
EILEEN CHANG

Eileen Chang was the most gifted Chinese writer to emerge in the forties, and certainly the most important. Though she is the youngest writer represented in this anthology, her career has spanned nearly four decades. In terms of what she could have achieved in the last two decades if she had retained the creative exuberance of her youth and her sheer zest for life, her career may be regarded as somewhat disappointing. Nevertheless, her permanent status in Chinese literature is assured, and her influence on the younger Chinese writers in Taiwan and America has been as salutary as the influence of Lu Hsi n on the fiction writers of the twenties and thirties. No Chinese author of recent years can yet boast of so rich an oeuvre, including not only her brilliant short fiction but also a novel of classic stature, *The Rice-Sprout Song* (*Yang-ko*).

A native of Shanghai, Eileen Chang (Chang Ai-ling) comes from a distinguished family. Her grandmother's father was the statesman Li Hung-chang, and her grandfather was Chang P'ei-lun, the chief political casualty of the SinoFrench War of 1884 but nonetheless an earnest official in his youth and a classical scholar. Her father, however, was a domestic tyrant, and Eileen Chang suffered greatly in her youth. She studied at the University of Hong Kong until Pearl Harbor and then returned to Shanghai to begin her literary career. All her *Collected Stories* (*Chang Ai-ling tuan p'ien hsiao-shuo chi*, Hong Kong, 1954; Taipei, 1968) and many of her essays date from the period 1943-1947. In 1952 she left the mainland for Hong Kong, where two novels appeared: *The Rice-Sprout Song* (1954; English version, 1955); and *Naked Earth* (*Ch'ih-ti chin lien*, 1954; English version, 1956).

Eileen Chang arrived in the United States in 1955 and has since lived a most secluded life. In the sixties she produced two versions of a novel based on her story "The Golden Cangue" (*Chin-so chi*, 1943)-*The Embittered Woman* (*Yuan nii*, Taipei, 1968) and *The Rouge of the North* (London, 1967)-as well as a revision of a novel first serialized in the forties, newly titled *Half a Lifetime's Romance* (*Pan-sheng yuan*, Taipei, 1969). Two unfinished stories dating from the forties are included in a collection mainly of essays entitled *As Seen by Eileen Chang* (*Chang k'an*, Hong Kong and Taipei, 1976).

I have maintained in *History* that "The Golden Cangue" is "the greatest novelette in the history of Chinese literature" (p. 398). Certainly, beside it, even the finest traditional vernacular tales of comparative length and scope (such as "The Pearl-sewn Shirt" or "The Oil Peddler") appear victims of the storyteller's conventions in their occasional adulteration of moral and psychological reality, while none of Eileen Chang's successors have yet told an essential truth about Chinese civilization in a novella of equal weight and terrifying power. In *History* I commented on the story as follows:

Eileen Chang has evinced an unerring knowledge of the manners and mores of the decadent upper class throughout the story and has studied the heroine's life in terms of an unflinching psychological realism; but what elevates this perception and this realism into the realm of tragedy is the personal emotion behind the creation, the attitude of mingled fascination and horror with which the author habitually contemplates her own childhood environment. In *The Golden Cangue* Eileen Chang has found a perfect fable to serve as the dramatic correlative of her emotion, and the result is an overpowering tragedy embodying an acute moral vision, uniquely her own. [p. 407]

The reader who finds the novella interesting should by all means read *The Rouge of the North*.

"The Golden Cangue," a modern work of striking originality, is nevertheless deeply indebted to *Dream of the Red Chamber* for its style and boudoir realism. Eileen Chang, who knows this novel by heart, has written a valuable textual study called *Nightmare in the Red Chamber* (*Hung-lou meng-yen*, Taipei, 1977).

The Golden Gangue

Translated by the author

Shanghai thirty years ago on a moonlit night . . . maybe we did not get to see the moon of thirty years ago. To young people the moon of thirty years ago should be a reddish-yellow wet stain the size of a copper coin, like a teardrop on letter paper by To-yun Hsdan,' worn and blurred. In old people's memory the moon of thirty years ago was gay, larger, rounder, and whiter than the moon now. But seen after thirty years on a rough road, the best of moons is apt to be tinged with sadness.

The moonlight reached the side of Feng_hsiao's pillow. She was a slave girl brought by the bride, the new Third Mistress of the Chiangs. She opened her eyes and saw her own blue-white hand on the half-worn blanket faced with quilted Korean silk. "Is it moonlight?" she said to herself. She slept on a pallet on the floor under the window. The last couple of years had been busy with the changing of dynasties; the Chiangs, coming to Shanghai as refugees, did not have enough room, so the servants' quarters were criss-crossed with people sleeping.

Feng-hsiao thought she heard a rustle behind the big bed; somebody must have gotten up to use the chamber pot. She turned over and, just as she thought, the cloth curtain was pushed aside and a black shadow emerged, shuffling in slippers worn down in the back. It was probably Little Shuang,

the personal maid of Second Mistress, and so she called out softly, "Little Sister Shuang."

Little Shuang came, smiling, and kicked at the pallet. "I woke you." She put both hands under her old lined jacket of dark violet silk, worn over bright oil-green trousers. Feng-hsiao put out a hand to feel the trouser leg and said, smiling: 2

"Colorful clothes aren't worn so much now. With the people downriver,³ the fashion is all for neutral tones."

Little Shuang said, "You don't know: in this house we don't keep up with other people. Old Mistress is strict. Not even the young mistresses can have their own way, to say nothing of us slave girls. We wear what's given us-all dressed like peasants." She squatted down to sit on the pallet and picked up a little jacket at Feng-hsiao's feet. "Was this newly made for your lady's wedding?"

Feng-hsiao shook her head. "Of my clothes for the season, only the few pieces on view are new. The rest are just discards."

"It's really hard on your lady that this wedding happened to run into the revolution."

Feng-hsiao sighed. "Don't go into that now. In times like these one should economize, but there's still a limit! That wedding really had no style. She didn't say anything, but how could she not be angry?"

"I shouldn't wonder Third Mistress is still unhappy about it. On your side the trousseau was passable, but the wedding preparations we made were really too dismal. Even the year we took our Second Mistress it was better than this."

Feng-hsiao was taken aback. "How? Your Second Mistress . . ."

Little Shuang took off her shoes and stepped barefoot across Feng-hsiao to the window. "Come and look at the moon," she said.

Feng-hsiao scrambled quickly to her feet. "I was going to ask you all along, your Second Mistress . . ."

Little Shuang bent down to pick up the little jacket and put it over her shoulders. "Be careful you don't catch cold."

Feng-hsiao said smiling as she buttoned it up, "No, you've got to tell me."

"My fault, I shouldn't have let it out," said Little Shuang.

"We're like sisters now. Why treat me like an outsider?"

"If I tell you, don't you tell your lady, though. Our Second Mistress's family owns a sesame oil shop."

"Oh!" Feng-hsiao was surprised. "A sesame oil shop! How on earth could they stoop so low! Now your Eldest Mistress is from a titled family; ours can't compare with Eldest Mistress, but she does come from a respectable family."

"Of course there was a reason. You've seen our Second Master, he's crippled. What mandarin family would give him a daughter for wife? Old Mistress didn't know what to do, first was going to get him a concubine, and then the matchmaker found this one from the Ts'ao family, called Ch'ich'iao⁴ because she was born in the seventh month."

"Oh, a concubine," said Feng-hsiao.

"Was to be a concubine. Then Old Mistress thought, Second Master wasn't going to take a wife, and it wouldn't do for the second branch to be without its proper mistress. Just as well to have her for a wife so she would look after Second Master faithfully."

Feng-hsiao leaned on the windowsill, musing. "No wonder. I'm new here, but I guessed some of it."

"Dragons breed dragons, phoenixes breed phoenixes-as the saying goes. You haven't heard her conversation! Even in front of the unmarried young ladies she says anything she likes. Lucky that in our house not a word goes out from inside, nor comes in from outside, so the young ladies don't understand a thing. Even then they get so embarrassed they don't know where to hide."

Feng-hsiao giggled. "Really? Where could she have picked up vulgar language? Even us slave girls-"

Little Shuang said, holding her own elbows, "Why, she was the big attraction at the sesame oil shop, standing at the counter and dealing with all kinds of customers. What have we got to compare with her?"

"Did you come with her when she was married?"

Little Shuang sneered. "How could she afford me! I used to wait on Old Mistress, but Second Master took medicine all day and had to be helped around all the time, and since they were short of help, I was sent over there. Are you cold?" Feng-hsiao shook her head. "Look at you, the way you've pulled in your neck, so cuddly!" She had hardly finished speaking when Fenghsiao sneezed. Right away Little Shuang gave her a push. "Go to bed, go to bed. Warm yourself."

Feng-hsiao knelt down to take her jacket off. "It's not winter, you don't catch cold just like that."

"The window may be closed but the wind sneaks in through the crevices."

They both lay down. Feng-hsiao asked in a whisper, "Been married four, five years now?"

"Who?"

"Who else?"

"Oh, she. That's right, it's been five years."

"Had children too, and gave people nothing to talk about?"

"Well-! Plenty to talk about. The year before last Old Mistress took everybody in the house on a pilgrimage to Mount P'u-t'o. She didn't go because it was just after her lying-in, so she was left home to look after the house. Master-in-laws called a bit too often and a batch of things was lost."

Feng-hsiao was startled. "And they never got to the bottom of it?"

"How could they? It would have been embarrassing for everybody. Anyway, one day the jewelry would have gone to Eldest Master, Second Master, and Third Master. Eldest Master and Mistress couldn't very well say anything on account of Second Master. Third Master was in no position to, he himself was spending money like water and borrowed a lot from the family accounts."

The two of them were talking across a gap of ten feet. Despite their efforts to keep their voices down, a louder sentence or two woke up old Mrs. Chao on the big bed. She called out, "Little Shuang." Little Shuang did not dare answer. Old Mrs. Chao said, "Little Shuang, if you talk more nonsense and let people hear you, be careful you don't get skinned tomorrow!" Little Shuang kept still. "Don't think you're still in the deep halls and big courtyards we lived in before, where you had room to talk crazy and act silly. Here it's cheek by jowl, nothing can be kept from other people. Better stop talking if you want to avoid a beating."

Immediately the room became silent. Old Mrs. Chao, who had inflamed eyes, had stuffed her pillow with chrysanthemum leaves, said to make eyes clear and cool. She now raised her head to press down the silver hairpin tucked into her bun and the chrysanthemum leaves rustled with the slight stir. She turned over, her whole frame pulled into motion, all her bones squeaking. She sighed, "You people- ! What do you know?" Little Shuang and Feng-hsiao still didn't dare reply. For a long time nobody spoke, and one by one they drifted off to sleep.

It was almost dawn. The flat waning moon got lower, lower and larger, and by the time it sank, it was like a red gold basin. The sky was a cold, bleak crab-shell blue. The houses were only a couple of storeys high, pitch-dark under the sky, so one could see far. At the horizon the morning colors were layers of green, yellow, and red like a watermelon cut open-the sun was coming up. Gradually wheelbarrows and big pushcarts began rattling along the road, and horse carriages passed, hooves tapping. The beancurd soup vendor, flat pole on his shoulder, slowly and swingingly hawked his wares. Only the drawn-out last syllable carried, "Haw. . . 01 Haw . . . 01" Farther off, it became "Aw ... O! Aw . . . O!"

In the house the slave girls and amahs had also got up, in a flurry to open the room doors, fetch hot water, fold up bedding, hook up the bed-curtains, and do the hair. Feng-hsiao helped the Third Mistress Lan-hsien get dressed. Lan-hsien leaned close to the mirror for a careful look, pulled out from under her armpit a pale green blossom-flecked handkerchief, rubbed some powder off the wings of her nose, and said with her back to Third Master on the bed, "I'd better go first to pay my respects to Old Mistress. I'd be late if I waited for you."

As she was speaking, Eldest Mistress Tai-then came and stood in the doorway, saying with a smile, "Third Sister, let's go together."

Lan-hsien hurried up to her. "I was just beginning to worry that I'd be late-so Eldest Sister-in-law hasn't gone up yet. What about Second Sister-in-law?"

"She'll still be a while."

"Getting Second Brother his medicine?"

Tai-then looked around to make sure there was no one about before she said, smiling, "It's not so much taking medicine as-" She put her thumb to her lips, made a fist with the three middle fingers, sticking out the little finger, and shushed softly a couple of times.

Lan-hsien said, surprised, "They both smoke that?"

Tai-then nodded. "With your Second Brother it's out in the open, with her it's kept from Old Mistress, which makes things difficult for us, caught in between-have to cover up for her. Actually Old Mistress knows very well. Deliberately pretends she doesn't, orders her around and tortures her in little ways, just so that she can't smoke her fill. Actually, to think of it, a woman and so young, what great problems could she have, to need to smoke that to take her mind off things?"

Tai-then and Lan-hsien went upstairs hand in hand, each followed by the slave girl closest to her, to the small anteroom next door to Old Mistress's bedroom. The slave girl Liu-hsi came out to them whispering, "Not awake yet."

Tai-chen glanced up at the grandfather dock and said smiling, "Old Mistress is also late today."

"Said she didn't sleep well the last couple of days, too much noise on the street," Liu-hsi said. "Probably used to it now, making up for it today."

Beside the little round pedestal table of purple elm covered with a strip of scarlet felt sat Yun-tse, the second daughter of the house, cracking walnuts with a little nutcracker. She put it down and got up to greet them. Tai-then laid a hand on her shoulder. "Sister Yiin, you're really a devoted child. Old Mistress had a fancy for sugared walnuts yesterday, and you remembered."

Lan-hsien and Tai-then sat down around the table and helped to dean the walnut meat. Yiintse's hands got tired and Lan-hsien took the nutcracker as she put it down.

"Be careful of those nails of yours, as slender as scallions. It would be a pity to break them when you've grown them so long," said Tai-then.

"Have somebody go and get your gold nail sheath," Yun-tse said.

"So much bother, we might as well have them shelled in the kitchen," said Lan-hsien.

As they were talking and laughing in undertones, Liu-hsi raised the curtain with a stick, announcing, "Second Mistress is here."

Lan-hsien and Yun-tse rose to ask her to sit down but Ts'ao Ch'i-ch'iao would not be seated as yet. With one hand on the doorway and the other on her waist, she first looked around. On her thin face were a vermilion mouth, triangular eyes, and eyebrows curved like little hills. She wore a pale pink blouse over narrow mauve trousers with a flickering blue scroll design and greenish-white incense-stick piping. A crepe handkerchief made of lavender silk was half tucked around the wrist in one narrow blouse sleeve. She smiled, showing her small fine teeth, and said, "Everybody's here. I suppose I'm late again. How can I help it, doing my hair in the dark? Who gave me a window facing the back yard? I'm the only one who got a room like that. That one of ours is evidently not going to live long anyway, we're just waiting to be widow and orphans-whom to bully, if not us?"

Tai-then blandly said nothing. Lan-hsien said smiling, "Second Sister-in-law is used to the houses in Peking. No wonder she finds it too cramped in here."

Yun-tse said, "Eldest Brother should have gotten a larger place when he was house-hunting, but I'm afraid that for Shanghai, this counts as a bright, airy house."

Lan-hsien said, "That's so. It's true it's a bit crowded. Really, so many people in the house-"

Chi-ch'iao rolled up her sleeve and tucked the handkerchief in her green jade bracelet, glancing sideways at Lan-hsien, and said smiling, "So Third Sister feels there're too many people. If it's too crowded for us, who have been married for years, naturally it's too crowded for newlyweds like you."

Before Lan-hsien could say anything, Tai-then blushed, saying, "Jokes are jokes, but there's a limit. Third Sister has just come here. What will she think of us?"

Ch'i-ch'iao patted her lips with a corner of her handkerchief. "I know you're all young ladies from respectable homes. Just try and change places with me-I'm afraid you couldn't put up with it for a single night."

Tai-then made a spitting noise. "This is too much. The more you talk, the more impertinent you get."

At this Ch'i-ch'iao went up and took Tai-then by the sleeve. "I can swear-I can swear for the last three years . . . Do you dare swear? You dare swear?"

Even Tai-then could not help a titter, and then she muttered, "How is it that you had even two children?"

Ch'i-ch'iao said, "Really, even I don't know how the children got born. The more I think about it the less I understand."

Tai-chen held up her right hand and waved it from side to side. "Enough of such talk. Granted that you take Third Sister as one of our own, and feel free to say anything you like, still Sister Yiin's here. If she tells Old Mistress later, you'll get more than you bargained for."

Yun-tse had walked off long ago, and was standing on the veranda with her hands behind her back, whistling at the canary to make it sing. The Chiangs lived in a modern foreign-stile house of an early period, tall arches supported by thick pilars of red brick with floral capitals, but the upstairs veranda had a wooden floor. Behind the railings of willow wood was a row of large bamboo baskets in which dried bamboo shoots were being aired. The worn sunlight pervaded the air like gold dust, slightly suffocating and dizzying when rubbed in the eyes. Far away in the street a peddler shook a rattle-drum whose sleepy beat, *bu lung dung . . . bu lung dung*, held memories of many children now grown old. The private rickshas tinkled as they ran past and an occasional car horn went *ba ba*. Because Ch'i-ch'iao knew that everyone in this house looked down on her, she was especially warm to the newcomer. Leaning on the back of Lan-hsien's chair, she asked her this and that and spoke admiringly of her fingernails after giving her hand a thorough inspection. Then she added, "I grew one on my little finger last year fully half an inch longer than this, and broke it picking flowers."

Lan-hsien had already seen through Ch'i-ch'iao and understood her position at the Chiangs'. She kept smiling but hardly answered. Ch'i-ch'iao felt the slight. Ambling over to the veranda, she picked up Yun-tse's pigtail and shook it, making conversation. '*To!* How come your hair's so thin? Only last year you had such a head of glossy black hair-must have lost a lot?"

Yun-tse turned aside to protect her pigtail, saying with a smile, "I can't even lose a few hairs without your permission?"

Ch'i-ch'iao went on scrutinizing her and called out, "Elder Sister-in-law, come take a look. Sister Yun has really grown much thinner. Could it be that the young lady has something on her mind?"

With marked annoyance Yun-tse slapped Ch'i-ch'iao's hand to get it off her person. "You've really gone crazy today. As if you weren't enough of a nuisance ordinarily."

Ch'i-ch'iao tucked her hands in her sleeves. "What a temper the young lady has," she said, smiling.

Tai-chen put her head out, saying "Sister Yun, Old Mistress is up."

They all straightened their blouses hastily, smoothed the hair in front of their ears, lifted the curtain to go into the next room, curtsied, and waited on Old Mistress at breakfast. Old women holding trays went in through the living room; slave girls inside took the dishes from them and returned to wait in the outer room. It was quiet inside, scarcely anybody saying anything; the only sound was the rustle of the thin silver chain quivering at the top of a pair of silver chopsticks.

Old Mistress believed in Buddha and made it a rule to worship for two hours after breakfast. Coming out with the others, Yun-tse managed to ask Tai-then without being

overheard, "Isn't Second Sister-in-law in a hurry to go for her smoke? Why is she still hanging around inside?"

Tai-then said, "I suppose she has a few words to say in private."

Yun-tse couldn't help laughing. "As if Old Mistress would listen to anything she had to say!"

Tai-then laughed cynically. "That you can't tell. Old people are always changing their minds. When something's dinned into your ears all day long, it's just possible you'll believe one sentence out of ten."

As Lan-hsien sat cracking walnuts, Tai-then and Yun-tse went to the veranda, though not specifically to eavesdrop on the conversation in the main chamber. Old Mistress, being of an advanced age, was a little deaf, so her voice was especially loud. Intentionally or not, the people on the veranda heard much of the talk. Yun-tse turned white with anger; first she held her fists tight, then flicked her hands open forcibly and ran toward the other end of the veranda. After a couple of steps she stood still and bent forward with her face in her hands, sobbing.

Tai-then hurried up and held her. "Sister, don't be like this! Stop it. It's not worth your while to heed the likes of her. Who takes her words seriously?"

Yun-tse struggled free and ran straight to her lower face, bright chubby red cheeks, glistening own room. Tai-chen came back to the living room dark eyebrows, and moist black eyes where some and clapped her hands once. "The damage is impatience always showed. Over a narrow-sleeved done."

Lan-hsien hastened to ask, "What happened?"

"Your Second Sister-in-law just told Old Mistress, 'A grown girl won't keep,' and Old Mistress is to write to the P'engs to come for the bride right away. What kind of talk is that?"

"The Chiangs will lose face only temporarily, but not Sister Yun. How can *they* respect her over there when she gets married? She still has her life to live."

"Old Mistress is understanding, she's not likely to share that one's views."

"Of course Old Mistress didn't like it at first, said a daughter of our house would never have such ideas. So *she* said, 'Yo! you don't know the girls nowadays. How can they compare with the girls when you were a girl? Times have changed, and people also change, or why is there trouble all over the world?' You know, old people like to hear that sort of thing. Old Mistress isn't so sure anymore."

Lan-hsien sighed, saying, "How on earth did she have the gall to make up such stories?"

Tai-chen rested both elbows on the table and stroked an eyebrow with a little finger. After a moment of reflection she snickered. "She thinks she's being especially thoughtful toward Sister Yun! Spare me her thoughtfulness."

Lan-hsien grabbed hold of her. "Listen-that can't be Sister Win?" There was loud weeping apparently coming from a back room and the rattle of brass bedposts being kicked and a hubbub of voices trying to soothe and reason to no avail.

Tai-chen stood up. "I'll go and see. That young "That's all right with me, I'm used to it," said lady may be good-tempered, but she can fight back if she's cornered."

Tai-chen was gone when Third Master Chiang came in yawning. A robust youth, tending toward plumpness, Chiang Chi-tse sported a big shiny three-strand pigtail loosely plaited, down his neck. He had the classic domed forehead and squarish lower face, bright chubby red cheeks, glistening dark eyebrows, and moist black eyes where some impatience always showed. Over a narrow-sleeved gown of bamboo-root green he wore a little sleeveless jacket the color of sesame-dotted soy paste, buttoned across with pearls from shoulder shoulder. He asked Lan-hsien, "Who's talking away to Old Mistress in there?"

"Second Sister-in-law."

Chi-tse pressed his lips tight and shook his head.

"You've had enough of her too?" Lan-hsien said, smiling.

Chi-tse said nothing, just pulled a chair over, pushed its back against the table, threw the hem of his gown up high and sat astride the chair, his chin on the chair back, and picked up and ate one walnut meat after another.

Lan-hsien looked at him out of the corners of her eyes. "People shelling them the whole morning, was it all for your sake?"

Just then Chi-chiao lifted the curtain and came out. The Minute she saw Chi-tse she circled over to the back of Lan-hsien's chair, put both hands around Lan-hsien's neck and bent her head down, around Lan-hsien's neck and bent her head down, saying with a smirk, "What a ravishing bride! Third Brother, you haven't thanked me yet. If I hadn't hurried them to get this done for you early, you might have had to wait eight or ten years for the war to be over. You'd have died of impatience."

Lan-hsien's greatest regret was that her wedding had happened in a period of national emergency and lacked pomp and style. As soon as she heard these jarring words, her narrow little face fell to its full length like a scroll. Chi-tse glanced at her and said, "Second Sister-in-law, a good heart is not rewarded as of old. Nobody feels obliged to you."

"That's all right with me, I'm used to it," said Chi-chiao. "Ever since I stepped inside the Chiang house, just nursing your Second Brother all these years,, watching over the sickbed day and night, just for that alone you'd think I'd done some good and nothing wrong, but who's ever grateful to me? Who ever did me half a good turn?" ~

Chi-tse said smiling, "You're full of grievances the minute you open your mouth."

With a long-drawn-out groan she kept fingering the gold triad⁷ and key chain buttoned on Lan-hsien's lapel. After a long pause she suddenly said, "At least you haven't fooled around outside for a month or so. Thanks to the bride; she made you stay home. Anybody else could beg you on bended knee and you wouldn't."

"Is that so? Sister-in-law never asked me, how do you know I won't?" he said smiling, and signaled Lan-hsien with his eyes.

Ch'i-ch'iao doubled up laughing. "Why don't you do something about him, Third Sister? The little monkey, I saw him grow up, and now he's making jokes at my expense!"

While talking and laughing she felt bothered; her restless hands squeezed and kneaded Lanhsien, beating and knocking lightly with a fist as if she wished to squash her out of shape. No matter how patient Lan-hsien was, she could not help getting annoyed. With her temper rising, she applied more strength than she should using the nutcracker, and broke the two-inch fingernail dean off at the quick.

"Yo!" Ch'i-ch'iao cried. "Quick, get scissors and trim it. I remember there was a pair of little scissors in this room. Little Shuang!" she called out. "Liu-hsi! Come, somebody!"

Lan-hsien rose. "Never mind, Second Sister-inlaw, I'll go and cut it in my room." She went.

Ch'i-ch'iao sat down in Lan-hsien's chair. Leaning her cheek on her hand and lifting her eyebrows, she gazed sideways at Chi-tse. "Is she angry with me?"

"Why should she be?" he said, smiling.

"I was just going to ask that. Could I have said anything wrong? What's wrong with keeping you at home? She'd rather have you go out?"

He said, "The whole family from Eldest Brother and Eldest Sister-in-law down want to discipline me, just for fear that I'll send the move inlte/general accounts."

"By the Buddha, I can't vouch for the others but I don't think like that. Even if you get into debt and mortgage houses and sell land, if I so much as frown I'm not your Second Sister-in-law. Aren't we the closest kin? I just want you to take care of your health."

He could not suppress a utter. "Why are you so worried about my health?"

Her voice trembled. "Health is the most important thing for anybody. Look at your Second Brother, the way he gets, is he still a person? Can you still treat him as one?"

Chi-tse looked serious. "Second Brother's not like me, he was born like that. It's not that he ruined his health. He's a pitiful man; it's up to you to take care of him."

Ch'i-ch'iao stood up stiffly, holding on the table with both hands, her eyelids down and the lower half of her face quivering as if she held scalding hot candlewax in her mouth. She forced out two sentences in a small high voice: "Go sit next to your Second Brother. Go sit next to your Second Brother." She tried to sit beside Chi-tse and only got onto a corner of his chair and put her hand on his leg. "Have you touched his flesh? It's soft and heavy, feels like your feet when they go numb . . ."

Chi-tse had changed color too. Still he gave a frivolous little laugh and bent down to pinch her foot. "Let's see if they're numb."

"Heavens, you've never touched him, you don't know how good it is not to be sick . . . how good ..." She slid down from the chair and squatted on the floor, weeping inaudibly with her face pillowed on her sleeve; the diamond on her hairpin flashed as it jerked back and forth. Against the diamond's flame shone the solid knot of pink silk thread binding a little bunch of hair at the heart of the bun. Her back convulsed as it sank lower and lower. She seemed to be not so much weeping as vomiting, churning and pumping out her guts.

A little stunned at first Chi-tse t up. "I'm going, if that's all right with you. If you're not afraid of being seen, I am. Have to save some face for Second Brother."

Gripping the chair to rise, she said, sobbing, "I'll leave." She pulled a handkerchief from her sleeve to dab at her face and suddenly smiled slightly. "You're so protective of your Second Brother."

Chi-tse laughed. "If I don't protect him-, "who will?"

Ch'i-ch'iao said, walking toward the door, "You're a great one to talk. Don't try to act the hypocrite in front of me. Why, just in these rooms alone . . . nothing escapes my eyes-not to mention how wild you are when you get outside the house. You probably wouldn't mind even taking your wet-nurse, let alone a sister-in-law."

"I've always been easygoing. How am I supposed to defend myself if you pick on me?" he said smiling.

On her way out she again leaned her back against the door, whispering, "What I don't get is in what way I'm not as good as the others. What is it about me that's no good?"

"My good sister-in-law, you're all good."

She said with a laugh, "Could it be that staying with a cripple, I smell crippled too, and it will rub off on you?" She stared straight ahead, the small, solid gold pendants of her earrings like two brass nails nailing her to the door, a butterfly specimen in a glass box, bright colored and desolate.

Looking at her, Chi-tse also wondered. But it wouldn't do. He loved to play around but had made up his mind long ago not to flirt with members of the family. When the mood had passed one could neither avoid them nor kick them aside, they'd be a continual burden. Besides, Ch'i-ch'iao was so outspoken and hot-tempered, how could the thing be kept secret? And she was so unpopular, who would cover up for her, high or low? Perhaps she no longer cared and wouldn't even mind if it got known. But why should a young man like him take the risk? He spoke up: "Second Sister-in-law, young as I am, I'm not one who'd do just anything."

There was a sound of footsteps. With a flip of his gown he ducked into Old Mistress's room, grabbing a handful of shelled walnuts on the way. She had not quite come to her senses, but when she heard someone pushing the door she roused herself, managing the best she could to hide behind the door. When she saw Tai-chen walk in, she came out and slapped her on the back.

Tai-chen forced a smile. "You're in better spirits than ever." She looked at the table. "My, so many walnuts, practically all eaten up. It couldn't be anybody but Third Brother.

Ch'i-ch'iao leaned against the table, facing the veranda and saying nothing.

"People had to shell them all morning, and he comes along to enjoy himself," Tai-chen grumbled as she took a seat.

Ch'i-ch'iao scraped the red table cover with a piece of sharp walnut shell, one hard stroke after another until the felt turned hairy and was about to tear. She said between clenched teeth, "Isn't it the same with money? We're always told to save, save it so others can take it out by the handful to spend. That's what I can't get over."

Tai-then glanced at her and said coldly, "That can't be helped. When there're too many people, if it doesn't go on in the open it will go on in the dark. Control this one and you can't control that one."

Ch'i-ch'iao felt the sting and was about to reply in kind when little Shuang came in furtively and walked up to her, murmuring, "Mistress, Master-in-law is here."

"Master-in-law's coming here is nothing to hide. You've got a growth in your throat or what?" Ch'i-ch'iao cursed. "You sound like a mosquito humming."

Little Shuang backed off a step and didn't dare to speak.

Tai-chen said, "So your brother has come to Shanghai. It seems all our relatives are here."

Ch'i-ch'iao started out of the room. "He's not allowed to come to Shanghai? With war inland, poor people want to stay alive too." She stopped at the doorstep and asked Little Shuang, "Have you told Old Mistress?"

"Not yet," said Little Shuang.

Ch'i-ch'iao thought for a moment and went downstairs quietly, since she didn't have the courage after all to go in and tell Old Mistress of her brother's arrival.

Tai-chen asked Little Shuang, "Master-in-law came alone?"

"With Mistress-in-law, carrying food in a set of round two-layered wooden boxes."

Tai-then chuckled. "They went to all that expense."

Little Shuang said, "Eldest Mistress needn't feel sorry for them, What comes in full will go out full too. To them even remnants are good, for making slippers and waistbands, not to mention round or flat pieces of gold and silver."

"Don't be so unkind. You'd better go down," Tai-chen said smiling. "Her family seldom comes here. Not enough service and there'd be trouble again."

Little Shuang hurried out. Ch'i-ch'iao was cross-examining Liu-hsi at the top of the stairs to see if Old Mistress knew. Liu-hsi replied, "Old Mistress was at her prayers, Third Master was leaning against the window looking out, and he said there were guests coming in the front gate. Old Mistress asked who it was. Third Master looked hard and said he wasn't sure that it wasn't Master-in-law Ts'ao, and Old Mistress left it at that."

Fire leaped up in Ch'i-ch'iao as she heard this. She stamped her feet and muttered on her way downstairs, "So-just going to pretend you don't know. If you were going to be so snobbish, why did you bother to carry me here in a sedan chair, complete with three matchmakers and six wedding gifts? Ties of kinship not even a sharp knife can sever. Even if you aren't just feigning death today but really are dead, he'll have to come to your funeral and kowtow three times and you will have to take it."

Her room was screened off by a stack of gold-lacquered trunks right inside the door, leaving just a few feet of space. As she lifted the curtain, she saw her brother's wife bent over the box set to remove the top section, containing little pies, to see if the dishes underneath had spilled. Her brother Ts'ao Ta-nien bowed down to look, hands behind his back. Ch'i-ch'iao felt a wave of acrid pain rising in her heart and could not restrain a shower of tears as she leaned against the trunks, her face pressed against their padded covers of sandy blue loth.

Her sister-in-law straightened up hastily and rushed up to hold her hand in both of hers, calling her Miss over and over again. Ts'ao Ta-nien also had to rub his eyes with a raised sleeve. Ch'i-ch'iao unbuttoned the frog fastenings on the trunk-covers with her free hand, only to button them up again, unable to say anything all the while.

Her sister-in-law turned to give her brother a look. "Say something! Talking about Sister all the time, but now you see her you're like the gourd with its mouth sawed off." ⁸

Ch'i-ch'iao said in a quavering voice, "No wonder he has nothing to say-how could he face me?" and turning to her brother, "I thought you would never want to come here! You've ruined me good and proper. Just like that you walked away, but I couldn't leave. You don't care if I live or die."

Ts'ao Ta-nien said, "What are you saying? I expect it from other people, but for you to talk like this! If you don't cover up for me you won't look so good either."

"Even if I say nothing, I can't keep other people from talking. Just because of you the anger is making me sick. And after all this, you're still trying to gag me!"

Her sister-in-law interposed quickly, "It was his fault, his fault! Miss has been put upon. However, Miss hasn't suffered just on that account alone be patient anyway, there'll be happiness in the end." The words "However, Miss hasn't suffered just on that account alone" struck Ch'i-ch'iao as so true that she began to weep. This made her sister-in-law so nervous she immediately raised her hand and waved it rapidly from side to side, murmuring, "Be careful you don't wake Ku-yeh." ⁹ The net curtains hung still on the big dark bed of purple cedar over on the other side of the room. "Is Ku-yeh asleep? He'd be angry if we disturbed him."

Ch'i-ch'iao called out loudly, "If he can react like a human being it won't be so bad."

Her sister-in-law was so frightened she covered Ch'i-ch'iao's mouth. "Don't, Ku-nai-nai! ¹⁰ Sick people feel bad when they hear such talk."

"He feels bad and how do I feel?"

Her sister-in-law said, "Is Ku-yeh still suffering from the soft bone illness?"

"Isn't that enough to bear, without further complications? Here the whole family avoids mentioning the word tuberculosis-actually it's just tuberculosis of the bones."

"Does he sit up for a while sometimes?"

Ch'i-ch'iao started to chuckle. "Huh huh! Sit up and the spine slides down, not even as tall as my three-year-old, to look at."

Her sister-in-law ran out of comforting words for the moment and all three were speechless. Ch'i-ch'iao suddenly stamped her feet, saying, "Go, go, you people. Every time you come I have to review once more in my mind how everything has led to this, and I can't stand the agitation. Leave quickly."

Ts'ao Ta-nien said, "Listen to a word from me, Sister. Having your own family around makes it a little better anyhow, and not just now when you're unhappy. Even when your day of independence comes, the Chiangs are a big clan, the elders keep browbeating people with high-sounding words, and those of your generation and the next are like wolves and tigers, every one of them, not a single one easy to deal with. You need help for your own sake too. There will be plenty of times when you could use your brother and nephews."

Ch'i-ch'iao made a spitting noise. "I'd really be out of luck if I had to rely on your help. I saw through you long ago-if you could fight them you'd gain more credit and you'd come to me for money; if you're no match for them you'd just topple over to their side. The sight of mandarins scares you out of your wits anyway: you'll just pull in your neck and leave me to my fate."

Ta-nien flushed and laughed sardonically. "Wait until the money is in your hands. It won't be too late then to keep your brother from getting a share."

"Then why bother me when you know it's not in my hands yet?"

"So we were wrong to come all this distance to see you!" he said. "Come on, let's go. To be perfectly frank though, even if I use a bit of your money it's only fair. If I'd been greedy for wedding gifts and asked for another few hundred taels of silver from the Chiangs and sold you for a concubine, you'd have been sold,"

"Isn't a wife better for you than a concubine? Kites go farther on a longer string; you have big hopes yet."

Ta-nien was going to retort when his wife cut in, "Now hold your tongue. You'll meet again in days to come. One day when Ku-nai-nai thinks of you she'll know she has only one brother."

Ta-nien hustled her into tidying the box set, picked it up, and started out.

"What do I care?" Ch'i-ch'iao said. "When I have money I won't have to worry about your not coming, only how to get rid of you." Despite her harsh words she could not hold back the sobs that got louder and louder. This quarrel had made it possible for her to release the frustrations pent up all morning long.

Her sister-in-law, seeing that she was evidently dinging to them a little, cajoled and lectured and succeeded in pacifying her brother, and at the same time, with her arm around her, led her to the carved pearwood couch, set her down, and patiently reasoned with her until her tears gradually dried. The three now talked about everyday affairs. It was more or less peaceful in the north, with business as usual at the Ts'aos' sesame oil shop. Their present trip to Shanghai had to do with their future son-in-law, a bookkeeper who happened to be in Hupeh when the revolution started. He had left the place with his employer and finally come to Shanghai. So Ta-nien had brought his daughter here to be married, visiting his sister on the side. Ta-nien asked after all the Chiangs of the house and wanted to pay his respects to Old Mistress.

"Just as well if you don't see her," said Ch'ich'iao. "I just had an argument with her." Ta-nien and his wife were both startled.

"How can I help myself?" Ch'i-ch'iao said. "The whole family treading me down. If I'd been easy to bully I'd have been trampled to death long ago. As it is, I'm full of aches and pains from anger."

"Do you still smoke, Miss?" her sister-in-law said. "Opium-is still better than any other medicine for soothing the liver and composing the nerves. Be sure that you take good care of yourself, Miss. We're not around, and who else is there to look after you?"

Ch'i-ch'iao went through her trunks and took out lengths of silk in new designs to give to her sister-in-law, and also a pair of -gold bracelets weighing four taels, a pair of carnelian hairpins shaped like lotus pods, and a quilt of silk fluff. She had for each niece a gold ear spoon and for each nephew a miniature gold ingot or a sable hat, and handed her brother an enameled gold watch shaped like a cicada. Her brother and sister-in-law hastened to thank her.

"You came at the wrong moment," Ch'i-ch'iao said. "When we were just about to leave Peking, what we couldn't take was all given to the amahs and slave girls, several trunkfuls they got for nothing."

They looked embarrassed at this. As they took their leave, her sister-in-law said, "When we've got our daughter off our hands, we'll come and see Ku-nai-nai again."

"Just as well if you don't," Ch'i-ch'iao said, smiling. "I can't afford it."

When they got out of the Chiangs' house her sister-in-law said, "How is it Ku-nai-nai has changed so? Before she was married she may have been a bit proud and talked a little too much. Even later, when we went to see her, she had more of a temper but there was still a limit. She wasn't silly as she is now, sane enough one minute and the next minute off again, and altogether disagreeable."

Ch'i-ch'iao stood in the room holding her elbows and watched the two slave girls, Little Shuang and Ch'iang-yiin, carrying the trunks between them and stacking them back one by one. The things of the past came back again: the sesame oil shop over the cobbled street, the blackened greasy counter, the wooden spoons standing in the buckets of sesame butter, and iron spoons of all sizes strung up above the oil jars. Insert the funnel in the customer's bottle. One big spoon plus two small spoons make a bottle-one and a half catties. Counts as one catty and four ounces if it's somebody she knows. Sometimes she went marketing too, in a blouse and pants of blue linen trimmed with mirror-bright black silk. Across the thick row of brass hooks from which pork dangled she saw Ch'ao-lu of the butcher shop. Ch'ao-lu was always after her, calling her Miss Ts'ao, and on rare occasions Little Miss Ch'iao,¹¹ and she would give the rack of hooks a slap that sent all the empty hooks swinging across to poke him in the eye. Ch'ao-lu plucked a piece of raw fat a foot wide off the hook and threw it down hard on the block, and a warm odor rushed to her face, the smell of sticky dead flesh . . . she frowned. On the bed lay her husband, that lifeless body . . .

A gust of wind came in the window and blew against the long mirror in the lacquered scroll-work frame until it rattled against the wall. Ch'ich'iao pressed the mirror down with both hands. The green bamboo curtain and a green and gold landscape scroll reflected in the mirror went on swinging back and forth in the wind—one could get dizzy watching it for long. When she looked again the green bamboo curtain had faded, the green and gold landscape was replaced by a photograph of her deceased husband, and the woman in the mirror was ten years older.

Last year she wore mourning for her husband and this year her mother-in-law had passed away. Now her husband's uncle Ninth Old Master, was formally invite to come and divide the property among the survivors. Today was the focal point of all her imagings since she had married into the I house of Chiang. All these years she had worn the golden cangue but never even got to gnaw at the edge of the gold. It would be different from now on. In her white satin blouse and black skirt she looked rouged, from the eyes rubbed red to the feverish cheekbones. She lifted her hand to touch her face. It was flushed but the rest of her body was so cold she was actually trembling. She told Ch'iang-yiin to pour her a cup of tea. (Little Shuang had been married long ago; Ch'iang-yiin also was mated, with a page.) The tea she drank flowed heavily into her chest cavity and her heart jumped, thumping in the hot tea. She sat down with her back to the mirror and asked Ch'iangyun, "All this time Ninth Old Master has been here this afternoon, he's just been going over the accounts with Secretary Ma?"

Ch'iang-yun answered yes.

"Eldest Master and Eldest Mistress, Third Master and Third Mistress, none of them is around?"

Ch'iang-yun answered yes.

"Who else did he go to see?"

"Just took a turn in the schoolroom," said Ch'iang-yun.

"At least our Master Pai's studies could bear looking into . . . The trouble with the child this year is what happened to his father and grandmother, one after the other. If he still feels like studying, he's born of beasts." She finished her tea and told Ch'iang-yun to go down and see if the people of the eldest and third branches were all in the parlor, so she would not be too early and be laughed at for seeming eager. It happened that the eldest branch had also sent a slave girl to inquire, who came face to face with Ch'iang-yun.

Ch'i-ch'iao finally came downstairs, slowly, gracefully. A foreign-style dining table of ebony polished like a mirror was set up in the parlor for the occasion. Ninth Old Master occupied one side by himself, the account books with blue cloth covers and plum-red labels

heaped before him along with a melon-ribbed teacup. Around him, besides Secretary Ma, were the specially invited *kung chin*, relatives no closer to one than to the other, serving more or less in the capacity of assistant judges. Eldest Master and Third Master represented their respective branches, but Second Master having died, his branch was represented by Second Mistress. Chi-tse, who knew very well that this day of reckoning boded no good for him, arrived last. But once there he showed no anxiety or depression: that same plump red smile was still on his cheeks, and in his eyes still that bit of dashing impatience.

Ninth Old Master coughed and made a brief report on the Chiangs' finances. Leafing through the account books, he read out the main holdings of land and houses and the annual income from each of these. Ch'i-ch'iao leaned forward with hands locked tight over her stomach, trying hard to understand every sentence he uttered and match it with the results of her past investigations. The houses in Tsingtao, the houses in Tientsin, the land in the home town, the land outside Peking, the houses in Shanghai . . . Third Master had borrowed too much from the general accounts and for too long. Apart from his share, now canceled out, he still owed sixty thousand dollars, but the eldest and second branches had to let it go, since he had nothing. The only house he owned, a foreign-style building with a garden bought for a concubine, was already mortgaged. Then there was just the jewelry that Old Mistress had brought with her as a bride, to be divided evenly among the three brothers. Chi-tse's share could not very well be confiscated, being a memento left by his mother.

Ch'i-ch'iao suddenly cried out, "Ninth Old Master, this is too hard on us."

The parlor had been dead quiet before; now the silence sawed straight into the ears, like the sandy rustle of a movie with a broken sound track grating rustily on. Ninth Old Master opened his eyes wide to look at her. "What? You wouldn't even let him have the bit of jewelry his mother left?"

"Even brothers settle their accounts openly," Ch'i-ch'iao quoted. "Eldest Brother and Sister-in-law say nothing, but I have to be tough-skinned and speak out this once. I can't compare with Eldest Brother and Sister-in-law. If the one we lost had been able to go out and be a mandarin for a couple of terms and save some money, I'd be glad to be generous too-what if we cancel all the old accounts? Only that one of ours was pitiful, ailing and groaning all his life, never earned a copper coin. Left a widow and orphans who're counting on just this small fixed sum to live on. I'm a crab without legs and Ch'ang-pai is not yet fourteen, with plenty of hard days ahead." Her tears fell as she spoke.

"What do you want, then, if you may have your way?" said Ninth Old Master.

"It's not for me to decide," she said, sobbing. "I'm only begging Ninth Old Master to settle it for me."

Chi-tse, cold-faced, said nothing. The whole roomful of people felt it was not for them to speak. Ninth Old Master, unable to keep down a bellyful of fire, snorted: "I'd make a suggestion, only I'm afraid you won't like it. The second branch has land and nobody to look after it. The third branch has a man but no land. I'd have Third Master look after it for you for a consideration, whatever you see fit, only you may not want him."

Ch'i-ch'iao laughed sardonically. "I'd have it your way, only I'm afraid the dead one will not. Come, somebody! Ch'iang-yiin, go and get Master Pai for me. Ch'ang-pai, what a hard life your father had! Born with ailments all over, went through life like a wretch, and for what? Never had a single comfortable day. In the end he left you, all there is of his bone and blood, and people still won't let you be, there're a thousand designs on your property. Ch'ang-pai, it's your father's fault that he dragged himself around with all his illnesses, bullied when he was alive, to have his widow and orphan bullied when he's dead. I don't matter-how many more scores of years can I live? At worst I'd go and explain this before Old Mistress's spirit

tablet and kill myself in protest. But Ch'ang-pai, you're so young, you still have your life to live even if there's nothing to eat or drink but the northwest wind!"

Ninth Old Master was so angry he slapped the table. "I wash my hands of this! It was you people who begged and kowtowed to make me come. Do you think I like to go around looking for trouble?" He stood up, kicked the chair over and, without waiting to be seen out of the room, strode out of sight in a gust of wind.

The others looked at one another and slipped out one by one. Only Secretary Ma was left behind busily tidying up the account books. He thought that, with everybody gone and Second Mistress sitting there alone beating her breast and Wailing, it would be embarrassing if he just walked off, and so he went up to her, bowing repeatedly, moving his hands up and down in obeisance, and calling, "Second Mistress! Second Mistress! . . . Second Mistress!" Ch'i-ch'iao just covered her face with a sleeve. Secretary Ma could not very well pull her hand away. Perspiring in his despair, he took off his black satin skullcap to fan himself.

The awkward situation lasted for a few days, and then the property was divided quietly according to the original plan. The widow and orphans were still taken advantage of.

Ch'i-ch'iao took her son Ch'ang-pai and daughter Ch'ang-an and rented another house to live in, and seldom saw the Chiangs' other branches. Several months later Chiang Chi-tse suddenly appeared. When the amah announced the visit upstairs, Ch'i-ch'iao was secretly worried that she had offended him that day at the family conference over the division of property, and wondered what he was going to do about it. But "an army comes and generals fend it off"; why should she be afraid of him? She tied on a black skirt of ironthread gauze under the Buddha-blue solid gauze jacket she was wearing and came downstairs. When Chi-tse got up, all smiles, to give his best regards to Second Sister-in-law, and asked if Master Pai was in the schoolroom and if Little Miss An's ringworm was cured, Ch'i-ch'iao suspected he was here to borrow money. Doubly on guard, she sat down and said smiling, "You've gained weight again lately, Third Brother."

"I seem like a man without a thing on his mind," said Chi-tse.

"Well, 'A lucky man need never be busy.' You're never one to worry," she said smiling.

"I'd have fewer worries than ever if I sold my landed property," he said.

"You mean the house you mortgaged? You want to sell it?"

"Quite a lot of thought went into it when it was built and I loved some of the fixtures; of course I wouldn't want to part with it. But later, as you know, land got expensive over there, so the year before last I tore it down and built in its place a row of houses. But it was really too much bother collecting rent from house to house, dealing with those tenants; so I thought I'd get rid of the property just for the sake of peace and quiet."

Ch'i-ch'iao said to herself, "How grand we sound! Still acting the rich young master before me when I know all about you!"

Although he was not complaining of poverty to her, any mention of money transactions seemed to lead them onto dangerous ground, and so she changed the subject. "How is Third Sister? Her kidneys haven't been bothering her lately?"

"I haven't seen her for some time," Chi-tse said smiling.

"What's this? Have you quarreled?"

"We haven't quarreled either all this time," he said, smiling. "Exchange a few words when we have to but that's also rare. No time to quarrel and no mood for it."

"You're exaggerating. I for one don't believe it."

He rested his elbows on the arms of the rattan chair, locking his fingers to shade his eyes, and sighed deeply.

"Unless it's because you play around too much outside. You're in the wrong and still sighing away as if you were wronged. There's not one could you believe me? Ever since you came to our good man among you Chiangs!" she said, smiling, and lifted her round

white fan as if to strike him. He moved his interlocked fingers downward, with both thumbs pressed on his lips and the forefingers slowly striking the bridge of his nose, and his eyes seemed brighter. The irises were the black pebbles at the bottom of a bowl of narcissus, covered with cold water and expressionless. It was impossible to tell what he was thinking. "I should beat you," she said.

A bubble of mirth came up in his eyes. "Go ahead, beat me."

She was about to hit him, snatched back her hand, and then again mustered her strength and said, "I'd really beat you!" She swung her arm downward, but the descending fan remained in midair as she started to giggle.

He raised a shoulder toward her, smiling. "You'd better hit me just once. As it is, my bones are itching for punishment."

She hid the fan behind her, chuckling.

Chi-tse moved his chair around and sat facing the wall, leaning back heavily with both hands over his eyes, and heaved another sigh.

Ch'i-ch'iao chewed on her fan handle and looked at him from the corners of her eyes. "What's the matter with you today? Can't stand the heat?"

"You wouldn't know." After a long pause he said in a low voice, enunciating each word distinctly. "You know why I can't get on with the one at home, why I played so hard outside and squandered all my money. Who do you think it's all for?"

Ch'i-ch'iao was a bit frightened. She walked a long way off and leaned on the mantelpiece, the expression on her face slowly changing. Chi-tse followed her. Her head was bent and her right elbow rested on the mantelpiece. In her right hand was her fan, whose apricot-yellow tassel trailed down over her forehead. He stood before her and whispered, "Second Sister-in-law! . . . Ch'i-ch'iao!"

Ch'i-ch'iao turned her face away and smiled blandly. "As if I'd believe you!"

So he also walked away. "That's right. How could you believe me? Ever since you came to our house I couldn't stay there a minute, only wanted to get out. I was never so wild before you came; later it was to avoid you that I stayed out. After I was married to Lan-hsien, I played harder than ever because besides avoiding you I had to avoid her too. When I did see you, scarcely two sentences were exchanged before I lost my temper-how could you know the pain in my heart? When you were good to me, I felt still worse-I had to control myself-I couldn't ruin you like that. So many people at home, all watching us. If people should know, it wouldn't matter too much for me, I was a man, but what was going to happen to you?"

Ch'i-ch'iao's hands trembled until the yellow tassel on the fan handle rustled on her forehead.

"Whether you believe it or not makes little difference," he said. "What if you do believe it? Half our lives are over anyway. It's no use talking about it. I'm just asking you to understand the way I felt; then my suffering on your account wouldn't be totally in vain."

Ch'i-ch'iao bowed her head, basking in glory, in the soft music of his voice and the delicate pleasure of this occasion. So many years now, she had been playing hide-and-seek with him and never could get close, and there had still been a day like this in store for her. True, half a lifetime had gone by-the flower-years of her youth. Life is so devious and unreasonable. Why had she married into the Chiang family? For money? No, to meet Chi-tse, because it was fated that she should be in love with him. She lifted her face slightly. He was standing in front of her with flat hands dosed on her fan and his cheek pressed against it. He was ten years older too, but he was after all the same person. Could he be lying to her? He wanted her money-the money she had sold her life for? The very idea enraged her. : Even if she had him wrong there, could he have suffered as much for her as she did for him? Now that she had finally given up all thoughts of love he was here again to tempt her. His

eyes-after ten years he was still the same person. Even if he were lying to her, wouldn't it be better to find out a little later? Even if she knew very well it was lies, he was such a good actor, wouldn't it be almost real?

No, she could not give this rascal any hold on her. The Chiangs were very shrewd; she might not be able to keep her money. She had to prove first whether he really meant it. She took a grip on herself, looked outside the door, gasped under her breath, "Somebody there!" and rushed out. She went to the amahs' quarters to tell Fan Ma to get the tea things for Third Master.

Coming back to the room, she frowned, saying, "So hateful-amah peering outside the door, turned and ran the minute she saw me. I went after her and stopped her. Who knows what stories they'd make up if we'd talked, however briefly, with the door shut. No peace even living by yourself."

Pan Ma brought the tea things and chilled sour plum juice. With her chopsticks Ch'i-ch'iao picked the shredded roses and green plums off the top of the honey cake for Chi-tse. "I remember you don't like the red and green shreds," she said.

He just smiled, unable to say anything with people around.

Ch'i-ch'iao made conversation. "How are you getting on with the houses you were going to sell?"

Chi-tse answered as he ate, "Some people offered eighty-five thousand; I haven't decided yet."

Ch'i-ch'iao paused to reflect. "The district is good

"Everybody is against my getting rid of the property, says the price is still going up."

Ch'i-ch'iao asked for more particulars, then said, "A pity I haven't got that much cash in hand, otherwise I'd like to buy it."

"Actually there's no hurry about my property; it's your land in our part of the country that should be gotten rid of soon. Ever since we became a republic it's been one war after another, never missed a single year. The area is so messed up and with all the graft-the collectors and bookkeepers and the local powers-how much do we get when it comes our turn, even in a yeai+of good harvest? And these last few years it's been either flood or drought."

Ch'i-ch'iao pondered. "I've done some calculating and kept putting it off. If only I'd sold it, then I wouldn't be caught. shortjust when I want to buy your houses."

"If you want to sell that land it had better be now. I heard Hopeh and Shantung are going to be in the war again."

"Who am I to sell it to in such a hurry?"

He said after a moment of hesitation, "All right, I'll make some inquiries for you."

Ch'i-ch'iao lifted her eyebrows and said, smiling, "Go on! You and that pack of foxes and dogs you run with, who is there that's halfway reliable?"

Chi-tse dipped a dumpling that he had bitten open into the little dish of vinegar, taking his time, and mentioned a couple of reliable names. Ch'i-ch'iao then seriously questioned him on details and he set his answers out tidily, evidently well prepared.

Ch'i-ch'iao continued to smile but her mouth felt dry; her upper lip stuck on her gum and would not come down. She raised the lidded teacup to suck a mouthful of tea, licked her lips, and suddenly jumped up with a set face and threw her fan at his head. The round fan went wheeling through the air, knocked his shoulder as he ducked slightly to the left, and upset his glass. The sour plum juice spilled all over him.

"You want me to sell land to buy your houses? You want me to sell land? Once the money goes through your hands what can I count on? You'd con me-you're trying to con me with such talkyou take me for a fool=" She leaned across the table to hit him, but Pan Ma held her in a desperate embrace and started to yell. Ch'iang-yun and the others came running,

pressed her down between them, pleaded noisily. Ch'i-ch'iao struggled and barked orders at the same time, but with a sinking heart she quite realized she was being foolish, too foolish. She was making a spectacle of herself.

Chi-tse took off his drenched white satin gown. Pan Ma brought a hot towel to wipe it for him. He paid her no attention but, before sauntering out the door with his gown on his arm, he said to Ch'iang-Yun, "When Master Pai finishes his lesson for the day, tell him to get a doctor for his mother." Ch'iang-yun, who was too frightened by the proceedings not to say yes, received a resounding slap on the face from Ch'i-ch'iao. Chi-tse was gone. The slave girls and amahs were scolded and also hurriedly left her. Drop by drop, the sour plum juice trickled down the table, keeping time like a water dock at night-one drip, another drip-the first watch of the night, the second watch-one year, a hundred years. So long, this silent moment. Ch'i-ch'iao stood there, holding her head up with one hand. In another second she had turned around and was hurrying upstairs. Lifting her skirt, she half climbed and half stumbled her way up, continually bumping against the dingy wall of green plaster. Her Buddha-blue jacket was smudged with patches of pale chalk. She wanted another glimpse of him from the upstairs window. No matter what, she had loved him before. Her love had given her endless pain. That alone should make him worthy of her continuing regard. How many times had she strained to repress herself until all her muscles and bones and gums ached with sharp pain. Today it all had been her fault. It wasn't as if she didn't know he was no good. If she wanted him she had to pretend ignorance and put up with his ways. Why had she exposed him? Wasn't life just like this and no more than this? In the end what was real and what was false?

She reached the window and pulled aside the dark green foreign-style curtains fringed in little velvet balls. Chi-tse was going out the alley, his gown slung over his arm. Like a flock of white pigeons, the wind on that sunny day fluttered inside his white silk blouse and trousers. It penetrated everywhere, flapping its wings.

A curtain of ice-cold pearls seemed to hang in front of Ch'i-ch'iao's eyes. A hot wind would press the curtain tight on her face, and after being sucked back by the wind for a moment, it would muffle all her head and face before she could draw breath. In such alternately hot and cold waves her tears flowed.

The tiny shrunken image of a policeman reflected faintly in the top corner of the window glass ambled by swinging his arms. A ricksha quietly ran over the policeman. A little boy with his long gown tucked up into his trouser waist ran kicking a ball out the edge of the glass. A postman in green riding a bicycle superimposed his image on the policeman as he streaked by. All ghosts, ghosts of many years ago or the unborn of many years hence . . . What is real and what is false?

The autumn passed, then the winter, Chi-chiao was out of touch with reality, feeling a little lost despite the usual falces of temper which prompted her to beat slave girls and change cooks. Her brother and his wife came to Shanghai to see her twice and stayed each time not longer than ten days, because in the end they could not stand her nagging, even though she would give them parting presents. Her nephew Ts'ao Ch'unhsi came to town to look for work and stayed at her house. Though none too bright, -th' ouch knew his place. Ch'i-Ch'iao's son was now fourteen, and her aughte Ch'un -, a ' about a year younger, but they baked only about seven or eight, being small and thin. During the New Year holidays the boy wore a bright blue padded gown of heavy silk and the girl a bright green brocade padded gown, both so thickly wadded that their arms stuck out straight. Standing side by side, both looked like paper dolls, with their flat thin white faces. One day after lunch Ch'i-ch'iao was not up yet. Ts'ao Ch'un-hsi kept the brother and sister company throwing dice. Ch'ang-an had lost all her New Year money gifts and still would not stop playing. Ch'ang-pai swept

all the copper coins on the table toward himself and said, smiling, "I won't play with you anymore."

"We'll play with candied lotus seeds," Ch'ang-an said.

"The sugar will stain your clothes if you keep them in your pocket," Ch'un-hsi said:

"Watermelon seeds will do. There's a can of them on top of the wardrobe," said Ch'ang-an. So she moved a small tea table over and stepped on a chair to get on the table to reach up.

Ch'un-hsi was so nervous he called out, "Don't you fall down, little Miss An, I can't shoulder the blame." The words were scarcely out of his mouth when Ch'ang-an suddenly tipped backward and would have toppled down if he had not caught her. Ch'ang-pai clapped his hands, laughing, while Ch'un-hsi, though he muttered curses, also could not help laughing. All three of them dissolved in mirth. Lifting her down, Ch'un-hsi suddenly saw in the mirror of the rosewood wardrobe Ch'i-ch'iao standing in the doorway with her arms akimbo, her hair not yet done. Somewhat taken aback, he quickly set Ch'ang-an down and turned around to greet her: "Aunt is up."

Ch'i-ch'iao rushed over and pushed Ch'ang-an behind her. Ch'ang-an lost her balance and fell down, but Ch'i-ch'iao continued shielding her with her own body while she cried harshly to Ch'un-hsi "You wolf-hearted, dog-lunged creature, I' fix you! After all the teas and meals I've served you, what ground have I given you for complaint? How could you take advantage of my daughter? You think I can't see what's in your wolf's and dog's lungs? Don't you go thingking if you teach my daughter bad things I'll have to hold my nose and marry her to you, so you can take over our property. A fool like you couldn't think of such a trick, I must be your parents who taught you, led you by the hand. Those two wolf-hearted, dog-lunged, ungrateful, old addled eggs, they're determined to get my money. When one scheme fails they try another."

Ch'un-hsi, staring white-eyed in his anger, was about to defend himself when Ch'i-ch'iao said, "Aren't you ashamed? You'd still answer back? Get out of my sight; don't wait for my men to drive you out with rods." So saying, she pushed her son and daughter out and then left the room herself, supported by a slave girl. Being a quicktempered youth, Ch'un-hsi rolled up his bedding and left the Chiang house forthwith.

Ch'i-ch'iao returned to the living room and lay down on the 'pium couch. With the velvet curtains drawn it was dark in the room. Only when the wind came in through the crevices and moved the curtains was a bit of sky hazily visible under hems fringed with green velvet balls. There was just the opium lamp and the dim light of the stove burning red. Having had a fright, Ch'ang-an sat stunned on a little stool by the stove.

"Come over here," Ch'i-ch'iao said.

Ch'ang-an didn't move at first, thinking her mother would hit her. She fiddled with the laundry hung on the tin screen around the stove and turned over a cotton undershirt with little pink checks, saying, "It's almost burned." The shirt gave out a hot smell of cloth fuzz.

But Ch'i-ch'iao, not quite in the mood to beat or scold her, simply said matter-of-factly, "You'll be thirteen after the New Year, you should have more sense. Although Cousin is no outsider, men are all rotten without exception. You should know how to take care of yourself. Who's not after your money?" A gust of wind passed, showing the cold white sky between the velvet balls on the curtains, puncturing with a row of little holes the warm darkness in the room. The flame of the opium lamp ducked and the shadows on Ch'i-ch'iao's face seemed a shade deeper. She suddenly sat up to whisper, "Men . . . leave them alone! Who's not after your money? Your mother's bit of money didn't come easy, nor is it easy to keep. When it comes to you two, I can't look on and see you get cheated. I'm telling you to be more on guard from now on, you hear?"

"I hear," Ch'ang-an said with her head down.

One of Ch'i-ch'iao's feet was going to sleep, and she reached down to pinch it. Just for a moment a gentle memory stirred in her eyes. She remembered a man who was after her money.

Her bound feet had been padded with cotton wool to simulate the reformed feet, half let out. As she looked at them, something occurred to her and she said with a cynical laugh, "You may say yes, but how do I know if you're sensible or silly at heart? You're so big already, and with a pair of big feet, where can't you go? Even if I could control you, I wouldn't have the energy to watch you all day long. Actually at thirteen it's already too late for foot-binding, it's my fault not to have seen to it earlier. We'll start right now, there's still time."

Ch'ang-an was momentarily at a loss for an answer, but the amahs standing around said, smiling, "Small feet are not fashionable anymore. To have her feet bound will perhaps mean trouble when the time comes for Little Miss to get engaged."

"What nonsense! I'm not worried about my daughter having no takers; you people needn't bother to worry for me. If nobody really wants her and she has to be kept all her life, I can afford it too."

She actually started to bind her daughter's feet, and Ch'ang-an howled in great pain. But then even women in conservative families like the Chiangs' were letting out their bound feet, to say nothing of girls whose feet had never been bound. Everybody talked about Ch'ang-an's feet as a great joke. After binding them for a year or so, Ch'i-ch'iao's momentary enthusiasm had waned and relatives persuaded her to let them loose, but Ch'ang-an's feet would never be entirely the same again.

All the children of the Chiangs' eldest and third branches went to foreign-style schools. Ch'i-ch'iao, always purposely competing with them, wanted to enroll Ch'ang-pai in one. Besides playing mahjong for small stakes, Ch'ang-pai's only love was amateur Peking opera dubs. He was working hard day and night training his singing voice, and was afraid that school would interfere with his lessons, so he refused to go. In desperation Ch'ich'iao sent Ch'ang-an instead to the Hu Fan Middle School for girls and through connections got her into one of the higher classes. Ch'ang-an changed into a uniform of rough blue "patriotic loth" and in less than six months her complexion turned ruddy and her wrists and ankles grew thicker. The boarders were supposed to have their clothes washed by a laundry concession. Ch'ang-an could not remember her own numbers and often lost pillowcases, handkerchiefs, and other little items, and Ch'i-ch'iao insisted on going to speak to the principal about it. One day when she was home for holidays, in going over the things Ch'i-ch'iao found a sheet missing. She fell into a thundering rage and threatened to go to the school herself the next day to demand satisfaction. Ch'ang-an in dismay tried just once to stop her and Ch'i-ch'iao scolded, "You good-for-nothing wastrel. Your mother's money is not money to you. Did your mother's money come easy? What dowry will I have to give you when you get married? Whatever I give you will be given in vain."

Ch'ang-an did not dare say anything in reply and cried all night. She could not bear to lose face like this in front of her schoolmates. To a fourteen-year-old that seems of the greatest importance. How was she to face people from now on if her mother went and made a scene? She would rather die than go to school again. Her friends, the music teacher she liked, they would soon forget there was a girl who had come for half a year and left quietly for no reason. A dean break-she felt this sacrifice was a beautiful desolate gesture.

At midnight she crawled out of bed and put a hand outside the window. Pitch-dark, was it raining? No raindrops. She took a harmonica from the side of her pillow and half squatted, half sat on the floor, blowing it stealthily. Hesitantly the little tune of "Long, Long Ago" twirled and spread out in the huge night. People must not hear. Strictly controlled, the thin, wailing music of the harmonica kept trailing off and on like a baby sobbing. Short of breath, she stopped for a while. Through the window the moon had come out of the clouds: a dark gray sky

dotted sparsely with stars and a blurred chip of a moon, like a lithographed picture. White clouds steaming up underneath and a faint halo over the street lamp showing among the top branches of a tree. Ch'an -a ted her harmonica again. "Tell me the tales that to me were so dear, long, long ago, long, long ago . . ."

The next day she summoned up enough courage to tell her mother, "I don't feel like going back to school, Mother."

Chi-ch'iao opened her eyes wide. "Why?"

"I can't keep up with the lessons, and the food is too bad, I can't get used to it."

Chi-ch'iao took off a slipper and slapped her off-handedly, with its sole, saying bitterly, "Your father wasn't as good as other people, you're also not as good? You weren't born a freak; you're just being perverse so as to disappoint me."

Looking down, Ch'ang-an stood with her hands behind her back and would not speak. So the amahs intervened: "Little Miss is grown up now, and it's not convenient for her to go to school where there're all sorts of people. Actually, it's just as well for her not to go."

Chi-ch'iao paused to reflect. "At least we have to get the tuition back. Why give it to them for nothing?" She wanted Ch'ang-an to go with her to collect it. Ch'ang-an would have fought to the death rather than go. Chi-ch'iao took two amahs with her. The way she told it when she returned, although she did not get the money back, she had thoroughly humiliated the principal. Afterward, when Ch'ang-an met any of her schoolmates on the street, she reddened and paled alternately. Earth had no room for her. She could only pretend not to see and walk past them hastily. When friends wrote her, she dared not even open the letters but just sent them back. Thus her school life came to an end.

Sometimes she felt the sacrifice was not worth it and was secretly sorry, but it was too late. She gradually gave up all thought of selfimprovement and kept to her place. She learned to make trouble, play little tricks, and interfere with the running of the house. She often fell out with her mother, but she ooked and sounded more and more like her. Every time she wore a pair of unlined trousers and sat with her legs apart and the palms of both hands on the stool in front of her, her head tilted to one side, her chin on her chest, looking dismally but intently at the woman opposite and telling her, "Every family has its own troubles, Cousin-in-law-every family has its own troubles!", she seemed the spit and image of Chi-ch'iao. She wore a pigtail and her eyes and eyebrows had a taut expressiveness about them reminiscent of Chi-ch'iao in her prime, but her small mouth was a bit too drawn which made her look older. Even when she had been younger, she did not seem fresh, but was like a tender bunch of vegetables that had been salted.

Some people tried to make matches for her. If the other side was not well off, Chi-ch'iao would always suspect it wanted their money. If the other side had wealth and influence, it would show little enthusiasm. Ch'ang-an had only average good looks, and since her mother was not only lowborn but also known for her shrewishness, she probably would not have much upbringing. So the high were out of reach and the low Chi-ch'iao would not stoop to-
Cb_an~-an stayed home year after year. But Ch'ang-pai's marriage could not be delayed. When he gambled outside and showed enough personal interest in certain Peking opera actresses to attend their performances regularly, Chi-ch'iao still had nothing to say; she got alarmed only when he started to go to brothels with his Third Uncle Chiang Chi-tse. In great haste she betrothed and married him to a Miss Yuan, called Cfi-shou as a child.

The wedding ceremony was half modern, and the bride, without the customary red kerchief over her head and face, wore blue eyeglasses and a pink wedding veil instead, and a pink blouse and skirt with multicolored embroidery. The glasses were removed after she entered the bridal chamber and sat with bowed head under the turquoise-colored bed curtains. The guests gathered for the "riot in the bridal chamber" surrounded her, making jokes. After

taking a look, Ch'i-ch'iao came out. Ch'ang-an overtook her at the door and whispered, "Fair-skinned, only the lips are a bit too thick."

Ch'i-ch'iao leaned on the doorway, took a gold ear spoon from her bun to scratch her head with, and laughed sardonically. "Don't start on that now. Your new sister-in-law's thick lips, chop them up and they'll make a heaping dish!"

"Well, it's said that people with thick lips have warm feelings," said a lady beside her.

Ch'i-ch'iao snorted; pointing her gold ear spoon at the woman, she lifted an eyebrow and said with a crooked little smile, "It isn't so nice to have warm feelings. I can't say much in front of young ladies-just hope our Master Pai won't die in her hands." Ch'i-ch'iao was born with a high clear voice, which had grown less shrill as she grew older, but it was still cutting, or rather rasping, like a razor blade. Her last remark could not be called loud, but it was not exactly soft. Could the bride, surrounded by a crowd as she was, possibly have registered a quiver on her severely flat face and chest? Probably it was just a reflection of the flames leaping on the tall pair of dragon-andphoenix candles.

After the Third Day Ch'i-ch'iao found the bride stuff and unsatisfactory in various things often complained to relatives. Some said placatingly, "The bride is young. Second Sister-in-law will just have to take the trouble to teach her. The child is simply naive."

Ch'i-ch'iao made a spitting noise. "Our new young mistress may look innocent-but as soon as she sees Master Pai she has to go and sit on the nightstool. Really! It sounds unbelievable, doesn't it?"

When the talk reached Chih-shou's ears, she wanted to kill herself. This was before the end of the first month, when Ch'i-ch'iao still kept up appearances. Later she would even say such things in front of Chih-shou, who could neither cry nor laugh with impunity. And if she merely looked wooden, pretending not to listen, Ch'i-ch'iao would slap the table and sigh, "It's really not easy, to eat a mouthful of rice in the house of your son and daughter-in-law! People pull a long face at you at the drop of a hat."

One night Ch'i-ch'iao was lying on the opium couch smoking while Ch'ang-pai crouched on a nearby upholstered chair cracking watermelon seeds. The radio was broadcasting a little-known Peking opera. He followed it in a book, humming the lyrics word by word, and as he got into the mood, swung a leg up over the back of the chair rocking it back and forth to mark the rhythm.

Ch'i-ch'iao reached out a foot and kicked at him. "Come Master Pai, fill the pipe for me a couple of times."

"With an opium lamp right there why put me to work? I have honey on my fingers or something=" Ch'ang-pai stretched himself while replying and slowly moved over to the little stool in front of the opium lamp and rolled up his sleeves.

"Unfilial slave, what kind of answer is that! Putting you to work is an honor." She looked at him through slitted, smiling eyes. All these years he had been the only man in her life. Only with him there was no danger of his being after her money-it was his anyway. But as her son, he amounted to less than half a man. And even the half she could not keep, now that he was married. He was a slight, pale young man, a bit hunched, with gold-rimmed glasses and fine features meticulously drawn, often smiling vacantly, his mouth hanging open and something shining inside, either too much saliva or a gold tooth. The collar of his gown was open, showing its pearly lamb lining and a white pajama shirt. Ch'i-ch'iao put a foot on his shoulder and kept giving him light kicks on the neck, whispering, "Unfilial slave, I'll fix you! When did you get to be so unfilial?"

Ch'ang-pai quoted with a smile, "'Take a wife and the mother is forgotten.'"

"Don't talk nonsense, our Master Pai is not that kind of person, nor could I have had a son like that either," said Ch'i-ch'iao. Ch'ang-pai just smiled. She looked fixedly at him from the

corners of her eyes. "If you're still my Master Pai as before, cook opium for me all night tonight."

"That's no problem," he said, smiling.

"If you doze off, see if I don't hammer you with my fists."

The living room curtains had been sent to be washed. Outside the windows the moon was barely visible behind dark clouds, a dab of black, a dab of white like a ferocious theatrical mask. Bit by bit it came out of the bottomless pit. It was long past midnight, and Ch'ang-an had gone to bed long ago. As Ch'ang-pai started to nod while rolling the opium pills, Ch'i-ch'iao poured him a cup of strong tea. The two of them ate honeyed preserves and discussed neighbors' secrets. Ch'ich'iao suddenly said, smiling, "Tell me, Master Pai, is your wife any good?"

"What is there to say about it?" Ch'ang-pai said, smiling.

"Must be good if there is nothing to criticize," said Ch'i-ch'iao.

"Who said she's good?"

"Not good? In what way? Tell Mother."

Ch'ang-pai was vague at first but under cross-examination he had to reveal a thing or two. The amahs handing them tea turned aside to chuckle and the slave girls covered their mouths trying not to laugh and slipped out of the room. Ch'ich'iao gritted her teeth and laughed and muttered curses, removed the pipe bowl and knocked the ashes out with all her strength, banging loudly. Once started, Ch'ang-pai found it hard to stop and talked all night.

The next morning Ch'i-ch'iao told the amahs to bring a couple of blankets to let the young master sleep on the couch. Chih-shou was up already and came to pay her respects. Ch'i-ch'iao had not slept all night but was more energetic than ever and asked relatives over to play mahjong, women of different families including her daughter-in-law's mother. Over the mahjong table she told in detail all her daughter-in-law's secrets as confessed by her son, adding some touches of her own that made the story still more vivid. Everybody tried to change the subject, but the small talk no sooner started than Ch'i-ch'iao would smilingly switch it back to her daughter-in-law. Chih-shou's mother turned purple. Too ashamed to see her daughter, she put down her mahjong tiles and went home in her private ricksha.

Ch'i-ch'iao made Ch'ang-pai cook opium for her for two nights running. Chih-shou lay stiffly in bed with both hands on her ribs curled upward like a dead chicken's legs. She knew her mother-in-law was questioning her husband again, although Heaven knew how he could have anything fresh to say. Tomorrow he would again come to her with a drooling, mock-pleading look. Perhaps he had guessed that she would center all her hatred on him. Even if she could not fight tooth and nail, she would at least upbraid him and make a scene. Very likely he would steal her thunder by coming in half drunk, to pick on her and smash something. She knew his ways. In the end he would sit down on the bed, raise his shoulders, reach inside his white silk pajama shirt to scratch himself, and smile unexpectedly. A little light would tremble on his gold-rimmed spectacles and twinkle in his mouth, spit or gold tooth. He would take off his glasses . . . Chih-shou suddenly sat up and tore open the bed curtains. This was an insane world, a husband not like a husband, a mother-in-law not like a mother-in-law. Either they were mad or she was. The moon tonight was better than ever, high and full like a white sun in a pitch-black sky, not a loud within ten thousand li. Blue shadows all over the floor and blue shadows on the canopy overhead. Her feet too were in the deathly still blue shadows.

Thinking to hook up the bed curtains, Chihshou reached out groping for the hook. With one hand holding the brass hook and her face snuggled against her shoulder, she could not keep the sobs from starting. The curtain dropped. There was nobody but her inside the dark bed still she hastened to hook the curtains up in a panic. Outside the windows there was still that abnormal moon that made all one's body hairs stand on end—small white sun brilliant in the black sky. Inside the room she could clearly see the embroidered rosy-purple chair covers

and table cloths, the gold-embroidered scarlet screen with five phoenixes flying in a row, the pink satin scrolls embroidered with seal-script characters embellished with flowers. On the dressing table the silver powder jar, silver mouth-rinsing mug, and silver vase were each caught in a red and green net and filled with wedding candies. Along the silk panel across the lintel of the bed hung balls of flowers, toy flower pots, *ju yi*,¹² and rice dumplings, all made of multicolored gilded velvet, and dangling underneath them glass balls the size of finger tips and mauvish pink tassels a foot long. In such a big room, crammed full of trunks, spare bedding, and furnishings, surely she could find a sash to hang herself with. She fell back on the bed. In the moonlight her feet had no color at all—bluish, greenish, purplish, the tints of a corpse gone cold. She wanted to die, she wanted to die. She was afraid of the moonlight but didn't dare turn on the light. Tomorrow her mother-in-law would say, "Master Pai fixed me a couple more p.pes and our poor young mistress couldn't sleep the whole night, kept her light on to all hours waiting for him to come back—can't do without him." Chih-shou's tears flowed along the pillow. She did not wipe her eyes; rubbing would get them swollen and her mother-in-law would again say, "Master Pai didn't sleep in his room for just one night and Young Mistress cried until her eyes were like peaches!"

Although Ch'i-ch'iao pictured her son and daughter-in-law as a passionate couple~, Ch'ang-pai as not very pleased with Chih-shou and

ih-shou on her part hated him so much he tot itched to bite him. Since the two did nbt get along, Ch'ang-pai again went strolling in "the streets of flowers and the lanes of willows." ¹⁵ Ch'ich'iao gave him a slave girl called Chi an-erh for a concubine and still could not hold him. She also tried in various ways to get him to smoke opium. Ch'ang-pai had always liked a couple of drags for fun but he had never gotten into the habit. Now that he smoked more he quieted down and no longer went out much, just stayed with his mother and his concubine.

His sister Ch'ang-an got dysentery when she was twenty-four. Instead of getting a doctor, Ch'ich'iao persuaded her to smoke a little opium and it did ease the pain. After she recovered she also got into the habit. An unmarried girl without any other distractions, Ch'ang-an went at it singlemindedly and smoked even more than her brother. Some tr a to dissuade her. Ch'i-ch'iao said, "What is there to be afraid of? For one thing we Chiangs can still afford it, and even if I sold two hundred *mou* of land today so the brother and sister could smoke, who is there who'd dare fart about it? When the girl gets married she'll have her dowry, she'll be eating and drinking out of her own pocket, so even if her husband is unhappy about her smoking he can only look on."

All the same, Ch'ang-an's prospects were affected. The matchmakers, who had never come running to begin with, now disappeared altogether. When Ch'ang-an was nearly thirty, Ch'ich'iao changed her tune, seeing that her daughter was fated to be an old maid. "Not married off because she's not good-looking, and yet blames her mother for putting it off, spoiling her chances. Pulls a long face all day as if I owed her two hundred copper coins. It's certainly not to make myself miserable that I've kept her at home, feeding her free tea and rice!"

On the twentieth birthday of Chiang Chi-tse's daughter Ch'ang-hsing, Ch'ang-an went to give her cousin her best wishes. Chiang Chi-tse was poor now, but fortunately his wide social contacts kept him more or less solvent. Ch'ang-hsing said secretly to her mother, "Mother, try to introduce a friend to Sister An, she seems so pathetic. Her eyes reddened with tears at the very mention of conditions at home."

Lan-hsien hastily raised her hand. "No, no! This match I dare not make. Stir up your Second Aunt, with her temper?"

But Ch'ang-hsing, young and meddlesome, paid her no heed. After some time she by chance mentioned Ch'ang-an's case to her schoolmates, and it happened that one of them had

an uncle newly returned from Germany, a northerner too, even distantly related to the Chiangs as it turned out when they really investigated his background. The man was called T'u-hih-fang, and was several years older than Ch'ang-an. And Ch'ang-hsing took matters into her own hands and arranged everything. Her schoolmate Qter would play hostess. On Ch'ang-an's side her family was kept as much in the dark as if sealed in an iron barrel. Ch'i-ch'iao had always had a strong constitution. Thus, when Chih-shou got tuberculosis, naturally Ch'i-ch'iao thought her daughter-in-law disgustingly affected, making much of herself, eating this and that, unable to stand the least fatigue and seemingly having a better time than usual. Finally, out of spite, she got sick too. At first it was just weak breath and thin blood, but even then it sent the entire household into a spin, so that they had no time for Chih-shou. Later Ch'i-ch'iao got seriously ill and took to her bed and there was more fuss than ever. Ch'ang-an slipped out in the confusion and called a tailor to her Third Uncle's house, where Ch'ang-hsing designed a new costume for her. On the day of the dinner Ch'ang-hsing accompanied her in the late afternoon to see the hairdresser, who waved her hair with hot tongs and plastered close-set little kiss-curls from the temple to the ears. Upon returning home, Ch'ang-hsing made her cousin wear "glassy green" jadeite* earrings with pagoda-shaped pendants two inches long and change into an apple-green georgette gown with a high collar, ruffled sleeves, and fine pleats below the waist, half Western style. As a young maid squatted on the floor buttoning her up, Ch'ang-an scrutinized herself in the wardrobe mirror and could not help stretching out both arms and kicking out the skirt in a posture from "The Grape Fairy."¹⁵ Twisting her head around, she started to laugh, saying, "Really dolled up to look like the celestial maiden scattering flowers!" 18

Ch'ang-hsing signaled the maid in the mirror with her eyes and they both laughed. After Ch'ang-an had finished dressing, she sat down straight-backed on a high chair.

"I'll go and telephone for a taxi," Ch'ang-hsing said.

"It's early yet," said Ch'ang-an.

Ch'ang-hsing looked at her watch. "We're supposed to be there at eight. It's now five past." "It probably wouldn't matter if we were half an hour late."

Ch'ang-hsing thought it both infuriating and laughable for her cousin to want to put on airs. She opened her silver mesh handbag to examine its contents. On the pretext that she had forgotten her compact, she went to her mother's room and told her all about it, adding, "T'ung is not the host today, so for whom is she putting on airs? I won't bother to talk her out of it. Let her dawdle until tomorrow morning, it's none of my business."

Lan-hsien said, "How silly you are! You made the appointment, you're making the match, how can you not be responsible? I've told you so many times you should have known better, Little Miss An is just as petty as her mother and not used to company. She'll make a spectacle of herself, and she's your cousin, after all. If you lose face you deserve it who told you to get into this? Gone crazy from having nothing to do?"

Ch'ang-hsing sat pouting in her mother's room for a long while.

"It looks as if your cousin is waiting to be pressed," Lan-hsien said smiling.

"I'm not going to press her."

"Silly girl, what's the use of your pressing? She's waiting for the other side to telephone."

Ch'ang-hsing broke out laughing. "She's not a bride, to be urged three, four times and forced into the sedan chair."

"Ring up the restaurant anyway and be done with it-tell them to call. It's almost nine. If you wait any longer it's really off."

Ch'ang-hsing had to do as she was told and finally set out with her cousin.

Ch'ang-an was still in good spirits in the car, talking and laughing away. But once in the restaurant, she suddenly became reserved, stealing into the room behind Ch'ang-hsing, timidly removed her apple-green ostrich cape, and sat down with bowed head, took an almond and

bit off a tenth of it every two minutes, chewing slowly. She had come to be looked at. She felt, that her costume was impeccable and could stand scrutiny but her body was altogether superfluous and could as well be shrunk in size and put away if she knew how to do this. She kept silent throughout the meal.

While waiting for the dessert, Ch'ang-hsing pulled her to the window to watch the street scene and walked off on some pretext, and T'ung Shih-fang ambled over to the window.

"Has Miss Chiang been here before?" he said. "No," Ch'ang-an said in a small voice.

"The first time for me too. The food isn't bad, but I'm not quite used to it yet." "Not used to it?"

"Yes, foreign food is more bland, Chinese food is more greasy. When I had just come back friends and relatives made me eat out for several days running and I easily got an upset stomach."

Ch'ang-an looked at her fingers back and front as if intent on counting how many of the whorls were shaped like "snails" and how many "shovels."

Out of nowhere a little neon sign in the shape of a flower bloomed on the windowpane, reflected from the shop opposite, red petals with a green heart. It was the lotus of the Nile set before the gods and also the lily emblem of French royalty . . .

Shih-fang, who had not seen any girls of his homeland for many years, was struck by Ch'angan's pathetic charm and rather liked it. He had been engaged long before he went abroad, but having fallen in love with a schoolmate he violently opposed the match. After endless long-distance negotiations he almost broke with his parents, who for a time stopped sending money, causing him much hardship. They finally gave in, however, and put an end to his engagement. Unfortunately his schoolmate fell in love with somebody else. In his disappointment he dug in and studied for seven, eight years. His conviction that old-fashioned wives were best was also one made on the rebound.

After this meeting with Ch'ang-an, they were both interested. Ch'ang-hsing thought she should finish her good deed but, however enthusiastic, she was not qualified to speak to Ch'ang-an's mother. She had to beg Lan-hsien, who refused adamantly, saying, "You know very well your father and your Second Aunt are like enemies, never see each other. Although I've never quarreled with her there's no love lost. Why ask to be cold-shouldered?"

Ch'ang-an said nothing when she saw Lanhsien, merely shed tears. Lan-hsien had to promise to go just once. The sisters-in-law met and after the amenities Lan-hsien explained the purpose of her visit. Ch'i-ch'iao was glad enough when she first heard of it.

"Then I'll leave it to Third Sister," she said. "I haven't been at all well, I can't cope with it, will just have to trouble Third Sister. This girl has been a dead weight on my hands. As a mother I can't be said not to have done right by her. When old-fashioned rules were in force I bound her feet, when new-fangled rules were in force I sent her to school-what else is there? A girl I dug out my heart and liver to train, as it were, she shouldn't have no takers as long as she's not scarred or pock-marked or blind. But this girl was born an Ah-tou"that isn't worth supporting. I get so angry I keep yelling: 'Oh, for the day that I shut my eyes and gol'-her marriage will then be in the hands of Heaven and left to fate."

So it was agreed that Lan-hsien would ask both sides to dinner so they could look each other over. Ch'ang-an and T'ung Shih-fang met again as if for the first time. Ch'i-ch'iao, sick in bed, did not appear, so Ch'ang-an got engaged in peace. At the dinner table Lan-hsien and Ch'ang-hsing forcibly took Ch'ang-an's hand and placed it in T'ung Shih-fang's. Shih-fang put the ring on her finger in public. And the girl's family gave gifts in return, not the traditional stationery but a pen set in a velvet-lined box plus a wristwatch.

After the engagement Ch'ang-an furtively went out alone with T'ung Shih-fang several times. The two of them walked side by side in the park in the autumn sun; talking very little,

each content with a partial view of the other's clothes and moving feet. The fragrance of her face powder and his tobacco smell served as invisible railings that separated them from the crowd. On the open green lawn where so many people ran and laughed and talked, they alone walked a porch that wound on endlessly in silence. Ch'ang-an did not feel there was anything amiss in silence. She thought this was all there was to social contact between modern men and women. As to 'rung Shih-fang, from painful experience in the past he was dubious anyway of the exchange of thought. He was satisfied that someone was beside him. Formerly he had been disgusted by the character in fiction who would say, when asking a woman to live with him, "Please give me solace." Solace is purely spiritual but it is used here as a euphemism for sex. But now he knew the line between the spiritual and physical could not be drawn so clearly: Words are no use after all. Holding hands for a long time is a more apt consolation, because not many people talk well and still fewer really have anything to say.

Sometimes it rained in the park. Ch'ang-an would open her umbrella and Shih-fang would hold it for her. Upon the translucent blue silk, myriad raindrops twinkled like a skyful of stars that would follow them about later on a taxi's glistening front window of crushed silver and, as the car ran through red and green lights, a nestful of red stars would fly humming outside the window and a nestful of green stars.

Ch'ang-an brought back some of the stray dreams under the starlight and became unusually silent, often smiling. Ch'i-chiao saw the change and could not help getting angry and sarcastic. "These many years we haven't been very attentive to Miss, no wonder Miss seldom smiled. Now you've got your wish and are going to spring out the Chiangs' door. But no matter how happy you are, don't show it on your face so much-it's sickening."

In former days Chi-chiao would have answered back, but now that she appeared a transformed person she let it go and concentrated on curing herself of the opium habit. Ch'i-chiao could do nothing with her.

Eldest Mistress Tai-chen, who had not been present when Ch'ang-an got engaged, came to the house to congratulate her some time afterward. Ch'i-chiao whispered, "Eldest Sister-in-law, it seems to me we still have to ask around a bit. This is not a matter to blunder into. The other day I heard something about a wife in the country and another across the seas."

"The one in the country was sent back before marriage," said Tai-chen. "The same with the one overseas. It's said that they were friends for several years; nobody knew why nothing came of it."

"What's so strange about that? Men's hearts change faster than you can say change. He didn't even acknowledge the one who came with the three matchmakers and six gifts, not to say the hussy who has no formal status. Who knows whether he has anybody else across the seas? I have only this one daughter, I can't muddle along and ruin her whole life. I myself have suffered at the matchmakers' hands."

Ch'ang-an sat to one side pressing her fingernails into her palm until the palm reddened and the nails turned white from the strain. Ch'i-chiao looked up and saw her. "Shameless girl, pricking up your ears to listen! Is this anything that you should hear? When we were girls we couldn't get out of the way fast enough at the very mention of marriage. You Chiangs had generations of book learning in vain, you may have to go and learn some manners from your mother's family with their sesame oil shop."

Ch'ang-an ran out crying. Ch'i-chiao pounded her pillow and sighed. "Miss couldn't wait to marry, so what can I do? She'd drag home any old smelly stinking thing. It's supposed to be her Third Aunt that found him for her-actually she's just using her Third Aunt as a blind. Probably the rice was already cooked before they asked Third Aunt to be matchmaker. Everybody ganged up to fool me-and just as well. If the truth came out, where should the mother and brother look?"

Another day Ch'ang-an slipped out on some excuse. When she got back she was going to report every place she had been before Ch'i-ch'iao had even asked.

"All right, all right, save it," Ch'i-ch'iao barked. "What's the use of lying to me? Let me catch you red-handed one day-humph! Don't think that because you're grown up and engaged I can't beat you anymore!"

"I went to give Cousin Hsing those slipper patterns, what's wrong in that?" Ch'ang-an was upset. "If Mother doesn't believe me, she can ask Third Aunt."

"Your Third Aunt found you a man and she's the father and me ther of your rebirth! Never seen anybody as cheap as you . . . Disappears in the twinkling of an eye. Your family kept you and honored you all these years-short of buying a page to serve you, where have we been remiss, that you can't even stay home for a moment?"

Ch'ang-an blushed, tears falling straight down.

Ch'i-ch'iao paused for breath. "So many good ones were turned down before and now you want to marry a ne'er-do-well! If he's any good, how did he live to be thirty-something, cross oceans and seas over a hundred thousand *li*, and never get himself a wife? Aren't you slapping your own face?"

But Ch'ang-an remained obdurate. Both parties being none too young, several months after the engagement Lan-hsien came to Ch'i-ch'iao as Shih-fang's deputy and asked her to set a date for the wedding.

Ch'i-ch'iao pointed at Ch'ang-an. "We won't marry early, won't marry late, has to choose this year when there's no money at hand. If we have a better harvest next year, the trousseau would be more complete."

"Modern-style weddings don't go in for these things. Might as well do it the new way and save a little," Lan-hsien said.

"New ways, old ways, what's the difference? The old ways are more for show, the new ways more practical-the girl's family is the loser anyway."

"Just do whatever you see fit, Second Sister-inlaw, Little Miss An is not going to argue about getting too little, is she?" At this everybody in the room laughed; even Ch'ang-an could not help a little smile.

Ch'i-ch'iao burst out, "Shameless! You have something in your belly that won't keep or what? Can't wait to get over there, as if your eyebrows were on fire. Will even do without the trousseau you're willing, others may not be. You're so sure he's after your person? What vanity! Have you got a pretty spot on you? Stop lying to yourself. This man Tung has his eyes on the Chiangs' name and prestige, that's all. Your family sounds so grand with its titles and its eminent generals and ministers; actually it's not so at all. It's been strong outside and shriveled up inside long since, and for these last few years couldn't even keep up appearances. Moreover, each generation of your family is worse than the one before, no regard for Heaven and earth and king and parent anymore. The young masters know nothing whatsoever and all the young ladies know is to grab money and want men-worse than pigs and dogs. My own family was a thousand times and ten thousand times to blame in making this match-ruined my whole life. I'm going to tell this man rung not to make the same mistake before it's too late."

After this quarrel Lan-hsien washed her hands of the match. Ch'i-ch'iao, convalescing, could get out of bed a bit and would sit in the doorway and call out toward Ch'ang-an's room day after day, "You want strange men, go look for them, just don't bring them home to greet me as mother-inlaw and make me die of anger. Out of sight, out of mind, that's all I ask. I'd be grateful if Miss would let me live a couple of years longer." She would arrange just these few sentences in different orders, shouted out so that the whole street could hear. Of course the talk spread among relatives, boiling and steaming.

Ch'i-ch'iao then called Ch'ang-an to her, suddenly in tears. "My child, you know outsiders are saying this and that about you, have smirched you till you're not worth a copper coin. Ever since your mother married into the Chiang family, from top to bottom there's not one that's not a snob. Man stands low in dogs' eyes. I took so much from them in the open and in the dark. Even your father, did he ever do me a good turn that I'd want to stay his widow? I stayed and suffered endless hardships these twenty years, just hoping that you two children would grow up and win back some face for me. I never knew it'd come to this." And she wept.

Ch'ang-an was thunderstruck. Never mind if her mother made her out to be less than human or if outsiders said the same; let them. But Tung Shih-fang-he-what would he think? Did he still want her? Was there any change in his manner last time she saw him? Hard to say . . . She was too happy, she wouldn't notice little differences . . . Between the discomfort of taking the cure and these repeated provocations Ch'ang-an had had a hard time but, forcing herself to bear up, she had endured. Now she suddenly felt as though all her bones were out of joint. Explain to him? Unlike her brother, he was not her mother's offspring and could never thoroughly understand her mother. It would have been all right if he never had to meet her mother, but sooner or later he would make her acquaintance. Marriage is a lifelong affair; you can be a thief all your life but you can't always be on guard against thieves. Who knew what her mother would do? Sooner or later there would be trouble, sooner or later there would be a break. This was the most beautiful episode of her life; better to finish it before other people could add a disgusting ending to it. A beautiful, desolate gesture . . . She knew she would be sorry, she knew she would, but unconcernedly she lifted her eyebrows and said, "Since Mother is not willing to make this match I'll just go and tell them no."

Ch'i-ch'iao was still for a moment and then went on sobbing.

Ch'ang-an paused to collect herself and went to telephone T'ung Shih-fang. Shih-fang did not have time that day, and arranged to meet her the next afternoon. What she dreaded most was the night in between, and it finally passed, each minute and every chime of the quarter hour sinking its teeth into her heart. The next day, at the old place in the park he came up smiling without greeting her; to him this was an expression of intimacy. He seemed to take special notice of her today, kept looking into her face as they walked shoulder to shoulder. With the sun shining brightly she was all the more conscious of her swollen eyelids and could hardly lift her eyes. Better say it while he was not looking at her. Hoarse from weeping, she whispered, "Mr. T'ung." He did not hear her. Then she'd better say it while he was looking at her. Surprised that she was still smiling slightly, she said in a small voice, "Mr. 'rung, I think-about us-perhaps we'd better better leave it for now. I'm very sorry." She took off her ring and pushed it into his hand-cold gritty ring, cold gritty fingers. She quickened her pace, walking away. After a stunned moment he caught up with her. "Why? Not satisfied with me in some way?"

Ch'ang-an shook her head, looking straight ahead.

"Then why?"

"My mother . . ."

"Your mother has never seen me."

"I told you, it's not because of you, nothing to do with you. My mother . . ."

Shih-fang stood still. In China must her kind of reasoning be taken as fully adequate? As he hesitated, she was already some distance away.

The park had basked in the late autumn s'in for a morning and an afternoon, and its air was now heavy with fragrance, like rotten-ripe fruit on a tree. Ch'ang-an heard, coming faintly in slow swings, the sound of a harmonica clumsily picking out "Long, Long Ago"- "Tell me the tales that to me were so dear, long, long ago, long, long ago . . ." This was

now, but in the twinkling of an eye it would have become long, long ago and everything would be over. As if under a spell Ch'angan went looking for the person blowing the harmonica-looking for herself. Walking with her face to the sunlight, she came under a *wu-t'ung*¹⁸ tree with a boy in khaki shorts astride one of its forked branches. He was rocking and blowing his harmonica, but the tune was different, one she had never heard before. The tree was not big, and its sparse leaves shook in the sun like golden bells. Looking up, Ch'ang-an saw black as a flood of tears fell down her face. It was then that Shihfang found her, and he stood quietly beside her for a while before he said, "I respect your opinion." She lifted her handbag to ward off the sun from her face.

They continued to see each other for a time. Shih-fang wanted to show that modern men do not make friends with women just to find a mate, and so although the engagement was broken he still asked her out often. As to Ch'ang-an, in what contradictory hopes she went out with him she herself did not know and would not have admitted if she had known. When they had been engaged and openly going out together she still had had to guard her movements. Now her rendezvous were more secret than ever. Shih-fang's attitude remained straightforward. Of course she had hurt his self-respect a little, and he also thought it was a pity more or less, but as the saying goes, "a worthy man needn't worry about not having a wife." A man's highest compliment to a woman is a proposal. Shih-fang had pledged himself to relinquish his freedom. Although Ch'angan had declined his valuable offer, he had done her a service at no cost to himself.

No matter how subtle and awkward their relations were, they actually became friends. They even talked. Ch'ang-an's naivete often made Shihfang laugh and say, "You're a funny one." Ch'ang-an also began to discover that she was an amusing person. Where matters could go from here might surprise Shih-fang himself.

But rumors reached Ch'i-ch'iao. Behind Ch'ang-an's back she ordered Ch'ang-pai to send Tung Shih-fang a written invitation to an informal dinner at home. Shih-fang guessed that the Chiangs might want to warn him not to persist in a friendship with their daughter after the break. But while he was talking with Ch'ang-pai over two cups of wine about the weather, current politics, and local news in the somber and high-ceilinged dining room, he noticed that nothing was mentioned of Ch'ang-an. Then the cold dishes were removed. Ch'ang-pai suddenly leaned his hands against the table and stood up. Shih-fang looked over his shoulder and saw a small old lady standing at the doorway with her back to the light so that he could not see her face distinctly. She wore a blue-gray gown of palace brocade embroidered with a round dragon design, and clasped with both hands a scarlet hot-water bag; two tall amahs stood close beside her. Outside the door the setting sun was smoky yellow, and the staircase covered with turquoise plaid linoleum led up step after step to a place where there was no light. Shih-fang instinctively felt this person was mad. For no reason there was cold in all his hairs and bones.

"This is my mother," Ch'ang-pai introduced her.

Shih-fang moved his chair to stand up and bow. Ch'i-ch'iao walked in with measured grace, resting a hand on an amah's arm, and after a few civilities sat down to offer him wine and food.

"Where's Sister?" Ch'ang-pai asked. "Doesn't even come and help when we have company."

"She's going to smoke a couple of pipes more and then she'll come down," Ch'i-ch'iao said.

Shih-fang was greatly shocked and stared at her intently.

Ch'i-ch'iao hurriedly explained, "It's such a pity this child didn't have proper prenatal care. I had to puff smoke at her as soon as she was born. Later, after bouts of illness, she acquired this habit of smoking. How very inconvenient for a young lady! It isn't that she hasn't tried to break it, but

her health is so very delicate and she has had her way in everything for so long it's easier said than done. Off and on, it's been ten years now."

Shih-fang could not help changing color. Ch'ich'iao had the caution and quick wits of the insane. She knew if she was not careful people would cut her short with a mocking, incredulous glance; she was used to the pain by now. Afraid that he would see through her if she talked too much, she stopped in time and busied herself with filling wine cups and distributing food. When Ch'ang-an was mentioned again she just repeated these words lightly once more, her flat, sharp voice cutting all around like a razor blade.

Ch'ang-an came downstairs quietly, her embroidered black slippers and white silk stockings pausing in the dim yellow sunlight on the stairs. After stopping a while she went up again, one step after another, to where there was no light.

Ch'i-ch'iao said, "Ch'ang-pai, you drink a few more cups with Mr. Tung. I'm going up."

The servants brought the soup called *i-p'in-kuo*, the "highest ranking pot," and changed the wine to Bamboo Leaf Green, newly heated. A nervous slave girl stood in the doorway and signaled the page waiting on table to come out. After some whispering the boy came back to say a few words into Ch'ang-pai's ear. Ch'ang-pai got up, flustered, and apologized repeatedly to Shih-fang, "Have to leave you alone for a while, be right back," and also went upstairs, taking several steps in one.

Shih-fang was left to drink alone. Even the page felt apologetic. "Our Miss Chiian is about to give birth," he whispered to him.

"Who's Miss Chdan?" Shih-fang asked.

"Young Master's concubine."

Shih-fang asked for rice and made himself eat some of it. He could not leave the minute he set his bowl down, so he waited, sitting on the carved pearwood couch. Flushed from the wine, his ears hot, he suddenly felt exhausted and lay down. The scrollwork couch, with its ice-cold yellow rattan mat, the wintry fragrance of pomelos . . . the concubine having a baby. This was the ancient China he had been homesick for . . . His quiet and demure well-born Chinese girl was an opium smoker! He sat up, his head in his hands, feeling unbearably lonely and estranged.

He took his hat and went out, telling the page, "Later, please inform your master that I'll thank him in person another day."

He crossed the brick-paved courtyard where a tree grew in the center, its bare branches printed high in the sky like the lines in crackle china. Ch'ang-an quietly followed behind, watching him out. There were light yellow daisies on her navy blue long-sleeved gown. Her hands were clasped and she had a gentle look seldom seen on her face.

Shih-fang turned around to say, "Miss Chiang . . ."

She stood still a long way off and just bent her head. Shih-fang bowed slightly, turned, and left. Ch'ang-an felt as though she were viewing this sunlit courtyard from some distance away, looking down from a tall building. The scene was clear, she herself was involved but powerless to intervene. The court, the tree, two people trailing bleak shadows, wordless-not much of a memory, but still to be put in a crystal bottle and held in both hands to be looked at some day, her first and last love.

Chih-shou lay stiffly in bed, her hands placed palms up on her ribs like the claws of a slaughtered chicken. The bed curtains were half up. Night or day she would not have them let down; she was afraid.

Word came that Miss Chdan had given birth to a son. The slave girl tending the steaming pot of herb medicine for Chih-shou ran out to share the excitement. A wind blew in through the open door and rattled the curtain hooks. The curtains slid shut of their own accord but Chih-shou did not protest anymore. With a jerk to the right, her head rolled off the pillow. She did not die then, but dragged on for another fortnight.

Miss Chuan was made a wife and became Chih-shou's substitute. In less than an year she swallowed raw opium and killed herself. Ch'ang-pai dared not marry again, just went to brothels now and then. Chang-an of course had long since given up all thoughts of marriage.

Ch'i-ch'iao lay half asleep on the opium couch. For thirty years now she had worn a golden Gangu. She had used its heavy edges to chop down several people; those that did not die were half dead. She knew that her son and daughter hated her to the death, that the relatives on her husband's side hated her, and that her own kinfolk also hated her. She groped for the green jade bracelet on her wrist and slowly pushed it up her bony arm, as thin as firewood, until it reached the armpit. She herself could not believe she'd had round arms when she was young. Even after she had been married several years, the bracelet only left room enough for her to tuck in a handkerchief of imported crepe. As a girl of eighteen or nineteen, she would roll up the lavishly laced sleeves of her blue linen blouse, revealing a pair of snow-white wrists, and go to the market. Among those that liked her were Ch'ao-lu of the butcher shop; her brother's sworn brothers, Ting Yii-ken and Chang Shao-ch'ian; and also the son of Tailor Shen. To say that they liked her perhaps only means that they liked to fool around with her; but if she had chosen one of these, it was very likely that her man would have shown some real love as years went by and children were born. She moved the ruffled little foreign-style pillow under her head and rubbed her face against it. On her other cheek a teardrop stayed until it dried by itself: she was too languid to brush it away.

After Ch'i-ch'iao passed away, Ch'ang-an got her share of property from Ch'ang-pai and moved out of the house. Ch'i-ch'iao's daughter would have no difficulty settling her own problems. Rumor had it that she was seen with a man on the street stopping in front of a stall where he bought her a pair of garters. Perhaps with her own money, but out of the man's pocket anyway. Of course it was only a rumor.

The moon of thirty years ago has gone down long since, and the people of thirty years ago are dead, but the story of thirty years ago is not yet ended-can have no ending.