and flaps its huge black wings. It is beautiful, it is dancing.

Suddenly the old man and Lao-shih are sitting on the eagle's wings, each sitting on one side, like a see-saw. The eagle wheels in the air. They wave at me.

Refugee Student suddenly appears, riding on the eagle's back. He begins to play his flute to the rhythm of the eagle's dance.

The eagle carries them off down the river.

The human heads float downstream.

I call to the eagle, begging them to stop. I want to fly away on the eagle, too.

Peach-flower Woman, her breasts exposed, appears, riding the crest of a wave. She waves at me. She wants me to join her on the waves.

The sound of the flute gets louder.

I wake up. The flute is coming from the stern. Lao-shih, the old man, and Peach-flower Woman are all asleep. Peach-flower Woman hugs her child to her bare breasts.

I sit up.

The sound of the flute suddenly stops.

I go out of the cabin and walk around the bales of cotton which are piled in the stern.

Refugee Student, bare-chested, is lying on the deck.

The gorge is black. He reaches up to me. I lie down on top of him. We don't say anything.

My virgin blood trickles down his legs. He wipes it off with spit.

* * * * *

The Sixth Day Aground.

There is shouting on the river.

We run out. A ship tilts down over the crest of a wave. It spins around in the whirlpool. The people on the ship scream, women and children cry as it spins faster and faster, like a top.

White foam bubbles around the lip of the whirlpool. The foam churns up into a wall of water, separating us from the spinning ship. Then the wall collapses with a roar. The ship splits open like a watermelon. Everyone on board is tossed into the water.

Another huge wave rolls by. Everyone in the water has disappeared.

Silence.

The river rushes on. The sun dazzles overhead.

The beating of the drum begins.

Refugee Student, his shirt off, thick black hair bristling in his armpits and above his lip, is pounding on the drum, every muscle straining, teeth clenched. He raises the drumsticks over his head and pounds on the drum with all his strength. He isn't beating the drum. He is beating the mountains, the heavens, the waters.

The mountains, the heavens, the waters explode with each beat.

"Don't stop, don't stop. A victory song," shouts the old man.

A crow flies towards our boat.

Refugee Student throws down the drumsticks and glares at the crow.

"Black crow overhead; that means if disaster doesn't strike, misfortune will," Peach-flower Woman says as she nurses her child.

I pick up an empty bottle and throw it at the crow. "I'll kill you, you stupid bird." The bottle shatters on a rock.

Lao-shih picks up a bowl and hurls it at the crow. "You bastard. Get out of here!" The bowl shatters on a rock.

The crow circles overhead.

The old man shakes his fist at the crow, his face turning purple. "You think you can scare us, do you? You think I'll just die stranded here, do you? When the warlords were fighting, I didn't die. When the Japanese were fighting, I didn't die. Do you think I'm going to die now, on this pile of rocks? Hah!" He spits at the crow.

“Goddam motherfucker,” shouts Refugee Student, leaping at the crow. “You can’t scare me. Just wait and see. I won’t die. I’ll survive and I’ll raise hell, that’ll show you. Mountains, waters, animals, crows. Can you destroy the human race? You can destroy a man’s body, but you can’t destroy his spirit. Ships capsize, people drown, mountains are still mountains and water is still water. Millions of people are being born, millions of people have survived these rapids. The world belongs to the young. Don’t you know that, you bastard? People won’t die out. Don’t you know that? They won’t die out.”

The old man claps his hands. “Attention, please. Everybody. This is a matter of life and death. I have something to say that I can’t hold back any longer. I think the captain has been playing a game with our lives. This gorge is even more dangerous than Hundred Cage Pass. Of course he knows this danger. He’s been sailing these gorges all his life. This boat should only carry freight; they shouldn’t allow passengers. He certainly shouldn’t take our money before we arrive safely at our destination. The ticket for this old wooden boat costs as much as a paddlewheel. But since he has taken passengers and taken our money, he is responsible. First, he ought to ensure our safety; next, he ought to take care of feeding us. When we cracked up on New Landslide Rapids, we were delayed four days in Tai-hsi. We trusted the captain. We didn’t ask him to return our money. We got back on the boat. Then the two-line broke at Yellow Dragon Rapids. We’ve been stranded here since then. The Yangtze River, several thousand miles long, is the greatest river in Asia, and we have to ration drinking water. What a joke. From that day on, he took no emergency measures. Not only that, but when we were screaming for help at the top of our lungs, he made sarcastic remarks. The captain and the crew know how to handle boats. In case anything happens, they’ll know what to do and how to escape. We don’t know what to do. The passengers and the crew make 13 people, but there are only six of us, and we are all either too old or women and children. We’re outnumbered and we can’t fight them. And so, I want to stand up and be counted and speak out for justice. I represent the six passengers, including the baby, and I demand that the captain do something.”

The oarsmen and the passengers are silent.

The captain, squatting on deck, blank expression, sucks the empty pipe in his mouth. “You people just don’t understand the difficulties in sailing these Gorges. We boatmen make our living by relying on the water and the sky. If it doesn’t rain, the water

won't rise and there's nothing we can do about it. Whether it's sailing the river or riding a horse, there's always danger involved. There's a slippery stone slab in front of everyone's door. No one can guarantee you won't slip on it and crack your skull. For human beings, there is life and death; for things, there is damage and destruction. It all depends on the will of Heaven. If you want someone to die, the person won't die. But if heaven commands it, he will die. All I can do now is ask that you passengers calm down and wait patiently a while longer."

"God, wait for how long?"

"If we have to wait, we at least ought to have food to eat and water to drink!"

"There's plenty of water in the river, and plenty of fish." says the captain. "If there's no more firewood, then eat raw fish. If there's no more alum, then drink muddy water. We boatmen can live like that. Can't you?" He sucks hard on his pipe. "When our tobacco is gone, we smoke the dregs; when that's gone, we smoke the residue." He reaches down and strikes the drum. "Those who can't eat raw fish can chew the leather on this drum."

Refugee Student spits at the captain. "I'll chew on you."

The captain throws his head back and laughs. "Go ahead and chew. Go ahead and slice me up. Kill me. What good will that do? When the water rises and the ship floats up, you will need someone at the rudder.

* * * * *

"Dice!" I yell as I cross the aisle into the "Boys' Dormitory." The old man is sitting on his bunk, rolling three cubes of dice around in his hand. I snatch them away and cast them on the bunk. "Come on, let's gamble. Everybody, come here."

"Just what I was thinking!" "As soon as the old man gets excited, he starts coughing. "You should live each day as it comes. I still have four bottles of liquor in my suitcase. I was going to give it to friends in Chungking. To hell with them, let's drink now." He opens a bottle, gulps down a few swallows and strips off his coarse cotton jacket. He bares his chest. A few hairs stick out of his armpits.

The five of us crowd together in a circle. Lao-shih has ignored me all day. I want to sit next to her on the bunk, but I also want to sit beside Refugee Student. In the end I squeeze in between them. We pass the bottle around the circle. I've never drunk liquor before. I gulp down several swallows in one breath. My face burns. My heart pounds. My left hand rests on Lao-shih's shoulder and my right on Refugee Student's shoulder.

We put the dice in a porcelain bowl in the middle of the circle. I raise my hand and shout, "I'll be the dealer!"

"I'll be the dealer."

"I'll be the dealer."

"I'll be the dealer."

"I'll be the dealer."

"Let's decide by the finger-guessing game. Two people play; the winner gets a drink; then plays the next person. The last one to win gets to be dealer!"

"Let's begin. Two sweethearts!"

"Four season's wealth!"

"Six in a row!"

"Lucky seven!"

"Pair of treasures!"

"Four season's wealth!"

"Three sworn brothers."

"Pair of treasures!"

"Eight immortals!"

"Six in a row!"

"One tall peak!"

"Four season's wealth!"

"Lucky seven!"

"All accounted for!"

"Three sworn brothers!"

"Six in a row!"

"Pair of treasures!"

"Eight immortals!"

"Lucky seven!"

"I win, I win," yells Peach-flower Woman. "I'm the dealer. Place your bets."

"OK. Fifty dollars!"

"Sixty!"

"Seventy!"

"Eighty!"

"Another seventy!"

"Another eighty!"

Peach-flower Woman laughs. "You just bet more and more. I haven't got that kind of money. If I win, I get to be the dealer again. If I lose, I'll give up. I get first crack at this!" She grabs the dice and throws them into the bowl with a flourish.

They spin in the bowl.

I take a drink. I see several dice spinning crazily in the bowl.

"Five points! The dealer has got five points!"

"I only want six points, not a single point more!" The old man cups the dice in his hands, blows on them, and then his hands open slowly, like a mussel shell.

The dice spin in the bowl.

He bends over, glaring at the dice and yelling "Six points, six points! Six points! Six points . . . oh, three points." He lifts Peach-flower Woman's hand and sticks the bottle in it. She take a drink. She's still holding the bottle and he lifts her hand and puts the bottle in his mouth. He pulls her towards him with his free arm and presses her face against his naked chest. He strokes her face. He finishes off the liquor with one gulp and sucks on the empty bottle like a baby.

"Sir, men and women should not mix. The booze is all gone. I don't have anything for you either. You are supposed to be respectable. You shouldn't touch a woman's body like this," laughs Peach-flower Woman as she struggles out of his embrace and straightens up. Her chignon comes undone and hair straggles across her chest. The buttons of her blouse pop open, exposing most of her breasts.

The dice click as they spin.

"Six points! Six points! Six points! I only want six points!" Lao-shih yells, rolling on the bunk.

I roll next to her, turn over and climb on her back, as if riding a horse, bumping up and down as if keeping time. I yell with her: "Six points! Six points! Six points! Six points! Six points! If you keep on ignoring me, I won't let you go. Six points! Six points!"

She suddenly stops yelling, yanks me off and rolls over on the bunk and grabs me. Our faces press together, legs curl round each other, rolling this way and that. She mumbles. "If you ignore me, I won't let you go. If you ignore me, I won't let you go."

"Four points," yells Peach-flower Woman. "You got four points, Lao-shih! OK, Mulberry, it's your turn."

I struggle out of Lao-shih's embrace, roll over to the circle and stuff the dice in my mouth. I spit them out into the bowl. "Six points, come on, six points! Six points! Six points!" Refugee Student is sprawled beside me on the bunk. I pound on his hip with my fist. "Six points! Six, six, six, six points. How many? How many did I get?"

"Five points. The dealer also got five. The dealer wins!" Another bottle of liquor is passed around.

Refugee Student sits up, grasps the dice with his toes and tosses them into the bowl. He looks at me and begins singing in a flirtatious way. The dice, as if minding their own business, clatter in the bowl.

Wind blows through the window
 My body is cool
 The willow tree whistles in the wind
 Lovers behind the gauze curtain
 I have a husband, but we're not in love
 Ai-ya-ya-erh-oh!
 Ai-ya-ya-erh-oh!

"Too bad, you lose. You only got three points." Peach-flower Woman smiles at Refugee Student. With one sweep she rakes in the money.

She beat all of us.

We place larger and larger bets. In the end, we take out all our money and valuables and place them down. Lao-shih and I share our money. We have only two hundred dollars left in our purse. I put down the two hundred dollars. She puts down the purse. The old man bets his gold watch. Refugee Student bets his flute.

We lose again. Refugee Student wins twenty dollars, the price of the flute. He proposes that we change dealers. The three losers all agree. Of course, he gets to be the dealer. In any case, since he's won once already, he's probably the only one who can beat Peach-flower Woman. But the three of us losers don't have anything else to bet.

"I have an idea," says Refugee Student. "We play only one more game. This time it will be a game of life or death. Everyone takes out his most prized possession. If you don't have anything, then bet yourself. I'm the dealer. If I win, I'll take things, if there are any. If not, I'll take people!"

"And what if you lose?"

"All I've got is myself; you can do what you want with my body — cut it in two, chop it up, lick it, kiss it, fuck it."

"Good heavens!" laughs Peach-Flower Woman, as she looks at her baby asleep on the bunk. "My most valuable possession is my son."

Refugee Student leans over to her and says in a low voice, which everyone can overhear: "Your most valuable possession is your body."

The old man chuckles. "What you say sounds reasonable. I'll bet my house in Peking. If you win, you can go back and take possession. I hope to retire there once the war is over."

"I'll bet my family heirloom!" I yell as I step over to the Girls Dormitory and fish out the jade griffin from the little leather case by my pillow and return to the Boy's Dormitory. "Hey, everybody, this is my family heirloom."

The old man's eyes suddenly light up. He tries to take it out of my hand. Refugee Student snatches it first and holds out his hand, staring at me. "Are you going to bet this piece of junk?"

"Yeah."

"I'd rather have you! A sixteen-year old virgin!"

Lao-shih jerks me behind her and thrusts out her chest. "Hey, Refugee Student, I'll make a deal with you. I'll bet this person here! If I win, you get out of my way! If you win, I'll get out of your way. You know what you did."

"What did I do?"

"Mulberry, did you hear what he just said."

"I heard. So what did I do?"

"Did you hear what she said, Miss Shih?" Refugee Student says. "Two negatives make a positive. They cancel each other out. OK, everybody, back to your places. I won't steal your precious treasure. So what are you going to bet? Speak up!"

"I don't have anything. I have only myself."

"OK, if I win, I'll know what to do to you," Refugee Student leans over to Lao-shih and stares greedily into her eyes.

"Drink up! Come on and drink. It's the last half bottle." The old man raises the bottle to his lips.

We pass the bottle around. The liquor is gone. The dice click. We shout.

"One, two, three."

"One, two, three."

"Four, five, six."

"Four, five, six."

"One, two, three."

"One point!"

OK, it's one point."

"Come on, be good, be good, another one!"

"Be good, be good, don't listen to him. Let's have a two."

"OK, four points, great, the dealer got only four points."

The dice click again.

"Five points! Five points! Five points. Hey, you little beauties, did you hear me, I only want one more point than that bastard.

Keep my house in Peking for myself. Five points. Five points, please, five points. . . . Ah! You fuckin' dice, you did it, you did it! Five points!"

The dice click again.

"Five points, five points, five points, I don't want anymore, don't want any less, just give me five points. Good heavens, let me win just this once in my life. Just this once. Only five points, only five points. Have they stopped? How many did I get? Six points, six points, thank heavens."

Everything is floating in front of my eyes. I feel the boat floating underfoot, everyone, everything is floating. The jade griffin is floating. It's my turn, they tell me. I grab the dice and throw them in the bowl. I get a six. They tell me I only picked up two dice and want me to throw again. Lao-shih stuffs the cubes in my hand. I can't hold on to them, they slip from my hand into the bowl. I hear Lao-shih moaning, "It's over, it's over."

Dealer, Refugee Student:	Four points
Old man:	Five points
Lao-shih:	Three points
Peach-flower Woman:	Four points

"Dealer, I beat you by one point!" says the old man. "You little punk, I want you to kneel before me and bow three times and kowtow nine times. Nine loud thumps of your head."

Refugee Student kneels down on the bunk.

"No, no," says the old man, crossing his legs on the bunk like a bodhisattva statuette. "Haven't you ever seen your old man pray to his ancestor? Did he ever kneel on a bunk and kowtow to his ancestors that way? Humph. You have to kneel properly on the floor. Knock your head against the floor so I can hear it!"

Refugee Student jumps down from the bunk into the aisle and bends down.

"Hey, you punk, just slow down a little. Have you ever seen anyone kowtowing half-naked? Go put your clothes on!"

Refugee Student grinds his teeth.

Lao-shih, Peach-flower Woman and I burst into laughter.

He puts on his shirt, squeezes down in the narrow aisle between the two rows of bunks.

The old man sits erect on the bunk, strokes his beard and raises his voice like a master of ceremonies, "First kowtow, second kowtow, third kowtow."

Refugee Student stands up, bends and bows with uplifted hands, then kneels back down. "Fourth kowtow, fifth kowtow, sixth kowtow!" He gets up again and bows and kneels back down. "Seventh kowtow, eighth kowtow, ninth kowtow. Ceremony finished."

Refugee Student scrambles to his feet and points at me. "I beat you by one point. It's time to settle with you."

"That's easy. You won, take the jade griffin." I pick it up and give it to him.

He doesn't take it and just looks at me. "What would I do with that? I'm a wanderer. All I want is a pair of grass sandals, a bag of dried food, and a flute. This jade griffin is nothing but a burden. Anyway," his voice becomes oddly tender, "I owe you something. I'll repay you by giving back your jade griffin."

"You don't owe me anything. You said yourself, 'two negatives make a positive.' I don't owe you anything either." As I'm talking, I try to put the jade griffin in his hand. I'm sure I'm holding it securely, but when I raise my hand, it slips through my fingers and falls. I let out a cry.

The griffin breaks in two on the floor.

The old man picks up the two halves and fits them together. It looks as if they're still one piece.

"All right, we'll do it this way. You take one half, I'll take the other," Refugee Student says and stuffs one half into my hand.

"OK, problem solved," Lao-shih rubs her palms together and noisily grinds her teeth. "Now, I get to settle with the dealer. I'm the real winner; I beat the dealer by two points. I only wanted the satisfaction of beating you. I won't cut you in two or chop you up. I won't chew on you. I only want you to dress up like a girl and sing the Flower Drum Song."

"Good idea." I also want to get even with him. I toss my half of the jade griffin into the opposite bunk.

The three of us, Lao-shih, Peach-flower Woman and myself, strip off his clothes, leaving only his underpants. I remember when he lay naked on the deck, his weight on my body, head hanging over my shoulder, my thighs wet and sticky. I'm still a little sore there. I couldn't stop caressing his body, like a rock in the sun, so smooth, warm, hard. So a man's body was that nice. I wished I could stroke him forever, but when he used all his strength to push into my body, it hurt. How could Peach-flower Woman sleep with her man every night? And even have a baby? I don't see how she could bear the pain.

We dress him in Peach-flower Woman's clothes. He wears the peach flower blouse, blue print pants, a turban of a blue-flowered

print wound around his head, two red spots painted on his cheeks, his masculine eyebrows thick and black.

He daintily folds his muscular hands and curtsies. He picks up Peach-flower Woman's red handkerchief and dances with it like a woman, twisting, turning and singing.

You say life is hard
 My life is hard
 Looking for a good husband all my life
 Other girls marry rich men
 My husband can only play the flower drum.

The old man, sitting on the bunk, laughs until he has a coughing fit. Lao-shih, Peach-flower Woman and I roll with laughter on the bunk.

Suddenly Refugee Student leaps on the bunk and jumps on Lao-shih. "If you ignore me, I won't let you go! I'm your girl. You have to give me a kiss!" He presses his mouth to hers and strokes all over her body. Lao-shih begins choking and can't speak.

I tackle him to save Lao-shih. "Good, I've got you both!" He turns over and grabs us both, one on each side, arms locked around our necks, holding us down. "You come here, too," he says to Peach-flower Woman. "I can put you on my chest." Lao-shih and I beat on his chest with our fists.

He suddenly lets go and rolls over to Peach-flower Woman. He stretches up his hands to her, fingers curled like claws and moves closer and closer to her, saying. "Now, I am going to settle with you!"

She laughs, her blouse still unbuttoned, straggling hair on her breasts. "What do you want? Take all the money I've won?"

"Me? I want you!"

She points a finger at him. "Let me ask you; are you man enough to deal with me?"

"If he isn't, I am," chuckles the old man.

Refugee Student doesn't say anything. He rips open her blouse and jumps on her, grabs one of her breasts and begins to suck on it. The old man jumps over and grabs her other breast.

She laughs, her full breasts shaking as if they are laughing, too. "Do anything you want with my poor old body. Just don't take away my baby's food. My milk is almost gone!"

The baby on the other bunk starts to cry.

She shoves them aside and goes to pick up the baby.

"I have an idea. I still have two cigarettes. Be my guest." Refugee Student gropes in his pocket and pulls out two cigarettes

— The Dog with a Human Head brand and steps over to Peach-flower Woman.

She is lying on the bunk nursing her child. Refugee Student lights a cigarette, grabs Peach-flower Woman's right foot and sticks it between her toes. He presses his face against her sole and smokes, his two hands holding her foot.

The old man does the same with her left foot.

She lies flat on her back, her limbs flung out as the child clutches her breast and sucks loudly and the two men hold her feet and suck on the cigarettes.

She laughs and jerks back and forth. "You devils, you're tickling me. You sex fiends. When you die, you'll get what's coming to you."

"Listen, listen. The bombers are coming back." I hear the drone of aircraft.

* * * * *

We sit up stiffly in our bunks.

The roar comes toward us.

It's twilight in the Gorge, the time when day can't be distinguished from night, or clear dusk from a cloudy day.

The captain and the crew are in the bow.

"Hey, the bombers are coming. Come and hide in the cabin. Don't endanger everybody's lives!" shouts the old man.

No response.

"Look at that," says the captain, "Three planes in each formation. Nine altogether."

"Mother-fuckers, those traitors. Only traitors aren't scared of bombers." Refugee Student gnashes his teeth.

A boat comes downstream. People on board are yelling. Gongs are crashing.

The bombers are overhead. We sprawl on the bunks. I cover my head with the guilt, the rest of my body exposed.

The yelling, the gong, the roar of the planes get louder.

"I can't hear you," the captain is shouting to the people on the boat, "Say it again."

Shouting, gongs, bombers.

"The Japanese have surrendered!" the captain finally yells.

We rush to the bow. A flame shoots up in the sky, bursting into colorful fireworks. A huge lotus flower opens above the Gorge.

The airplane sprinkles colored confetti and flies off down the river.

The boat, separated from us by the churning rapids, glides downstream to the sound of cheering and gongs.

“Victory, victory, vic . . . tory . . . tory . . .”

The echoes of their cheers, the confetti swirl around us and disappear into the river.

“There are thunderheads on those mountains,” shouts the captain. “It’s going to rain. We’ll float away.”

Dark clouds appear overhead.

Refugee Student, still dressed as the flower drum girl, snatches up a drumstick and pounds on the drum. The drum is thundering.

*—Translated by Jane Yang and Peter Yang
with Linda Lappin*

IMAGES OF WOMEN:
NOTES ON OU-YANG TZU, TS'UNG SU,
AND SHIH SHU-CH'ING

WILLIAM TAY

In the late fifties the most prominent literary journal appearing in Taipei was *Wen-hsüeh tsa-chih* [Literature Magazine], edited by the late Professor Hsia Tsi-an. Hsia was then teaching at the Department of Foreign Languages and Literature, National Taiwan University. Besides publishing the works of established writers, Hsia also encouraged his students to write and contribute to the magazine. Ts'ung Su, Ch'en Juo-hsi, and Ou-yang Tzu, among other students, saw their works first published in *Wen-hsüeh tsa-chih*. In 1960, after Hsia's departure from Taipei, some of the juniors, including Ou-yang Tzu and Ch'en Juo-hsi, launched an avant-garde magazine called *Hsien-tai wen-hsüeh* (*Modern Literature*). While Ou-yang and Ch'en were the two women actively involved in the publication of this magazine, Ts'ung Su, who was then furthering her studies in the U.S., also lent her support by sending back experimental short stories. Eventually Ou-yang and Ch'en also went to the U.S. for graduate work, and the magazine was left in the hands of Ho Hsin and Yao I-wei. It was during this period that Shih Shu-ch'ing, who was then still in high school, started to send her works to *Hsien-tai wen-hsüeh*.

By now these four woman writers have all become famous in Taiwan. Ch'en Juo-hsi, in particular, is internationally known due to her recent works on the people and life in the People's Republic of China. Since the background and subject matter of her recent stories are very different from the other three writers, this article will exclude her from its discussion. Even so, a short introductory article like this cannot possibly cover the wide range of works produced by the three authors over the years, but the topic becomes more manageable when it focuses upon the images of women appearing in their works. By selecting and analyzing some of the more prominent images of women, perhaps we can come to a better understanding of the position and situation of women in contemporary Chinese society.

One of Ou-yang Tzu's characters claims that "without love, life is sheer emptiness," and indeed love seems to be the only subject matter of her works. However, the kind of love she portrays is not of the traditional *ts'ai-tzu chia-jen* type, but one

that has been described by critics as highly iconoclastic. In her collection of short stories *Ch'iu yeh* [Autumn Leaves], love between mother and son is the theme of at least four stories. In "*Chin huang-hun shih*" [Evening Approaching] a forty-year-old mother tries unsuccessfully to hold on to a relationship with her son's best friend. The son, his mother's tacit procurer, also attempts to change his friend's mind. Failing to do so, the son assaults his friend violently. Since the son is identified several times with the friend, Oedipal relationship between mother and son is obvious. In another story, "*Lang-tzu*" [The Prodigal Son], the mother is clearly a Lawrentian figure who endeavors to keep her son entirely to herself, regarding her son's girl as a rival. This dominating mother is finally defeated by her son with sly help of his father. The father, like his Lawrentian counterparts, is weak and despised by his wife. Hoping that the sabotage of the intimate mother-and-son relationship may bring him back a wife, he discovers that his wife detests him even more. Worse, as a defeated woman, she completely loses her usual vigor, because her love for her son used to be the source of her energy and youth. In "*Chüeh-hsing*" [Awakening] the middle-aged mother is again possessive and dominating. Jealous of the young girl whom her son admires, she has a scene with him. When it is revealed that his love has been rejected, she is relieved.

Common to these mothers is their unhappy marriages. Two have husbands who are old enough to be their fathers and the women yearn for more youthful companionship. Another marries her classmate but eventually finds the man not "man enough" and unable to provide her with material comforts. The sons of these mothers easily become the natural objects of their love. Yet despite their unhappiness, Ou-yang Tzu's heroines remain bound to their marriages. In "Awakening," the discovery of the adultery changes the heroine into a reticent woman. She hates her husband's love-making but continues to "bear his caress, for she believes that this is a wife's unavoidable duty." But when it is over, she "despises herself and sees herself as low and cheap as a whore." The woman is obviously very much bound by traditional Chinese values and concepts, though she is brave enough to marry her classmate despite her parents' objections; and in spite of her feelings and refusal to forgive him, the thought of divorce has apparently never crossed her mind. The same is also true of the heroine in "The Prodigal Son." Instead of seeking a divorce,

she continues to live with a man she abhors and no longer loves. In "Autumn Leaves" the husband is respected between the young stepmother and the stepson testify to her loneliness and yearnings. But the intriguing point is that the author never mentions the possibility of divorce in her stories and has written them in such a way that from the outset, this possibility is nonexistent.

When Ou-yang depicts an adulterous woman, as she did in "Evening Approaching," the woman is psychologically disturbed, seeking in her liaison with young men, a way of re-possessing her dead son. In this story, the husband, who is twenty years older than the heroine, does not appear and is only mentioned in passing. In other stories the husband figure appears more conspicuously and interacts with younger female characters. In "*Ch'iang*" [The Wall] the elder sister's husband who is forty-five almost successfully seduces his nineteen year old sister-in-law. In "Woman Possessed," a young co-ed falls in love with a photographer who, besides being over forty, happens to be the stepfather of her classmate. In both stories the men are portrayed in a negative way. They marry simply because they regard marriage as financially beneficial. Their wives pamper them, but they betray their affections. While the mother in "Woman Possessed" considers herself "a slave" of her prodigious lover, the elder sister in "The Wall" "dresses herself up in a beautiful long gown and welcomes [her husband] home as if he were royalty."

The behavior of these two women actually coincide with the overall pattern of the women in the other stories. They can be dominating and possessive mothers; they can also be unconventional or even "possessed" in their pursuits of love; but in the last analysis, they are always dominated in return by the rules and ideas of a world controlled by men. And the "love" they are now free to pursue turns out frequently to be an invisible string controlling their fate. One might, however, wonder why the husband-father figures in Ou-yang's stories constantly turn out to be middle-aged men married to lovely women. Sometimes they are intruders in the originally smooth relationship between sisters or that of mother and child, and the world before the intrusion often seems far more harmonious. In short, all the male figures play a negative role. But by casting them in an unfavorable light. Ou-yang merely makes us more aware of them as keys to the happiness of her women.

In her essay entitled "The Great American Bitch," Dolores B. Schmidt tries to describe a recurring image of the American woman as such:

The man-eating female in American literature is not the ambitious career woman competing in a man's world, not the unwomanly intellectual whose mind outweighs her heart, nor the unsexed non-woman, fearful and envious of penis-power. Instead she is always wife and, quite often, mother; she does not work outside the home, except, perhaps, as a volunteer, more sociable than social in impulse; she is educated, but not intellectual; well-informed, but not cultivated; her house is usually clean, well-run, though she is not a housewife in the sense of one devoted to domesticity. Here, perhaps, is both equation and solution: the woman who is neither career woman nor a hausfrau *equals* the woman without clear-cut identity *equals* the confused, dissatisfied wife *equals* the Great American Bitch. (*College English*, 32 [May, 1971], 901.)

Although this description of one popular image of woman is basically American, it also describes some of the modern Chinese women in Ou-yang's stories. The adulterous wife in "Evening Approaching" has a loving husband but is always after young men. In both "Awakening" and "The Prodigal Son," the wives denigrate their husbands and dominate their sons; and in one story, a "man-eating" female is finally "punished" by her husband.

The same image of the confused, discontented wife also appears in Ts'ung Su's recent story "*Tien-fu jih-chi*" [Diary of a Mad Woman], now collected in her book *Hsiang fei* [The Desire to Fly]. When the story begins, the heroine is already suffering from a severe case of split personality. The original cause of her problem is not revealed to us, but certain speculations can be made from the situation in which the writer of the diary describes. An arts student before her marriage to a man who eventually becomes a famous professor of modern Chinese history in an American university, the heroine reads Camus and Kierkegaard, watches Ingmar Bergmann, and finds Brahms and Beethoven relaxing in moments of tension. Undoubtedly, she is a dissatisfied wife whose career and potentiality for growth have been thwarted. She is now reduced to an appendage of her husband who finds her merely a convenient companion/housekeeper, and, at times, object for sexual relief: "When he climbed into bed I was already asleep. In

the darkness he quietly handled me, mechanical actions without passion . . . or emotion, as if he was merely finishing a job. Afterwards he fell into sleep. In the darkness I felt tears soaking the pillow." Her husband is very devoted to his career. When he is not attending conferences, he is working on his research projects. The wife's comfort and companion during lonely moments is the cat called "Leopard": "Raising a cat is just like raising kids CK [her husband] says that childless family should have a pet. He is right. Many nights when he is doing research at the university, Leopard keeps me company."

Ironically, while the mad wife finds married life unsatisfactory, single girls in other stories by Ts'ung Su desperately try to remedy their wedless state. In "*Pan-kuo wei-hsiao*" [Half a Smile], Tu Ch'uan, a beautiful and, hence, popular, Chinese student studying in New York, considers the heroine, Lin Mei, to be a "hopeless case" because she is fat and plain. To Tu Ch'uan, whether a girl is good-looking enough to capture a husband seems to be her only criteria for the judging of single females. Lin Mei herself believes that she will disappoint her mother, who nourishes the hope that Lin Mei "can get married by coming to America." Despite her education, Lin Mei sees her happiness as dependent upon finding a husband. Her only fleeting moment of joy comes when a bright young Chinese student studying at Columbia takes her to the Brooklyn Zoo out of pity. Failing to get along with her charming elder sister, who finds her "a disgrace" and "a burden," Lin Mei decides to return to Taipei. On the plane, she is found dead from an overdose of drugs. In her hands she is still clutching the photographs taken at the Zoo. Lin Mei is driven to death simply because of her failure to find a suitable husband.

The same misery of failing to get married also haunts Chin Min, the heroine of another story "*Pai-lao-hui shang*" [On Broadway]. According to Chin Min, her mother is "a very independent woman" and "refuses to be controlled by anyone." She despises her husband for she regards him as "gutless." Though she is a dominating wife and mother, she believes that man is superior to woman. Chin Min reports that "[she] should have been born a man. That is the regret of her whole life." Chin Min's mother also thinks that men are only interested in women as sex objects. Influenced by this extreme view, Chin Min restrains herself from getting interested in the opposite sex. But when she is over thirty and still unmarried, her mother criticizes her as a "big failure," for she "disgraces her in front of all her friends." On the other hand, Chin Min actually has a M.S. degree

and has been working in the field of electrical engineering. Failure in her case is simply failure to get married to the suitable man. In a session with the psychiatrist, she says pathetically, "Perhaps I am really a 'big failure'; I, I hate myself."

Some of Ts'ung Su's male characters, like their counterparts in Ou-yang Tzu's stories, are portrayed in a negative manner. The husband in "Diary of a Mad Woman" is merely egocentric, but the husband in "*Pa-li. Pa-li*" [Paris. Paris] goes whoring in another part of the city while his wife and daughter wait for him at a roadside café. The implication seems to be that living in a world dominated by men, women, even when they accept its rules and standards, may still find themselves the victim. However, those who reject these rules and standards are also "trapped," for they are reacting against a preexisting male-centered ideology without a set of values which they can claim as their own.

While Ts'ung Su deals with sexual desire only occasionally, Shih Shu-ch'ing features it more prominently. In "One Day in the Life of Aunt Ch'ang-man," Ch'ang-man, despite her lack of education, is an assertive and independent woman, but her failure to tie down the sailor with her money is the cause of her sexual frustration. After being rejected by the young man at the end of the story, she emerges as a pathetic figure. Again her suffering has its roots in a miserable marriage and her failure to settle down with the right man.

Like Ch'ang-man, most of the heroines in Shih's stories are unhappy because they have married the wrong men. In most cases, the women get married because they are expected to do so by their families and society. Chu Ch'in in "*Hou-chieh*" [Black Alley] goes to study in America in order to avoid her mother's nagging pressure on her to get married. Yeh Ch'ia in "*K'un*" [Confined] gets married because her university classmates are all doing the same thing. But once these women recognize their marriages as failures, the process of dissolving them turns into a painful ordeal. The husband of Fan Shui-hsiu in "*Chei-i-tai ti hun-yin*" [Marriage of This Generation] spits on her and starves her by removing all the food from the refrigerator. When Fan flies back to Taipei to solicit support from her family in an attempt to get a divorce, she is rejected violently by her father who considers divorce a disgrace to the family.

Li Su in "*Wan-mei ti chang-fu*" [The 'Perfect' Husband] also has difficulty getting a divorce because her husband believes that a divorce may endanger his prospects in the company. Hsiao, Li Su's husband, feels "hurt" and "face-losing" when the subject of

divorce is mentioned because it is not he but his wife who has brought it up first. His masculine pride is hurt. To Hsiao, "one marries so that the wife can help further the husband's career"; therefore, Li Su's main duty is to be a perfect hostess and companion at the cocktail parties and dinner gatherings. Li Su tries her best to satisfy such demands from her career-minded husband. However, her efforts do not mean that her husband will consider her as an equal partner in a joined pursuit for a better future. Hsiao never talks to Li Su about his plans and ideas. It finally dawns on Li that "after sleeping and eating with this man for over a dozen years, she doesn't even know what he's thinking about." Hsiao's total lack of communication with his wife is particularly disturbing since Li is considerably well-educated (she is working for her M.A. when she gets married) and is clever enough to be an equal partner in whatever schemes Hsiao may have besides being just a perfect hostess.

While Hsiao is a diligent and shrewd person who does not expect any financial help from his wife, Lin Chieh-sheng, Fan Shui-hsiu's husband, marries the latter thinking that he can profit from her dowry. When the dowry does not materialize, Lin becomes a brute. Finally, when Fan can no longer tolerate Lin's humiliation and brutality, she flies back to Taipei. But her mother succumbs under her father's pressure and refuses to support her in her attempt to get a divorce. Her father has even arranged a sum of money for her husband as a compensation for the "lost" dowry. Her mother's refusal to help and her father's insistence on her returning to her husband demonstrate the almost "dictatorial" power endowed upon the male head of the family.

The husbands in Shih's stories emerge as oppressive figures who demand total submission from their wives. To them, wives are maids in the day, hostesses or companions in the evening, and sexual objects at night, their lives and fates very much at the mercy of the dominating males. However, while the older generation of women takes their fate for granted, the younger generation has the courage to try to break loose from their stifling marriages.

In this sense, Shih Shu-ch'ing's women appear more "liberated" than Ou-yang Tzu's. However, Ou-yang's critics writing from a moralistic perspective have criticized her severely for writing "immoral and ugly" stories which "violate the good [traditional] ethics and morality." On the surface, such criticism may give one the impression that Ou-yang's stories are iconoclastic and, like some Anglo-American avant-garde works, are being

subjected to conservative strictures. But the truth is that Ou-yang's women are quite conservative. They may occasionally appear to violate conventions and morality, but most accept their fate docilely, and see their happiness as hinging upon the men they are tied to. They may be unconventional in their search for "love," but it is precisely "love" which seems to camouflage the traditional male domination with a facile expression of individual will and independence. As such, the images of women presented by Ou-yang, Ts'ung, and Shih are not mere reflections, however inadequate, of contemporary Chinese women, but are also indicators of the ideologies of the writers. Shih is, perhaps, the most "feminist" of the three. Ts'ung, Ou'yang's contemporary, is more detached and objective in her recent works. Her stories also deal with the grievances and sorrows of women, but unlike Shih, her attitude towards her characters is not as obvious. Detachment can sometimes be an artistic virtue; in Ts'ung's case, however, it might be a refusal or avoidance to formulate a more clear-cut stance towards the issues involved. Although the attitudes of the three writers may differ, by portraying contemporary Chinese women in their works, they have consciously or unconsciously given us some clues to the position and situation of women as perceived by other women.

SELECTED POEMS BY CONTEMPORARY CHINESE WOMEN POETS

TRANSLATED BY LING CHUNG

Most of these contemporary woman poets have never been translated into English before, nor were they included in *Orchid Boat: Woman Poets of China*, a collaboration between Kenneth Rexroth and myself, published in 1972. These poets are young; their ages range from twenty-four to thirty-nine. They live in various parts of the world — Taiwan, Hong Kong, Malaysia, and the United States. As for poetic form, they practice free verse instead of the classic form. In addition, they share a common root — the Chinese poetic traditions, and draw their inspiration from different facets of its traditions. Lydia Y. S. Liu, Fang O-chen and Wang Yü's poems are touched with the sheer lyricism characteristic of classical Chinese woman poets. Wu Hsü-pin and Lo Ying share a modernist approach with Taiwan poets writing in the 1960's, their surrealistic imagery and acute perception of the innate absurdity of the modern world evident in these lines of Lo Ying's "Children's Words":

An absurd autumn ripens
On a weeping tree.
The torn booming of a bell
Are falling
Like dead doves.

Chung Ling-ling's "My Glory was in 1919" reveals her concern for history and homeland, while Hung Su-li's "Evening View" displays a bird's-eye-view of ancient and modern civilizations in a sweeping perspective. On the other hand, Hung Su-li, whom I regard as the most exciting among the group, very skillfully adopts imagery from classical Chinese poetry. For example, stanza two of her "Mountain Poem, No. 2" is directly derived from a famous couplet by Cheng Pan-ch'iao (1693-1765):

Rooster's cry over the thatched inn in the moonlight.
Man's footprints on the frost on the wooden bridge.

Hung Su-li's expansion of this couplet is more intimate and exquisite than Chen's:

In the moonlight of last night, the rooster's cry still resounds
over the thatched inn.

The thin layer of frost on a wooden bridge is still icy-cold.
 Oh, wooden bridge, who has tramped over you, and signed
 your name
 With the tip of his umbrella?

Although today Chinese woman poets are still greatly outnumbered by male poets, these few voices demonstrate their wide range of concerns, as well as their superb power in manipulating beautiful, concrete poetic imagery. Notes following the translated poems provide some brief biographical material on the poets and the sources of the translations. I would like to express my gratitude to William Shu-sam Tay, who assisted me in collecting the materials, and to Guy Dinmore, who gave me many useful suggestions.

Times Square, New York

Wang Yü

In the streetlight my neck and limbs stretch.
 I am leaving quietly, climbing toward the icy
 Wintry sun. The heavy sky fills with
 Many layers of veils woven of tiny snow.
 I am ascending and turning white.

As usual, people hurry to and fro in their loneliness.
 As usual, they touch the heart of the city.
 But, I have discarded her clamour.
 Light-footed as a dancing snowflake
 I merge alone into the depth of time.

An Autumn Day

LO YING

The moon, dead bird in the wheat straw,
 and fish in the eyes,
 Are ascending, tracing the smoke in my mind.
 One by one, the leaves of an oak tree
 were glued to our vague sense of hearing.

Black wind lifts itself slowly
 Over a branch of red roses.
 The wind is the long hair,
 the curled, coiled sorrow.

Children's Words

LO YING

A murdered sun
 In a chimney-like city.

An absurd autumn ripens
 On a weeping tree.
 The torn boomings of a bell
 Are falling
 Like dead doves.

It is a season which forever slumbers.
 People are the fermented stars,
 the broken clay dolls on a ladder,
 or the dead snake-like sunlight.

Free the hedgehogs from the guitar, please.
 Here the roses
 Are the last lies,

Those wailing fish
 Hustle in the darkness.
 Maria in the picture frame,
 I heard that you died already.
 So died the sailor.

Love is a Tree

LYDIA Y. S. LIU

Love is a tree
 Love is the song of birds
 Love is a falling leaf
 Love is the thread-like cloud that fills the sky
 Kiss me, gentle rain drops
 Kiss me, gentle rock

Kiss me, gentle waterfall
 Kiss me, gentle forest
 Then my dear
 Please collect
 Every gentle lip of theirs
 To make a bed
 Let us lie down and wake up no more.

When I Sit Quietly Down

LYDIA Y. S. LIU

When I sit quietly down
 My shadow is not in the crystal current of Time
 Many purple traces left behind on the auditory tubes
 —motorcycles passed by screaming
 The isosceles triangle with retina as its pinnacle is bleeding
 —a bird darted skyward
 I, wounded, am in the crystal current of Time
 When I sit quietly.

My Glory Was In 1919

*Commemorating the 50th anniversary of
 the May Fourth Movement*

CHUNG LING-LING

I cannot spot
 The brilliant sunlight of May.
 I only know there is a ball called sun,
 Forsaken in a dark corner,
 In chilliness and loneliness suffering
 The approach of the fiftieth year.
 He has no eyes,
 no mouth,
 no face
 No milestones, and
 No compass.
 He must have been painted over

For he is covered thoroughly by seven colors.
 He has no identity,
 But has many masks, thrust upon him.
 His right arm is broken,
 His tongue lost.
 He stutters.
 He can't move.

Children turn their nose up at him.
 They don't recognize this muddy bumpkin.
 They merely desire degrees,
 ideals,
 love,
 And everything else but
 This faded banner.
 They love the tide from the West.

He, in reticence,
 in nakedness,
 Follows the plucked sun.
 He writes down:
 I have been young once.
 My glory was in 1919.
 I have spilled enough blood.
 I have run my heart out.
 I have reached greatness.
 I have erred.
 But, dear children,
 How could you laugh at me with your paleness?

My Sorrow

CHUNG LING-LING

Because, for no particular reason,
 You have asked me about the story of my sorrow,
 Please pardon me that
 I have changed my smile into an olive,
 Suddenly severed, bleeding sap quietly.
 Forgive me that I cannot explain to you,
 For those who are in the midst of breakers
 Cannot describe the breakers.

Those who are in the midst of rain
Cannot describe the rain.

Why don't we drink coffee?
Perhaps
I have not yet begun.
If I may die
Who cares how many times?
I will understand also sheer innocence
If you look down upon sorrow.

In addition
I always love to let it
Flow through my fingers into
The black coffee of morning.

I Saw Him

CHUNG LING-LING

I saw him
Stride out
From the room
I saw his long hair
Still
Lean gently against
His right eyebrow
I saw his white shirt
And beige pants
I saw him standing
In front of us
I saw his face
Smiling
At you
I saw him go away
I saw his eyes
Which did not
Glance at me
I saw you
About to
Speak to me
So I turn my head away
Meanwhile I realize

In a river somewhere
 A broken boat
 Has just capsized.

A Well

WU HSÜ-PIN

There was a well in the shade
 Where in the past folk drew up stars and songs
 To hang up among the sprays.
 Flowers on the stone gateway.
 To its sides, the gleams of the ocean, the bees and birds.
 Blue mist lying along the distant horizon.

Then, the well dried up.
 Folk cooked in the nearby glen.
 Black smoke filtered through leaves into the clear sky.
 Occasionally the red bricks sparkled.

Then it rained.
 Water spilled from empty baskets.
 Clouds glided down.
 Many a thunderstorm drained away the voices and laughter.
 Folk left here one by one.
 Empty houses stood in line.
 A black wok was placed securely over the well.
 The wind covered it with a shroud of rust.
 The wok broke.
 The hole at the bottom was like a thirty mouth
 Occasionally a pebble fell through.
 I say this is like the love of humankind.

Evening View

HUNG SU-LI

The city is a bellows,
 A chronicle of running machines.
 The train follows the direction of the track.
 The river flows into her own.

Young paddy fields hold high their fresh greenness.
The criss-crossing paths have retreated to the foot of the
mountain.

Skyscrapers line up as the teeth of a comb.
Chinmeys stand like ten thousand fingers pointing upward.
Automobiles grab land in all directions,
Their footprints striding out.
Oh, offspring of Industry.

The whistling wind casts down all the apparel of the white sun.
I lift my head to face the flying clouds transformed into dragons,
The wind and clouds on the stage of our universe.

Go reveal to the eyes of
The traveller on the high tower
How often the south of the Yangtze River has turned green?
How often the spring breeze has blown?
How often the soil of the delta has turned fertile?
The cogs of the wheel have never budged in any age.
This beautiful new world.

There is cruelty stretched taut between audacity and power.
The mountain dipped its tongue into the wine cup of the night.
The tongue turns cold inch by inch.

You soar through the sky, Oh white bird,
Just like a fragment of glass scoring the ice,
Your belly

Mountain Poem, No. 1

HUNG SU-LI

I did not wipe off with my fingers
The dew drops under the eaves forming at midnight.
But I look into the valley for the water clock.
Has it flowed away through that winding, narrow path?

The hues of mountains are watercolors.
May I scoop them with my hands to bathe
your face, just waking from morning slumber?

Wild grass unwitnessed grows.
The wooden fish forever repeats one song.
Clouds beckon me

With their long, melancholy fingers.
 The creek is a bride on her wedding night,
 Warm, sweet and her words spilling over.

The wind rises from without the wood,
 Dance gracefully a twirl,
 Then blows away from the wood again.

But the sun has not yet come over here to view the landscape.
 The rushes on the cliff's edge forlornly display their white purity,
 For none other than their own amusement.

Mountain Poem, No. 2

HUNG SU-LI

How I wish to be a bit more tired,
 just a bit more tired,
 Lying on the tips of the grass on the prairie.
 The mist spills out of my hand,
 the wind slips out of my grasp.
 Your footprints were formed solely by such wild grass.
 The solitary tune of your steps was played solely by such dry
 leaves.

In the moonlight of last night, the rooster's cry
 still resounds over the thatched inn.
 The thin layer of frost on a wooden bridge is still icy-cold.
 Oh, wooden bridge, who has tramped over you, and signed your
 name
 With the tip of his umbrella?

Why does the breeze, filled with songs, forever
 Ruffle the flowing mist?
 Oh, how I wish to be a bit more tired,
 Just a bit more tired,
 To let a bamboo leaf carry me
 as carrying a tiny boat,
 into the clouds
 into the clouds

.....

The Fan of Songs

FAN O-CHEN

Let me confide to you
 A single phrase
 Upon which, in this wide world,
 Only on your wall may a candle light shine.
 On your wall a fan of songs hangs high,
 Covered by stains and lines,
 Like a revealing face.
 Life and death are its two sheets of covering.
 The story of love its relief.
 You shall discover that phrase
 In the fan.

NOTES ABOUT THE POETS

- Wang Yü (1939-), educated in Taiwan, resides in New York City in the 1970's.
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- Lo Ying (1940-), wife of the poet Shan Ch'in, lives in Taipei.
 "An Autumn Day," *Chung-kuo hsien-tai wen-hsüeh ta-hsi*, Poetry, II, 237.
 "Children's Words," *Chung-kuo hsien-tai wen-hsüeh ta-hsi*, Poetry, II, 238-239.
- Lydia Y. S. Liu (1942-), a translator for the Commercial and Industrial News Agency, lives in Taipei.
 "Love is a Tree," *Lu-chu chi* (*We Walk Out of the Zoo*) (Taipei: China Post, 1973).
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- Chung Ling-ling (1948-), columnist and free-lance writer in Hong Kong.
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 "My Sorrow," *1970 Shih hsien* (*Selected Poems of 1970*), edited by Lo Fu (Taipei: Cactus, 1971), pp. 143-144.
 "I Saw Him," *Ming Pao Monthly*, No. 59 (November, 1970), 98-99.
- Wu Hsü-pin (1948-), a biology graduate from the Baptist College in Hong Kong, is also a writer of short stories and prose, and lives in San Diego, California.
 "A Well," *Hsiang-kang shih-pao* (*Hong Kong Times*), September 1, 1975.
- Hung Su-li (1949-), is a graduate of the Chinese Department of National Taiwan University.
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 "Mountain Poem, No. 1," *Hung Su-li shih-chi*, pp. 51-53.
 "Mountain Poem, No. 2," *Hung Su-li shih-chi*, pp. 54-55.
- Fang O-chen (1954-) was born in Malaysia and attended college in Taiwan.
 "The Fan of Songs," *O-mei fu* (Taipei: Four Seasons, 1977), pp. 112-113.

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SHIH SHU-CH'ING received her M.A. in Drama from the City University of New York. Author of two novels and three books of short stories, she has also written extensively on Western drama, Peking opera, and Chinese folk art. English translations of her short stories have recently appeared in a volume entitled *The Barren Years*. Shih, who now lives in Hong Kong and works as a columnist, is married to an American anthropologist and has one daughter.

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