

“The Shop of the Lin Family”
by Mao Dun, trans. Sidney Shapiro

I

Miss Lin's small mouth was pouting when she returned home from school that day. She flung down her books, and instead of combing her hair and powdering her nose before the mirror as usual, she stretched out on the bed. Her eyes staring at the top of the bed canopy, Miss Lin lay lost in thought. Her little cat leaped up beside her, snuggled against her waist and miaowed twice. Automatically, she patted his head, then rolled over and buried her face in the pillow.

"Ma!" called Miss Lin.

No answer. Ma, whose room was right next door, ordinarily doted on this only daughter of hers. On hearing her return, Ma would come swaying in to ask whether she was hungry. Ma would be keeping something good for her. Or she might send the maid out to buy a bowl of hot soup with meat dumplings from a street vendor... But today was odd. There obviously were people talking in Ma's room - Miss Lin could hear Ma hiccuping too - yet Ma didn't even reply.

Again Miss Lin rolled over on the bed, and raised her head. She would eavesdrop on this conversation. Whom could Ma be talking to, that voices had to be kept so low?

But she couldn't make out what they were saying. Only Ma's continuous hiccups wafted intermittently to Miss Lin's ears. Suddenly, Ma's voice rose, as if she were angry, and a few words came through quite clearly:

" - These are Japanese goods, those are Japanese goods, hic!..."

Miss Lin started. She prickled all over, like when she was having a hair-cut and the tiny shorn hairs stuck to her neck. She had come home annoyed just because they had laughed at her and scolded her at school over Japanese goods. She swept aside the little cat nestled against her, jumped up and stripped off her new azure rayon dress lined with camel's wool. She shook it out a couple of times, and sighed. Miss Lin had heard that this charming frock was made of Japanese material. She tossed it aside and pulled that cute cowhide case out from under the bed. Almost spitefully, she flipped the cover open, and turning the case upside down, dumped its contents on the bed. A rainbow of brightly coloured dresses and knick-knacks rolled and spread. The little cat leaped to the floor, whirled and jumped up on a chair, where he crouched and looked at his mistress in astonishment.

Miss Lin sorted through the pile of clothes, then stood, abstracted, beside the bed. The more she examined her belongings, the more she adored them - and the more they looked like Japanese goods! Couldn't she wear any of them? She hated to part with them - besides, her father wouldn't necessarily be willing to have new ones made for her! Miss Lin's eyes began to smart. She loved these Japanese things, while she hated the Japanese aggressors who invaded

the Northeast provinces. If not for that, she could wear Japanese merchandise and no one would say a word.

"Hic – "

The sound came through the door, followed by the thin swaying body of Mrs. Lin. The sight of the heap of clothing on the bed, and her daughter, bemused, standing in only her brief woollen underwear, was more than a little shock. As her excitement increased, the tempo of Mrs. Lin's hiccups grew in proportion. For the moment, she was unable to speak. Miss Lin, grief written all over her face, flew to her mother. "Ma! They're all Japanese goods. What am I going to wear tomorrow?"

Hiccuping, Mrs. Lin shook her head. With one hand she supported herself on her daughter's shoulder, with the other she kneaded her own chest. After a while, she managed to force out a few sentences.

"Child – hic – why have you taken off – hic – all your clothes? The weather's cold – hic – This trouble of mine – hic – began the year you were born. Hic – lately it's getting worse! Hic – "

"Ma, tell me what am I going to wear tomorrow? I'll just hide in the house and not go out! They'll laugh at me, swear at me!"

Mrs. Lin didn't answer. Hiccuping steadily, she walked over to the bed, picked the new azure dress out of the pile, and draped it over her daughter. Then she patted the bed in invitation for Miss Lin to sit down. The little cat returned to beside the girl's legs. Cocking his head, with narrowed eyes he looked first at Mrs. Lin, then at her daughter. Lazily, he rolled over and rubbed his belly against the soles of the girl's shoes. Miss Lin kicked him away and reclined sideways on the bed, with her head hidden behind her mother's back.

Neither of them spoke for a while. Mrs. Lin was busy hiccuping; her daughter was busy calculating "how to go out tomorrow." The problem of Japanese goods not only affected everything Miss Lin wore - it influenced everything she used. Even the powder compact which her fellow students so admired and her automatic pencil were probably made in Japan. And she was crazy about those little gadgets!

"Child – hic – are you hungry?"

After sitting quietly for some time, Mrs. Lin gradually controlled her hiccups, and began her usual doting routine.

"No. Ma, why do you always ask me if I'm hungry? The most important thing is that I have no clothes. How can I go to school tomorrow?" the girl demanded petulantly. She was still curled up on the bed, her face still buried behind her mother.

From the start, Mrs. Lin hadn't understood why her daughter kept complaining that she had no clothes to wear. This was the third time and she couldn't ignore the remark any longer, but those damned hiccups most irritatingly started up again. Just then, Mr. Lin came in. He was holding a sheet of paper in his hand; his face was ashen. He saw his wife struggling with continuous agitated hiccups, his daughter lying on the clothing-strewn bed, and he could guess pretty well what was wrong. His brows drew together in a frown.

"Do you have an Anti-Japanese-Invasion Society in your school, Xiu?" he asked. "This letter just came. It says that if you wear clothes made of Japanese material again tomorrow, they're going to burn them! Of all the wild lawless things to say!"

"Hic – hic!"

"What nonsense! Everyone has something made in Japan on him. But they have to pick on our family to make trouble! There isn't a shop carrying foreign goods that isn't full of Japanese stuff. But they have to make our shop the culprit. They insist on locking up our stocks! Huh!"

"Hic – hic – Goddess Guanyin protect and preserve us! Hic –"

"Papa, I've got an old style padded jacket. It's probably not made of Japanese material, but if I wear it they'll all laugh at me, it's so out of date," said Miss Lin, sitting up on the bed. She had been thinking of going a step farther and asking Mr. Lin to have a dress made for her out of non-Japanese cloth, but his expression decided her against such a rash move. Still, picturing the jeers her old padded jacket would evoke, she couldn't restrain her tears.

"Hic – hic – child! – hic – don't cry – no one will laugh at you – hic – child"

"Xiu, you don't have to go to school tomorrow! We soon won't have anything to eat; how can we spend money on schools! " Mr. Lin was exasperated. He ripped up the letter and strode, sighing, from the room. Before long, he came hurrying back.

"Where's the key to the cabinet? Give it to me!" he demanded of his wife.

Mrs. Lin turned pale and stared at him. Her eternal hiccups were momentarily stilled.

"There's no help for it. We'll have to make an offering to those straying demons –" Mr. Lin paused to heave a sigh. "It'll cost me four hundred at most. If the Guomindang local branch thinks it's not enough, I'll quit doing business. Let them lock up the stocks! That shop opposite has more Japanese goods than I. They've made an investment of over ten thousand dollars. They paid out only five hundred, and they're going along without a bit of trouble. Five hundred dollars! Just mark it off as a couple of bad debts! The key! That gold necklace ought to bring about three hundred...."

"Hic – hic – really, like a gang of robbers!" Mrs. Lin produced the key with a trembling hand. Tears streamed down her face. Miss Lin, however, did not cry. She was looking into space with misty eyes, recalling that Guomindang committeeman who had made a speech at

her school, a hateful swarthy pockmarked fellow who stared at her like a hungry dog. She could picture him grasping the gold necklace and jumping for joy, his big mouth open in a laugh. Then she visualized the ugly bandit quarreling with her father, hitting him....

“Aiya!” Miss Lin gave a frightened scream and threw herself on her mother’s bosom. Mrs. Lin was so started she had no time for hiccups.

“Child, hic – don’t cry,” Mrs. Lin made a desperate effort to speak. “After New Year your Papa will have money. We’ll make a new dress for you, hic – Those black-hearted crooks! They all insist we have money. Hic – we lose more every year. Your Papa was in the fertilizer business, and he lost money, hic – Every penny invested in the shop belongs to other people. Child, hic, hic – this sickness of mine; it makes life hell – hic – In another two years when you’re nineteen, we’ll find you a good husband. Hic – then I can die in peace! Save us from our adversity, Goddess Guanyin! Hic –”

II

The following day, Mr. Lin’s shop underwent a transformation. All the Japanese goods he hadn’t dared to show for the past week, now were the most prominently displayed. In imitation of the big Shanghai stores, Mr. Lin inscribed many slips of coloured paper with the words “Big Sale 10% Discount!” and pasted them on his windows. Just seven days before New Year, this was the “rush season” of the shops selling imported goods in the towns and villages. Not only was there hope of earning back Mr. Lin’s special expenditure of four hundred dollars; Miss Lin’s new dress depended on the amount of business done in the next few days.

A little past ten in the morning, group of peasants who had come into town to sell their produce in the market began drifting along the street. Carrying baskets on their arms, leading small children, they chatted loud and vigorously as they strolled. They stopped to look at the red and green blurbs pasted on Mr. Lin’s windows and called attention to them, women shouting to their husbands, children yelling to their parents, clucking their tongues in admiration over the goods on display in the shop windows. It would soon be New Year. Children were wishing for a pair of new socks. Women remembered that the family wash-basin had been broken for some time. The single washcloth used by the entire family had been bought half a year ago, and now was an old rag. They had run out of soap more than a month before. They ought to take advantage of this "Sale" and buy a few things.

Mr. Lin sat in the cashier’s cage, marshalling all his energies, a broad smile plastered on his face. He watched the peasants, while keeping an eye on his two salesmen and two apprentices. With all his heart he hoped to see his merchandise start moving out and the silver dollars begin rolling in.

But these peasants, after looking a while, after pointing and gesticulating appreciatively a while, ambled over to the store across the street to stand and look some more. Craning his neck, Mr. Lin glared at the backs of the group of peasants, and sparks shot from his eyes. He wanted to go over and drag them back!

"Hic – hic – "

Behind the cashier's cage were swinging doors which separated the shop itself from the "inner sanctum." Beside these doors sat Mrs. Lin releasing hiccups that she had long been suppressing with difficulty. Miss Lin was seated beside her. Entranced, the girl watched the street silently, her heart pounding. At least half of her new dress had just walked away.

Mr. Lin strode quickly to the front of the counter. He glared jealously at the shop opposite. Its five salesmen were waiting expectantly behind the counter. But not one peasant entered the store. They looked for a while, then continued on their way. Mr. Lin relaxed; he couldn't help grinning at the salesmen across the street. Another group of seven or eight peasants stopped before Mr. Lin's shop. A youngster among them actually came a step forward. With his head cocked to one side, he examined the imported umbrellas. Mr. Lin whirled around, his face breaking into a happy smile. He went to work personally on this prospective customer.

"Would you like a foreign umbrella, Brother? They're cheap. You only pay ninety cents on the dollar. Come and take a look."

A salesman had already taken down two or three imported umbrellas. He promptly opened one and shoved it earnestly into the young peasant's hand. Summoning all his zeal, the salesman launched into a high powered patter:

"Just look at this, young master! Foreign satin cloth, solid ribs. It's durable and handsome for rainy days or clear. Ninety cents each. They don't come any cheaper.... Across the street, they're a dollar apiece, but they're not as good as these. You can compare them and see why."

The young peasant held the umbrella and stood undecided, with his mouth open. He turned towards a man in his fifties and weighed the umbrella in his hand as if to ask "Shall I buy it?" The older man became very upset and began to shout at him.

"You're crazy! Buying an umbrella! We only got three dollars for the whole boatload of firewood, and your mother's waiting at home for us to bring back some rice. How can you spend money on an umbrella!"

"It's cheap, but we can't afford it!" sighed the peasants standing around watching. They walked slowly away. The young peasant, his face brick red, shook his head. He put down the umbrella and started to leave. Mr. Lin was frantic. He quickly gave ground.

"How much do you say, Brother? Take another look. It's fine merchandise!"

"It is cheap. But we don't have enough money," the older peasant replied, pulling his son. They practically ran away.

Bitterly, Mr. Lin returned to the cashier's cage, feeling weak all over. He knew it wasn't that he was an inept businessman. The peasants simply were too poor. They couldn't even spend

ninety cents on an umbrella. He stole a glance at the shop across the way. There too people were looking, but no one was going in. In front of the neighbouring grocery store and the cookie shop, no one was even looking. Group after group of the country folk walked by carrying baskets. But the baskets all were empty. Occasionally, someone appeared with a homespun flowered blue cloth sack, filled with rice, from the look of it. The late rice which the peasants had harvested more than a month before had long since been squeezed out as rent for the landlords and interest for the usurers. Now in order to have rice to eat, the peasants were forced to buy a measure or two at a time, at steep prices.

All this Mr. Lin knew. He felt that at least part of his business was being indirectly eaten away by the usurers and landlords.

The hour gradually neared noon. There were very few peasants on the street now. Mr. Lin's shop had done a little over one dollar's worth of business, just enough to cover the cost of the "Big Sale 10% Discount" strips of red and green paper. Despondently, Mr. Lin entered the "inner sanctum." He barely had the courage to face his wife and daughter. Miss Lin's eyes were filled with tears. She sat in the corner with her head down. Mrs. Lin was in the middle of a string of hiccups. Struggling for control, she addressed her husband.

"We laid out four hundred dollars – and spent all night getting things ready in the shop – hic! We got permission to sell the Japanese goods, but business is dead – hic – my blessed ancestors! ... The maid wants her wages – "

"It's only half a day. Don't worry." Mr. Lin forced a comforting note into his voice, but he felt worse than if a knife were cutting through his heart. Gloomily, he paced back and forth. He thought of all the business promotion tricks he knew, but none of them seemed any good. Business was bad. It had been bad in all lines for some time; his shop wasn't the only one having difficulty. People were poor, and there wasn't anything that could be done about it. Still, he hoped business would be better in the afternoon. The local townspeople usually did their buying then. Surely they would buy things for New Year! If only they wanted to buy, Mr. Lin's shop was certain of trade. After all, his merchandise was cheaper than other shops!

It was this hope that enabled Mr. Lin to bolster his sagging spirits as he sat in the cashier's cage awaiting the customers he pictured coming in the afternoon.

And the afternoon proved to be different indeed from the morning. There weren't many people on the street, but Mr. Lin knew nearly every one of them. He knew their names, or the names of their fathers or grandfathers. These were local townspeople, and as they chatted and walked slowly past his shop, Mr. Lin's eyes, glowing with cordiality, welcomed them, and sent them on their way. At times, with a broad smile he greeted an old customer.

"Ah, Brother, going out to the tea-house? Our little shop has slashed its prices, Favour us with a small purchase!"

Sometimes, the man would actually stop and come into the shop. Then Mr. Lin and his assistants would plunge into a frenzy of activity. With acute sensitiveness, they would watch

the eyes of the unpredictable customer. The moment his eyes rested on a piece of merchandise, the salesmen would swiftly produce one just like it and invite the customer to examine it. Miss Lin watched from beside the swinging doors, and her father frequently called her out to respectfully greet the unpredictable customer as "Uncle." An apprentice would serve him a glass of tea and offer him a good cigarette.

On the question of price, Mr. Lin was exceptionally flexible. When a customer was firm about knocking off a few odd cents from the round figure of his purchase price, Mr. Lin would take the abacus from the hands of his salesman and calculate personally. Then, with the air of a man who has been driven to the wall, he would deduct the few odd cents from the total bill.

"We'll take a loss on this sale," he would say with a wry smile. "But you're an old customer. We have to please you. Come and buy some more things soon!"

The entire afternoon was spent in this manner. Including cash and credit, big purchases and small, the shop made a total of over ten sales. Mr. Lin was drenched with perspiration, and although he was worn out, he was very happy. He had been sneaking looks at the shop across the street. They didn't seem to be nearly so busy. There was a pleased expression on the face of Miss Lin, who had been constantly watching from beside the swinging doors. Mrs. Lin even jerked out a few less hiccups.

Shortly before dark, Mr. Lin finished adding up his accounts for the day. The morning amounted to zero; in the afternoon they had sold sixteen dollars and eighty-five cents worth of merchandise, eight dollars of it being on credit. Mr. Lin smiled slightly, then he frowned. He had been selling all his goods at their original cost. He hadn't even covered his expenses for the day, to say nothing of making any profit. His mind was blank for a moment. Then he took out his account books and calculated in them for a long time. On the "credit" side there was a total of over thirteen hundred dollars of uncollected debts - more than six hundred in town and over seven hundred in the countryside. But the "debit" ledger showed a figure of eight hundred dollars owed to the big Shanghai wholesale house alone. He owed a total of not less than two thousand dollars!

Mr. Lin sighed softly. If business continued to be so bad, it was going to be a little difficult for him to get through New Year. He looked at the red and green paper slips on the window announcing "Big Sale 10% Discount." If we really cut prices like we did today, business ought to pick up, he thought to himself. We're not making any profit, but if we don't do any business I still have to pay expenses anyway. The main thing is to get the customers to come in, then I can gradually raise my prices.... If we can do some wholesale business in the countryside, that will be even better! ...

Suddenly, someone broke in on Mr. Lin's sweet dream. A shaky old lady entered the shop carrying a little bundle wrapped in blue cloth. Mr. Lin yanked up his head to find her confronting him. He wanted to escape, but there was no time. He could only go forward and greet her.

"Ah, Mrs. Zhu, out buying things for the New Year? Please come into the back room and sit down. - Xiu, give Mrs. Chu your arm."

But Miss Lin didn't hear. She had left the swinging doors some time ago. Mrs. Zhu waved her hand in refusal and sat down on a chair in the store. Solemnly, she unwrapped the blue cloth and brought out a small account book. With two trembling hands she presented the book under Mr. Lin's nose. Twisting her withered lips, she was about to speak, but Mr. Lin had already taken the book and was hastening to say:

"I understand, I'll send it to your house tomorrow."

"Mm, mm, the tenth month, the eleventh month, the twelfth month; altogether three months. Three threes are nine; that's nine dollars, isn't it? - you'll send the money tomorrow? Mm, mm, you don't have to send it. I'll take it back with me! Eh!"

The words seemed to come with difficulty from Mrs. Zhu's withered mouth. She had three hundred dollars loaned to Mr. Lin's shop, and was entitled to three dollars interest every month. Mr. Lin had delayed payment for three months, promising to pay in full at the end of the year. Now, she needed some money to buy gifts for tomorrow's Kitchen God Festival, and so she had come seeking Mr. Lin. From the forcefulness with which she moved her puckered mouth, Mr. Lin could tell that she was determined not to leave without the money.

Mr. Lin scratched his head in silence. He hadn't been deliberately refusing to pay the interest. It was just that for the past three months business had been poor. Their daily sales had been barely enough to cover their food and taxes. He had delayed paying her unconsciously. But if he didn't pay her today, the old lady might raise a row in the shop. That would be too shameful and would seriously influence the shop's future.

"All right, all right. Take it back with you!" Mr. Lin finally said in exasperation. His voice shook a little. He rushed to the cashier's cage and gathered together all the cash that had been taken in that morning and afternoon. To that he added twenty cents from his own pocket, and presented the whole collection of dollars, pennies and dimes to the old lady. She carefully counted the lot over and over again, then with trembling hands wrapped the money in the blue cloth. Mr. Lin couldn't repress a sigh. He had a wild desire to snatch back a part of the cash.

"That blue handkerchief is too worn, Mrs. Zhu," he said with a forced laugh. "Why not buy a good white linen one? We've also got top quality wash-cloths and soap. Take some to use over the New Year. Prices are reasonable!"

"No, I don't want any. An old lady like me doesn't need that kind of thing." She waved her hand in refusal. She put her account book in her pocket and departed, firmly grasping the blue cloth bundle.

Looking sour, Mr. Lin walked into the "inner sanctum." Mrs. Zhu's visit reminded him that he had two other creditors. Old Chen and Widow Zhang had put up two hundred and one hundred and fifty dollars respectively. He would have to pay them a total of ten dollars interest.

He couldn't very well delay their money; in fact, he would have to pay them ahead of time. He counted on his fingers - twenty-fourth, twenty-fifth, twenty-sixth. By the twenty-sixth, he ought to be able to collect all the outstanding debts in the countryside. His clerk Shousheng had gone off on a collection trip the day before yesterday. He should be back by the twenty-sixth at the latest. The unpaid bills in town couldn't be collected till the twenty-eighth or twenty-ninth. But the collector from the Shanghai wholesale house to which Mr. Lin owed money would probably come tomorrow or the day after. Lin's only alternative was to borrow more from the local bank. And how would business be tomorrow? ...

His head down, Mr. Lin paced back and forth, thinking. The voice of his daughter spoke into his ear:

"Papa, what do you think of this piece of silk? Four dollars and twenty cents for seven feet. That's not expensive, is it?"

Mr. Lin's heart gave a leap. He stood stock-still and glared, speechless. Miss Lin held the piece of silk in her hand and giggled. Four dollars and twenty cents! It wasn't a big sum, but the shop only did sixteen dollars worth of business all day, and really at cost price! Mr. Lin stood frozen, then asked weakly:

"Where did you get the money?"

"I put it on the books."

Another debit. Mr. Lin scowled. But he had spoiled his daughter himself, and Mrs. Lin would take the girl's side no matter what the case might be. He smiled a helpless bitter smile. Then he sighed.

"You're always in such a rush," he said, slightly reproving. "Why couldn't you wait till after New Year!"

III

Another two days went by. Business was indeed very brisk in Mr. Lin's shop, with its "Big Sale." They did over thirty dollars in sales every day. The hiccups of Mrs. Lin diminished considerably; she hiccuped on the average of only once every five minutes. Miss Lin skipped up and back between the shop and the "inner sanctum," her face flushed and smiling. At times she even helped with the selling. Only after her mother called her repeatedly, did she return to the back room. Mopping her brow, she protested excitedly.

"Ma, why have you called me back again? It's not hard work! Ma, Papa's so tired he's soaking wet, his voice is gone! - A customer just made a five-dollar purchase! Ma, you don't have to be afraid it's too tiring for me! Don't worry! Papa told me to rest a while, then come out again!"

Mrs. Lin only nodded her head and hiccuped, followed by a murmur that "Buddha is merciful and kind." A porcelain image of the Goddess Guanyin was enshrined in the "inner sanctum," with a stick of incense burning before it. Mrs. Lin swayed over to the shrine and kowtowed. She thanked the Goddess for Her Protection and prayed for Her Blessing on a number of matters - that Mr. Lin's business should always be good, that Miss Lin should grow nicely, that next year the girl should get a good husband.

But out in the shop, although Mr. Lin was devoting his whole being to business, though a smile never left his face, he felt as if his heart were bound with strings. Watching the satisfied customer going out with a package under his arm, Mr. Lin suffered a pang with every dollar he took in, as the abacus in his mind clicked a five per cent loss off the cost price he had raised through sweat and blood. Several times he tried to estimate the loss as being three per cent, but no matter how he figured it, he still was losing five cents on the dollar. Although business was good, the more he sold the worse he felt. As he waited on the customers, the conflict raging within his breast at times made him nearly faint. When he stole glances at the shop across the street, he had the impression that the owner and salesmen were sneering at him from behind their counters. Look at that fool Lin! they seemed to be saying. He really *is* selling below cost! Wait and see! The more business he does, the more he loses! The sooner he'll have to close down!

Mr. Lin gnawed his lips. He vowed he would raise his prices the next day. He would charge first-grade prices for second-rate merchandise.

The head of the Merchants Guild came by. It was he who had interceded with the Guomintang chieftains for Mr. Lin on the question of selling Japanese goods. Now he smiled and congratulated Mr. Lin, and clapped him on the shoulder.

"How goes it? That four hundred dollars was well spent!" he said softly. "But you'd better give a small token to Guomintang Party Commissioner Bu too. Otherwise, he may become annoyed and try to squeeze you. When business is good, plenty of people are jealous. Even if Commissioner Bu doesn't have any 'ideas,' they'll try to stir him up!"

Mr. Lin thanked the head of the Merchants Guild for his concern. Inwardly, he was very alarmed. He almost lost his zest for doing business.

What made him most uneasy was that his assistant Shousheng still hadn't returned from the bill collecting trip. He needed the money to pay off his account with the big Shanghai wholesale house. The collector had arrived from Shanghai two days before, and was pressing Mr. Lin hard. If Shousheng didn't come soon, Mr. Lin would have to borrow from the local bank. This would mean an additional burden of fifty or sixty dollars in interest payments. To Mr. Lin, losing money every day, this prospect was more painful than being flayed alive.

At about four p.m., Mr. Lin suddenly heard a noisy uproar on the street. People looked very frightened, as though some serious calamity had happened. Mr. Lin, who could think only of whether Shousheng would safely return, was sure that the river boat on which Shousheng

would come back had been set upon by pirates. His heart pounding, he hailed a passer-by and asked worriedly:

"What's wrong? Did pirates get the boat from Lishi?"

"Oh! So it's pirates again? Travelling is really too dangerous! Robbing is nothing. Men are even kidnapped right off the boat!" babbled the passer-by, a well-known loafer named Lu. He eyed the brightly coloured goods in the shop.

Mr. Lin could make no sense out of this at all. His worry increased and he dropped Lu to accost Wang, the next person who came along.

"Is it true that the boat from Lishi was robbed?"

"It must be A Shu's gang that did it. A Shu has been shot, but his gang is still a tough bunch!" Wang replied without slackening his pace.

Cold sweat bedewed Mr. Lin's forehead. He was frantic. He was sure that Shousheng was coming back today, and from Lishi. That was the last place on the account book list. Now it was already four o'clock, but there was no sign of Shousheng. After what Wang had said, how could Mr. Lin have any doubts? He forgot that he himself had invented the story of the boat being robbed. His whole face beaded with perspiration, he rushed into the "inner sanctum." Going through the swinging doors, he tripped over the threshold and nearly fell.

"Papa, they're fighting in Shanghai! The Japanese bombed the Zhabei section!" cried Miss Lin, running up to him.

Mr. Lin stopped short. What was all this about fighting in Shanghai? His first reaction was that it had nothing to do with him. But since it involved the "Japanese," he thought he had better inquire a little further. Looking at his daughter's agitated face, he asked:

"The Japanese bombed it? Who told you that?"

"Everyone on the street is talking about it. The Japanese soldiers fired heavy artillery and they bombed. Zhabei is burned to the ground!"

"Oh, well, did anyone say that the boat from Lishi was robbed?"

Miss Lin shook her head, then fluttered from the room like a moth. Mr. Lin hesitated beside the swinging doors, scratching his head. Mrs. Lin was hiccuping and mumbling prayers.

"Buddha protect us! Don't let any bombs fall on our heads!"

Mr. Lin turned and went out to the shop. He saw his daughter engaged in excited conversation with the two salesmen. The owner of the shop across the street had come out from behind his counter and was talking, gesticulating wildly. There was fighting in Shanghai;

Japanese planes had bombed Zhabei and burned it; the merchants in Shanghai had closed down – it all was true. What about the pirates robbing the boat? No one had heard anything about that! And the boat from Lishi? It had come in safely. The shopowner across the street had just seen stevedores from the boat going by with two big crates. Mr. Lin was relieved. Shousheng hadn't come back today, but he hadn't been robbed by pirates either!

Now the whole town was talking about the catastrophe in Shanghai. Young clerks were cursing the Japanese aggressors. People were even shouting, "Anyone who buys Japanese goods is a son of a bitch!" These words brought a scarlet blush to Miss Lin's cheeks, but Mr. Lin showed no change of expression. All the shops were selling Japanese merchandise. Moreover, after spending a few hundred dollars, the merchants had received special authorizations from the Guomindang chieftains, saying, "The goods may be sold after removing the Japanese markings." All the merchandise in Mr. Lin's shop had been transformed into "native goods." His customers, too, would call them "native goods," then take up their packages and leave.

Because of the war in Shanghai, the whole town had lost all interest in business, but Mr. Lin was busy pondering his affairs. Unwilling to borrow from the local bank at exorbitant interest, he sought out the collector from the Shanghai wholesale house, to plead with him as a friend for a delay of another day or two. Shousheng would be back tomorrow before dark at the latest, said Mr. Lin. Then he would pay in full.

"My dear Mr. Lin, you're an intelligent man. How can you talk like that? They're fighting in Shanghai. Train service may be cut off tomorrow or the day after. I only wish I could start back tonight! How can I wait a day or two? Please, settle your account today so that I can leave the first thing tomorrow morning. I'm not my own boss. Please have some consideration for me!"

The Shanghai collector was uncompromisingly firm in his refusal. Mr. Lin saw that it was hopeless; he had no choice but to bear the pain and seek a loan from the local banker. He was worried that "Old Miser" knew of his sore need and would take advantage of the situation to boost the interest rate. From the minute he started speaking to the bank manager, Mr. Lin could feel that the atmosphere was all wrong. The tubercular old man said nothing when Mr. Lin finished his plea, but continued puffing on his antique water-pipe. After the whole packet of tobacco was consumed, the manager finally spoke.

"I can't do it," he said slowly. "The Japanese have begun fighting, business in Shanghai is at a standstill, the banks have all closed down - who knows when things will be set right again! Cut off from Shanghai, my bank is like a crab without legs. With exchange of remittances stopped, I couldn't do business even with a better client than you. I'm sorry. I'd love to help you but my hands are tied!"

Mr. Lin lingered. He thought the tubercular manager was putting on an act in preparation for demanding higher interest. Just as Mr. Lin was about to play along by renewing his pleas, he was surprised to hear the manager press him a step farther.

"Our employer has given us instructions. He has heard that the situation will probably get worse. He wants us to tighten up. Your shop originally owed us five hundred; on the twentysecond, you borrowed another hundred - altogether six hundred, due to be settled before New Year. We've been doing business together a long time, so I'm tipping you off. We want to avoid a lot off talk and embarrassment at the last minute."

"Oh – but our little shop is having a hard time," blurted the dumbfounded Mr. Lin. "I'll have to see how we do with our collections."

"Ho! Why be so modest! The last few days your business hasn't been like the others! What's so difficult about paying a mere six hundred dollars? I'm letting you know today, old brother. I'm looking forward to your settling your debt so that I can clear myself with my employer."

The tubercular manager spoke coldly. He stood up. Chilled, Mr. Lin could see that the situation was beyond repair. All he could do was to take a grip on himself and walk out of the bank. At last he understood that the fighting in distant Shanghai would influence his little shop too. It certainly was going to be hard to get through this New Year: The Shanghai collector was pressing him for money; the bank wouldn't wait until after the New Year; Shousheng still hadn't come back and there was no telling how he was getting on. So far as Mr. Lin's outstanding accounts in town were concerned, last year he had only collected eighty per cent. From the looks of things, this year there was no guarantee of even that much. Only one road seemed open to Mr. Lin: "Business Temporarily Closed – Balancing Books!" And this was equivalent to bankruptcy. There hadn't been any of his own money invested in the shop for a long time. The day the books were balanced and the creditors paid off, what would be left for him probably wouldn't be enough to stand between his family and nakedness!

The more he thought, the worse Mr. Lin felt. Crossing the bridge, he looked at the turbid water below. He was almost tempted to jump and end it all. Then a man hailed him from behind.

"Mr. Lin, is it true there's a war on in Shanghai? I hear that a bunch of soldiers just set up outside the town's east gate and asked the Merchants Guild for a 'loan.' They wanted twenty thousand right off the bat. The Merchants Guild is holding a meeting about it now!"

Mr. Lin hurriedly turned around. The speaker was Old Chen who had two hundred dollars loaned to the shop – another of Mr. Lin's creditors.

"Oh – " retorted Mr. Lin with a shiver. Quickly he crossed the bridge and ran home.

IV

For dinner that evening, beside the usual one meat dish and two vegetable dishes, Mrs. Lin had bought a favourite of Mr. Lin's - a platter of stewed pork. In addition, there was a pint of yellow wine. A smile never left Miss Lin's face, for business in the shop was good, her new silk dress was finished, and because they were fighting back against the Japanese in Shanghai. Mrs. Lin's hiccups were especially sparse – about one every ten minutes.

Only Mr. Lin was sunk in gloom. Moodily drinking his wine, he looked at his daughter, and looked at his wife. Several times he considered dropping the bad news in their midst like a bombshell, but he didn't have that kind of courage. Moreover, he still hadn't given up hope, he still wanted to struggle; at least he wanted to conceal his failure to make ends meet.

And so when the Merchants Guild passed a resolution to pay the soldiers five thousand dollars and asked Mr. Lin to contribute twenty, he consented without a moment's hesitation. He decided not to tell his wife and daughter the true state of affairs until the last possible minute. The way he calculated it was this: He would collect eighty per cent of the debts due him, he would pay eighty per cent of the money he owed. Anyhow, he had the excuse that there was fighting in Shanghai, that remittances couldn't be sent. The difficulty was that there was a difference of about six hundred dollars between what people owed him and what he had to pay to others. He would have to take drastic measures and cut prices heavily. The idea was to scrape together some money to meet the present problem, then he would see. Who could think of the future in times like these? If he could get by now, that would be enough.

That was how he made his plans. With the added potency of the pint of yellow wine, Mr. Lin slept soundly all night, without even the suggestion of a bad dream.

It was already six thirty when Mr. Lin awoke the next morning. The sky was overcast and he was rather dizzy. He gulped down two bowls of rice gruel and hurried to the shop. The first thing to greet his eye was the Shanghai collector, sitting with a stern face, waiting for his "answer." But what shocked Mr. Lin particularly was the shop across the street. They too had pasted red and green strips all over their windows; they too were having a "Big Sale 10% Discount"! Mr. Lin's perfect plan of the night before was completely snowed under by those red and green streamers of his competitor.

"What kind of a joke is this, Mr. Lin? Last night you didn't give a reply. That boat leaves here at eight o'clock and I have to make connections with the train. I simply must catch that eight o'clock boat! Please hurry - "said the Shanghai collector impatiently. He brought his clenched fist down on the table.

Mr. Lin apologized and begged his forgiveness. Truly, it was all because of the fighting in Shanghai and not being able to send remittances. After all, they had been doing business for many years. Mr. Lin pleaded for a little special consideration.

"Then am I to go back empty-handed?"

"Why, why, certainly not. When Shousheng returns, I'll give you as much as he brings. I'm not a man if I keep so much as half a dollar!" Mr. Lin's voice trembled. With an effort he held back the tears that brimmed to his eyes.

There was no more to be said: the Shanghai collector stopped his grumbling. But he remained firmly seated where he was. Mr. Lin was nearly out of his wits with anxiety. His heart thumped erratically. Although he had been having a hard time the past few years, he had

been able to keep up a front. Now there was a collector sitting in his shop for all the world to see. If word of this thing spread, Mr. Lin's credit would be ruined. He had plenty of creditors. Suppose they all decided to follow suit? His shop might just as well close down immediately. In desperation, several times he invited the Shanghai gentleman to wait in the back room where it was more comfortable, but the latter refused.

An icy rain began to fall. The street was cold and deserted. Never had it appeared so mournful at New Year's time. Signboards creaked and clattered in the grip of a north wind. The icy rain seemed like to turn into snow. In the shops that lined the street, salesmen leaning on the counters looked up blankly.

Occasionally, Mr. Lin and the collector from Shanghai exchanged a few desultory words. Miss Lin suddenly emerged through the swinging doors and stood at the front window watching the cold hissing rain. From the back room, the sound of Mrs. Lin's hiccups steadily gathered intensity. While trying to be pleasant to their visitor, Mr. Lin looked at his daughter and listened to his wife's hiccups, and a wave of depression rose in his breast. He thought how all his life he had never known any prosperity, nor could he imagine who was responsible for his being reduced to such dire straits today.

The Shanghai collector seemed to have calmed down somewhat. "Mr. Lin," he said abruptly, in a sincere tone, "you're a good man. You don't go in for loose living, you're obliging and honest in your business practices. Twenty years ago, you would have gotten rich. But things are different today. Taxes are high, expenses are heavy, business is slow - it's an accomplishment just to get along."

Mr. Lin sighed and smiled in wry modesty.

After a pause, the Shanghai collector continued, "This year the market in this town was a little worse than last, wasn't it? Places in the interior like this depend on the people from the countryside for business, but the peasants are too poor. There's really no solution.... Oh, it's nine o'clock! Why hasn't your collection clerk come back yet? Is he reliable?"

Mr. Lin's heart gave a leap. For the moment, he couldn't answer. Although Shousheng had been his salesman for seven or eight years and had never made a slip, still, there was no absolute guarantee! And besides he was overdue. The Shanghai collector laughed to see Mr. Lin's doubtful expression, but his laugh had an odd ring to it.

At the window, Miss Lin whirled and cried urgently, "Papa, Shousheng is back! He's covered with mud!"

Her voice had a peculiar sound too. Mr. Lin jumped up, both alarmed and happy. He wanted to run out and look, but he was so excited that his legs were weak. By then Shousheng had already entered, truly covered with mud. The clerk sat down, panting for breath, unable to say a word. The situation looked bad. Frightened out of his wits, Mr. Lin was speechless too. The Shanghai collector frowned. After a while, Shousheng managed to gasp:

"Very dangerous! They nearly got me!"

"Then the boat was robbed?" the agitated Mr. Lin took a grip on himself and blurted.

"There wasn't any robbing. They were grabbing coolies for the army. I couldn't make the boat yesterday afternoon; I got a sampan this morning. After we sailed, we heard they were waiting at this end to grab the boat, so we came to port further down the river. When we got ashore, before we had come half a *li*, we bumped into an army pressgang. They grabbed the clerk from the clothing shop, but I ran fast and came back by a short cut. Damn it! It was a close call!"

Shousheng lifted his jacket as he talked and pulled from his money belt a cloth-bound packet which he handed to Mr. Lin.

"It's all here," he said. "That Huang Shop in Lishi is rotten. We have to be careful of customers like that next year.... I'll come back after I have a wash and change my clothes."

Mr. Lin's face lit up as he squeezed the packet. He carried it over to the cashier's cage and unbound the cloth wrapping. First he added up the money due on the list of debtors, then he counted what had been collected. There were eleven silver dollars, two hundred dimes, four hundred and twenty dollars in banknotes, and two bank demand drafts - for the equivalent of fifty and sixty-five taels of silver respectively, at the official rate. If he turned the whole lot over to the Shanghai collector, it would still be more than a hundred dollars short of what he owed the wholesale house.

Deep in contemplation, Mr. Lin glanced several times out of the corner of his eye at the Shanghai collector who was silently smoking a cigarette. At last he sighed, and as though cutting off a piece of his living flesh, placed the two bank drafts and four hundred dollars in cash before the man from Shanghai. Then Mr. Lin spoke for a long time until he managed to extract a nod from the latter and the words "all right."

But when the collector looked twice at the bank drafts, he said with a smile, "Sorry to trouble you, Mr. Lin. Please get them cashed for me first."

"Certainly, certainly," Mr. Lin hastened to reply. He quickly affixed his shop's seal to the back of the drafts and dispatched one of his salesmen to cash them at the local bank. In a little while, the salesman came back empty-handed. The bank had accepted the drafts but refused to pay for them, saying they would be credited against Mr. Lin's debt. Though it was snowing heavily now, Mr. Lin rushed over to the bank without an umbrella to plead in person. But his efforts were in vain.

"Well, what about it?" demanded the Shanghai collector impatiently as Mr. Lin returned to the shop, his face anguished.

Mr. Lin seemed ready to weep. There was nothing he could say; he could only sigh. Except to beg the collector for more leniency, what else could he do? Shousheng came out and added

his pleas to Mr. Lin's. He vowed that they would send the remaining two hundred dollars to Shanghai by the tenth of the new year. Mr. Lin was an old customer who had always paid his debts promptly without a word, said Shousheng. This thing today was really unexpected. But that was the situation; they couldn't help themselves. It wasn't that they were stalling.

The Shanghai collector was adamant. Painfully, Mr. Lin brought out the fifty dollars he had taken in during the past few days and handed it over to make up a total payment of four hundred and fifty dollars. Only then did that headache of a Shanghai collector depart.

By that time, it was eleven in the morning. Snowflakes were still drifting down from the sky. Not even half a customer was in sight. Mr. Lin brooded a while, then discussed with Shousheng means to be used in collecting outstanding bills in town. Both men were frowning; neither of them had any particular confidence that much of the six hundred dollars due from town customers could be collected. Shousheng bent close to Mr. Lin's ear and whispered:

"I hear that the big shop at the south gate and the one at the west gate are both shaky. Both of them owe us money - about three hundred dollars altogether. We better take precautions with these two accounts. If they fold up before we can collect, it won't be so funny!"

Mr. Lin paled; his lips trembled a little. Then, Shousheng pitched his voice lower still, and mumbled a bit of even more shocking news.

"There's another nasty rumour - about us. They're sure to have heard it at the bank. That's why they're pressing us so hard. The Shanghai collector probably got wind of it too. Who can be trying to make trouble for us? The shop across the street?"

Shousheng pointed with his pursed lips in the direction of the suspect, and Mr. Lin's eyes swung to follow the indicator. His heart skipping unevenly, his face mournful, Mr. Lin was unable to speak for some time. He had the numb and aching feeling that this time he was definitely finished! If he weren't ruined it would be a miracle: The Guornindang chieftains were putting the squeeze on him; the bank was pressing him; his fellow shopkeepers were stabbing him in the back; a couple of his biggest debtors were going to default. Nobody could stand up under this kind of buffeting. But why was he fated to get such a dirty deal? Ever since he inherited the little shop from his father, he had never dared to be wasteful. He had been so obliging; he never hurt a soul, never schemed against anyone. His father and grandfather had been the same, yet all he was reaping was bitterness!

"Never mind. Let them spread their rumours. You don't have to worry," Shousheng tried to comfort Mr. Lin, though he couldn't help sighing himself. "There are always rumours in lean years. They say in this town nine out of ten shops won't be able to pay up their debts before the year is out. Times are bad, the market is dead as a doornail. Usually strong shops are hard up this year. We're not the only one having rough going! When the sky tumbles everyone gets crushed. The Merchants Guild has to think of a way out. All the shops can't be collapsing; that would make the market even less like a market."

The snowfall was becoming heavier; it was sticking to the ground now. Occasionally, a dog would slink by, shivering, its tail between its legs. It might stop and shake itself violently to dislodge the snow thickly matting its fur. Then, with tail drooping again, the dog would go on its way. Never in its history had this street witnessed so frigid and desolate a New Year season! And just at this time, in distant Shanghai, Japanese heavy artillery was savagely pounding that prosperous metropolis of trade.

V

It was a gloomy New Year, but finally it was passed. In town, twenty-eight big and little shops folded up, including a "credit A-I" silk shop. The two stores that owed Mr. Lin three hundred dollars closed down too. The last day of the year, Shousheng had gone to them and plagued them for hours, but all he could extract was a total of twenty dollars. He heard that afterwards no other collector got so much as a penny out of them; the owners of the two shops hid themselves and couldn't be found. Thanks to the intervention of the head of the Merchants Guild, it wasn't necessary for Mr. Lin to hide. But he had to guarantee to wipe off his debt of four hundred dollars to the bank before the fifteenth of the first month, and he had to consent to very harsh terms: The bank would send a representative to "guard" all cash taken in starting from resumption of business on the fifth; eighty per cent of all money collected would go to the bank until Mr. Lin's debt to them was paid.

During the New Year holidays, Mr. Lin's house was like an ice box. Mr. Lin heaved sigh after sigh. Mrs. Lin's hiccups were like a string of firecrackers. Miss Lin, although she neither hiccuped nor sighed, moped around in the dazed condition of one who has suffered from years of jaundice. Her new silk dress had already gone to the only pawnshop in town to raise money for the maid's wages. An apprentice had taken it there at seven in the morning; it was after nine when he finally squeezed his way out of the crowd with two dollars in his hand. Afterwards, the pawnshop refused to do any more business that day. Two dollars! That was the highest price they would give for any article, no matter how much you had paid for it originally! This was called "two dollar ceiling." When a peasant, steeling himself against the cold, would peel off a cotton-padded jacket and hand it across the counter, the pawnshop clerk would raise it up, give it a shake, then fling it back with an angry "We don't want it!"

Since New Year's Day, the weather had been beautiful and clear. The big temple courtyard, as was the custom, was crowded with the stalls of itinerant pedlars and the paraphernalia of acrobats and jugglers. People lingered before the stalls, patted their empty money belts, and reluctantly walked on. Children dragged at their mothers' clothing, refusing to leave the stall where fireworks were on sale, until Mama was forced to give the little offender a hard slap. The pedlars, who had come specially to cash in on the usual New Year's bazaar trade, didn't even make enough to pay for their food. They couldn't pay their rent at the local inn and quarrelled with the innkeeper every day.

Only the acrobatic troupe earned the large sum of eight dollars. It had been hired by the Guornindang chieftains to add to the atmosphere of "peace and normalcy."

On the evening of the fourth, Mr. Lin, who had with some difficulty managed to raise three dollars, gave the usual spread for his employees at which they all discussed the strategy for the

morrow's re-opening of business. The prospects were already terribly clear to Mr. Lin: If they re-opened, they were sure to operate at a loss; if they didn't re-open, he and his family would be entirely without resources. Moreover, people still owed him four hundred dollars, the collection of which would be even more difficult, if he closed down. The only way out was to cut expenses. But taxes and levies for the soldiers were inescapable; there was even less chance of his avoiding being "squeezed." Fire a couple of salesmen? He only had three. Shousheng was his righthand man; the other two were poor devils; besides he really needed them to wait on the customers. He couldn't save any more at home. They had already let the maid go. He felt the only thing to do was to plunge on. Perhaps, when the peasants, with Buddha's blessing, earned money from their spring raw silk sales, he still might make up his loss.

But the greatest problem in resuming business was that he was short of merchandise. Without money to remit to Shanghai, he couldn't replenish his stock. The fighting in Shanghai was getting worse. There was no use in hoping for getting anything on credit. Sell his reserve? The shop was long since actually cleaned out. The underwear boxes on the shelves were empty; they were used only for show. All that was left were things like wash-basins and towels. But he had plenty of those.

Gloomily, the feasters sipped their wine. For all their perplexed reflection, no one could offer any solution to the problem. They talked of generalities for a while. Then suddenly A Si, one of the salesmen, said:

"The world is going to hell. People live worse than dogs! They say Zhabei was completely burned out. A couple of hundred thousand people had to flee, leaving all their belongings behind. There wasn't any fire in the Hongkou section, but everybody ran away. The Japanese are very cruel. They wouldn't let them take any of their things with them. House rent in safe quarters in Shanghai has skyrocketed. All the refugees are running to the countryside. A bunch came to our town yesterday. They all look like decent people, and now they're homeless!"

Mr. Lin shook his head and sighed, but Shousheng, on hearing these words, was suddenly struck with a bright idea. He put down his chopsticks, then raised his wine cup and drained it in one swallow. He turned to Mr. Lin with a grin.

"Did you hear what A Si just said? That means our wash basins, wash-cloths, soap, socks, tooth powder, tooth brushes, will sell fast. We can get rid of as many as we've got."

Mr. Lin stared. He didn't know what Shousheng was driving at.

"Look, this is a heaven-sent chance. The Shanghai refugees should have a little money, and they need the usual daily necessities, don't they? We ought to set up right away to handle this business!"

Shousheng poured himself another cup of wine, and drank, his face beaming. The two salesmen caught on, and they began to laugh. Only Mr. Lin was not entirely clear. He had been rather dulled by his recent adversity.

“Are you sure?” he asked, irresolutely. “Other shops have wash-cloths and wash-basins too—”

“But we’re the only ones with any real reserve of that sort of stuff. They don’t have even ten wash-basins across the street, and those are all seconds. We’ve got this piece of business right in the palm of our hand! Let’s write a lot of ads and paste them up at the town’s four gateways, any place in town where refugees are staying—say, A Si, where *are* they living? We’ll go put up our stickers there!”

“The ones with relatives are living with their relatives. The rest have borrowed that empty building in the silk factory outside the west gate.” A Si’s face shone with satisfaction over the excellent result he had unwittingly produced.

At last, Mr. Lin had the whole picture. Happy, his spirits revived. He immediately drafted the wording of the advertisements, listing all the daily necessities which the shop had available for sale. There were over a dozen different commodities. In imitation of the big Shanghai stores, he adopted the “One Dollar Package” technique. For a dollar the customer would get a wash-basin, a wash-cloth, a tooth brush and a box of tooth powder. “Big Dollar Sale!” screamed the ad in huge letters. Shousheng brought out the shop’s remaining sheets of red and green paper and cut them into large strips. Then he took up his brush and started writing. The salesmen and the apprentices noisily collected the wash-basins, wash-cloths, tooth brushes and boxes of tooth powder, and arranged them into sets. There weren’t enough hands for all the work. Mr. Lin called his daughter out to help with writing the ads and tying the packages. He also made up other kinds of combination packages - all of daily necessities.

That night, they were busy in the shop late and long. At dawn they had things pretty much in order. When the popping of firecrackers heralded the opening of business the next morning, the shop of the Lin family again had a new look. Their advertisements had already been pasted up all over town. Shousheng had personally attended to the silk factory outside the west gate. The ad with which he plastered the factory walls struck the eyes of the refugees, and they all crowded around to read it as if it were a news bulletin.

In the “inner sanctum” Mrs. Lin, too, rose very early. She lit incense before the porcelain image of the Goddess Guanyin and kowtowed for a considerable time, knocking her head resoundingly against the floor. She prayed for practically everything. About the only thing she omitted was a plea for more refugees to come to the town.

It all worked out fine, just as Shousheng had predicted. Mr. Lin’s shop was the only one whose trade was brisk on the first business day after the New Year’s holidays. By four in the afternoon, he had sold over one hundred dollars’ worth of merchandise - the highest figure for a day ever reached in that town in the past ten years. His biggest seller was the “One Dollar Package,” and it served as a leader to such items as umbrellas and rubber overshoes. Business, moreover, went smoothly, pleasantly. The refugees came from Shanghai, after all; they were used to the ways of the big city; they weren’t as petty as the townspeople or peasants from the out-lying districts. When they bought something, they made up their minds quickly. They’d

pick up a thing, look at it, then produce their money. There was none of this pawing through all the merchandise, no haggling over a few pennies.

When her daughter, all flushed and excited, rushed into the back room for a moment to report the good business, Mrs. Lin went to kowtow before the porcelain Guanyin again. If Shousheng weren't twice the girl's age, Mrs. Lin was thinking, wouldn't he make a good son-in-law! And it wasn't at all unlikely that Shousheng had half an eye on his employer's seventeen-year-old daughter, this girl whom he knew so well.

There was just one thing that spoiled Mr. Lin's happiness - completely disregarding his dignity, the local bank had sent its man to collect eighty per cent of the sales proceeds. And he didn't know who egged them on, but the three creditors of the shop, on the excuse that they "needed a little money to buy rice," all showed up to draw out some advance interest. Not only interest; they even wanted repayment of part of their loans too! But Mr. Lin also heard some good news - another batch of refugees had arrived in town.

For dinner that evening, Mr. Lin served two additional meat dishes, by way of reward to his employees. Everyone complimented Shousheng on his shrewdness. Although Mr. Lin was happy, he couldn't help thinking of how his three creditors had talked about being repaid their loans. It was unlucky to have such a thing happen at the beginning of the new year.

"What do they know!" said Shousheng angrily. "Somebody must have put them up to it!" He pointed with his lips at the shop across the street.

Mr. Lin nodded. But whether the three creditors knew anything or not, it was going to be difficult to handle them. An old man and two widows. You couldn't be soft with them, but getting tough wouldn't either. Mr. Lin pondered for some time, and finally decided the best thing to do would be to ask the head of the Merchants Guild to speak to his three precious creditors. He asked Shousheng for his opinion. Shousheng heartily agreed.

When dinner was over, and Mr. Lin had added up his receipts for the day, he went to pay his respects to the head of the Merchants Guild. The latter expressed complete approval of Mr. Lin's idea. What's more, he commended Mr. Lin on the intelligent way in which he conducted his business. He said the shop was sure to stand firm, in fact it would improve. Stroking his chin, the head of the Merchants Guild smiled and leaned towards Mr. Lin.

"There's something I've been wanting to talk to you about for a long time, but I never had the opportunity. I don't know where Guomindang Commissioner Bu saw your daughter, but he's very interested in her. Commissioner Bu is forty and he had no sons. Though he has two women at home, neither of them has been able to give birth. If your daughter should join his household and present him with a child, he's sure to make her his wife, Madam Commissioner. Ah, if that should happen, even I could share in the reflected glory!"

Never in his wildest dreams had Mr. Lin ever imagined he would run into trouble like this. He was speechless. The head of the Merchants Guild continued solemnly:

"We're old friends. There's nothing we can't speak freely about to each other. This kind of thing, according to the old standards, would make you lose face. But it isn't altogether like that any more; it's quite common nowadays. Your daughter's going over could be considered proper marriage. Anyhow, since that is what Commissioner Bu has in mind, there might be some inconvenience if you refuse him. If you agree, you can have real hope for the future. I wouldn't be telling you this if I didn't have your interests at heart."

"Of course in advising me to be careful, your intentions are the best! But I'm an unimportant person, my daughter knows nothing of high society. We don't dare aspire so high as a commissioner!" Mr. Lin had to brace himself up to speak. His heart was thumping fast.

"Ha ha! It isn't a question of your aspirations, but the fact that he finds her suitable.... Let's leave it at that. You go home and talk it over with your wife. I'll put the matter aside. When I see Commissioner Bu I'll say I haven't had a chance to speak to you about it, alright? But you must give me an answer soon!"

There was a long pause. Then, "I will," Mr. Lin forced himself to say. His face was ghastly.

When he got home, he sent his daughter out of the room and reported to his wife in detail. Even before he finished, Mrs. Lin's hiccups rose in a powerful barrage that was probably audible to all the neighbours. With an effort she stemmed the tide and said, panting:

"How can we consent? – hic – Even if it wasn't concubine he wanted – hic – hic – even if he were looking for a wife, I still couldn't bear to part with her!"

"That's the way I feel, but -

"Hic – we run our business all legal and proper. Do you mean to say if we don't agree he could get away with taking her by force? Hic – ”

"But he's sure to find an excuse to make some kind of trouble. That kind of man is crueler than a bandit!" Mr. Lin whispered. He was nearly crying.

"He'll get her only over my dead body! Hic! Goddess Guanyin preserve us!" cried Mrs. Lin in a voice that trembled. She rose and started to sway out of the room. Mr. Lin hastily barred her way.

"Where are you going? Where are you going?" he babbled.

Just then, Miss Lin came in. Obviously she had overheard quite a bit, for her complexion was the colour of chalk and her eyes were staring fixedly. Mrs. Lin flung her arms around her daughter and wept and hiccuped while she struggled to say in gasps:

"Hic – child – hic – anybody who tries to snatch you – hic – will have to do it over my dead body! Hic! The year I gave birth to you I got this – sickness – hic – It was hard, but I brought you up till now you're seventeen – hic – hic – Dead or alive, we'll stick together! Hic! We

should have promised you to Shousheng long ago! Hic! That Bu is a dirty crook! He isn't afraid the gods will strike him down!"

Miss Lin wept too, crying "Ma!" Mr. Lin wrung his hands and sighed. The women were wailing at an alarming rate, and he was afraid their laments would be heard through the thin walls and startle the neighbours. This sort of row was also an unlucky way to commence the new year. Holding his own emotions in check, he did his best to soothe wife and daughter.

That night, all three members of the Lin family slept badly. Although Mr. Lin had to get up early the next morning to go to business, he wrestled with his gloomy thoughts all night. A sudden sound on the roof sent his heart leaping with fear that Commissioner Bu had come to trump up charges against him. Then he calmed himself and considered the matter carefully. His was a family of proper business people who had never committed any crimes. As long as he did a good business and didn't owe people money, surely Bu couldn't make trouble without any reason at all. And now Lin's business was beginning to show some vitality. Just because he had raised a goodlooking daughter, he had invited disaster! He should have engaged her years ago, then maybe this problem would never have arisen.... Was the head of the Merchants Guild sincerely willing to help? The only way out was to beg for his aid – Mrs. Lin started hiccuping again. Ai! That ailment of hers!

Mr. Lin rose as soon as the sky began to turn light. His eyes were somewhat bloodshot and swollen, and he felt dizzy. But he had to pull himself together and attend to business. He couldn't leave the entire management of the shop to Shousheng; the young fellow had put in an exhausting few days.

He was still uneasy after he seated himself in the cashier's cage. Although business was good, from time to time his whole body was shaken by violent shivers. Whenever a big man came in, if Mr. Lin didn't know him, he would suspect that the man had been sent by Commissioner Bu to spy, to stir up a fuss, and his heart would thump painfully.

And it was strange. Business that day was active beyond all expectations. By noon they had sold nearly sixty dollars' worth of merchandise. There were local townspeople among the customers too. They weren't just buying; they were practically grabbing. The only thing like it would be a bankrupt shop selling its stock out at auction cheap. While Mr. Lin was fairly pleased, he was also rather alarmed. This kind of business didn't look healthy to him. Sure enough, Shousheng approached him during the lunch hour and said softly:

"There's a rumour outside that you've cut prices to clear out your left-overs. That when you've collected a little money, you're going to take it and run!"

Mr. Lin was both angry and frightened. He couldn't speak. Suddenly two men in uniform entered and barged forward to demand:

"Which one is Mr. Lin, the proprietor?"

Mr. Lin rose in flurried haste. Before he had a chance to reply, the uniformed men began to lead him away. Shousheng came over to stop them and to question them. They barked at him savagely:

"Who are you? Stand aside! He's wanted for questioning at the Guomindang office!"

VI

That afternoon, Mr. Lin did not return. They were busy at the shop, and Shousheng could not get away to inquire personally. He had managed to conceal the truth from Mrs. Lin but one of the apprentices let it leak out, and the lady became frantic almost to the point of distraction. She absolutely refused to let Miss Lin go out of the swinging doors.

"They've already taken your father. They'll be coming back for you next! Hic – "

She called in Shousheng and questioned him closely. He didn't think it advisable to tell her too much.

"Don't worry, Mrs. Lin," he comforted. "There's nothing wrong! He only went down to the Guomindang office to straighten out the question of our creditors. Business is good. What have we got to be afraid of!"

Behind Mrs. Lin's back, he told Miss Lin quietly, "We still don't really know what this is all about." He urged her to look after her mother; he would attend to the shop. Miss Lin didn't have the faintest idea what to do. She agreed to everything Shousheng said.

Between waiting on the customers and thinking up answers to Mrs. Lin's constant questions, it was impossible for Shousheng to find time to inquire about the fate of Mr. Lin. Finally, at twilight, word was brought by the head of the Merchants Guild: Mr. Lin was being held by the Guomindang chieftains because of the rumour that he was planning to abscond with the shop's money. Besides what Mr. Lin owed the bank and the wholesale house, there were also his three poor creditors to be considered. The total of six hundred and fifty dollars which they had put up was in jeopardy. The Guomindang was especially concerned over the welfare of these poor people. So it was detaining him until he settled with them.

Shousheng's face was drained of colour. Dazed, he finally managed to ask:

"Can we put up a guarantee and have him released first? Unless we get him out, how are we going to raise the money?"

"Huh! Release him on a guarantee! You can't become his guarantor if you go there without money in your hands!"

"Mr. Guild Leader, think of something, I beg you. Do a good deed. You and Mr. Lin are old friends. I beg you to help him!"

The head of the Merchants Guild frowned thoughtfully. He looked at Shousheng for a minute, then led him to a corner of the room and said in a low voice:

"I can't stand by with folded arms and watch Mr. Lin remain in difficulty. But the situation is very strained now! To tell you the truth, I've already pleaded with Commissioner Bu to intervene. Commissioner Bu only wanted Mr. Lin to agree to one thing, and would be willing to help him. I've just seen Mr. Lin at the Guomindang office where I urged him to consent, and he did so. Shouldn't that be the end of the matter? Who would have thought that dark pock-marked fellow in the Guomindang would be so nasty? He still insists – ”

"Surely he wouldn't go against Commissioner Bu?"

"That's what I thought! But the pock-marked fellow kept mumbling and grumbling till Commissioner Bu was very embarrassed. They had a terrible row! Now you see how awkward things are?"

Shousheng sighed. He had no idea. There was a pause, then he sighed again and said:

"But Mr. Lin hasn't committed any crime."

"Those people don't talk reason! With them, might makes right! Tell Mrs. Lin not to worry; Mr. Lin hasn't been mistreated yet. But to get him out she'll have to spend a little money!"

The head of the Merchants Guild held up two fingers, then quickly departed.

Though he racked his brains, Shousheng could see no other alternative. The two salesmen plagued him with questions, but he ignored them. He was wondering whether he should report the words of the head of the Merchants Guild to Mrs. Lin. Again they had to spend money! While he didn't know quite clear as to the financial condition of the shop: After the local bank got through deducting its eighty per cent from the cash earned during the past two days, all that was left for the shop was about fifty dollars. A lot of good that would do! The head of the Merchants Guild had indicated a bribe of two hundred dollars. Who knew whether that would be enough! The way things were, even if business should improve even more, it still wouldn't be any use. Shousheng felt discouraged.

From the back room, someone was calling him. He decided to go in and size up the situation, and then determined what should be done. He found Mrs. Lin leaning on her daughter's arm.

"Hic – just now – hic – the head of the Merchants Guild came – hic – " she panted. "What did he say?"

"He wasn't here," lied Shousheng.

"You can't fool me – hic – I – hic – know everything. Hic – your face is scared yellow! Xiu saw him – hic!"

"Be calm, Mrs. Lin. He says it's all right. Commissioner Bu is willing to help – "

"What? Hic – hic – What? Commissioner Bu is willing to help! – Hic, hic – Merciful goddess – hic – I don't want his help! Hic, hic – I know – Mr. Lin – hic, hic – is finished! Hic – I want to die too! There's only Xiu – hic – that I'm worried about! Hic, hic – take her with you! – Hic! You two go and get married! Hic – hic – Shousheng – hic – you take good care of Xiu and I won't worry about anything! Hic! Go! They want to grab her! – Hic – the savage beasts! Goddess Guanyin, why don't you display your divine power!"

Shousheng stared. He didn't know what to say. He thought Mrs. Lin had gone mad, yet she didn't look the least abnormal. His heart beating hard, he stole a glance at Miss Lin. She was blushing scarlet; she kept her head down and made no comment.

"Shousheng, Shousheng, somebody wants to see you!" an apprentice came running in and announced.

Thinking it was the head of the Merchants Guild or some such personage, Shousheng rushed out. To his surprise, he found Mr. Wu, proprietor of the shop across the street, waiting for him. What does he want? wondered Shousheng. He fixed his eyes on Mr. Wu's face.

Mr. Wu inquired about Mr. Lin, and then, all smiles, said he was sure it was "not serious." Shousheng felt there was something fishy about his smile.

"I've come to buy a little of your merchandise - " The smile had disappeared from Mr. Wu's face and the tone of his voice changed. He produced a sheet of paper from his sleeve. It was a list of over a dozen items - the very things Mr. Lin was featuring in his "One Dollar Package." One look and Shousheng understood. So that was the game!

"Mr. Lin isn't here," he said promptly. "I haven't the right to decide."

"Why not talk to Mrs. Lin? That'll be just as good!"

Shousheng hesitated to reply. He was beginning to have an inkling of why Mr. Lin had been detained. First there was the rumour that Mr. Lin was planning to run away, then Mr. Lin was arrested, and now the competitor's shop had come to gouge merchandise. There was an obvious connection between these events. Shousheng became rather angry, and a bit frightened. He knew that if he agreed to Mr. Wu's request, Mr. Lin's business would be finished, and the heart's blood that he himself had expended would be in vain. But if he refused what other tricks would be forthcoming? He simply didn't dare to think.

"I'll go and talk to Mrs. Lin, then," he offered tentatively "But she only operates on a cash basis."

"Cash? Ha, Shousheng, of course you're joking?"

"That's the kind of person Mrs. Lin is. I can't do anything with her. The best thing would be for you to come again tomorrow. The head of the Merchants Guild just told me that Commissioner Bu is willing to take a hand in the matter. Mr. Lin probably will be back tonight," said Shousheng with cold deliberateness. He shoved the list back in Mr. Wu's hand.

His face twitching, the latter hastily forced the list on Shousheng again.

"All right, all right, if it has to be cash then it's cash. I'll take the goods tonight. Cash on delivery."

Scowling, Shousheng walked into the back room and told Mrs. Lin about the shop across the street wanting to gouge merchandise.

"When the head of the Merchants Guild was here, he really said Mr. Lin was fine; he hasn't been through any hardships. But we'll have to spend some money to get him out. There's only fifty dollars in the shop. Now this fellow across the street wants goods – from the looks of his list, about a hundred and fifty dollars' worth. Why not let him have them? The important thing is to get Mr. Lin back as soon as possible! "

Upon hearing that they had to spend money again, tears gushed from Mrs. Lin's eyes, and her hiccups truly shook the heavens with their intensity. Beyond words, she could only wave her hand, while her head, which she rested on the table, resounded alarmingly against the wooden top. Shousheng could see that he was getting nowhere, and he quietly withdrew. Miss Lin caught up with him outside the swinging doors. Her face was deathly white, her voice trembling and hoarse.

"Ma is so angry she can't think straight," Miss Lin whispered urgently. "She keeps saying they're already killed Papa! You, you hurry up and agree to what Mr. Wu wants. Save Papa, quick! Shousheng, Brother, you – " At this point, her face suddenly flamed scarlet, and she flew back into the room.

In a daze, Shousheng stared after her for a full half minute, then he turned away, determined to take the responsibility for selling the merchandise to their competitor. At least Miss Lin agreed with him on what should be done.

The table had already been laid for dinner in the shop, but Shousheng had no appetite. As soon as Mr. Wu arrived with the money, Shousheng took one hundred dollars in his hand and concealed another eighty dollars on his person, and rushed off to find the head of the Merchants Guild.

Half an hour later Shousheng returned with Mr. Lin. Bursting into the "inner sanctum," they nearly startled Mrs. Lin out of her wits. When she saw that it was really Mr. Lin in the flesh, she agitatedly prostrated herself before the porcelain Guanyin and kowtowed vigorously, pounding her head so loudly that it drowned out the sound of her hiccups. Miss Lin stood to one side, her eyes staring. She looked as if she wanted to laugh and cry at the same time. Shousheng took out a paper-wrapped packet and set it on the table.

"This is eighty dollars we didn't have to use."

Mr. Lin sighed. When he finally spoke, his voice was dull.

"You should have let me die there and be done with it. Spending more money to get me out! Now we've got no money, we're all going to die anyhow! "

Mrs. Lin jumped up from the ground, excited and wanting to speak. But a string of hiccups blocked the words in her throat. Miss Lin wept quietly, with suppressed sobs. Mr. Lin did not cry. He sighed again and said in a choked voice:

"Our merchandise has been cleaned out! We can't do any business, they're pressing us hard for debts – "

"Mr. Lin!"

It was Shousheng who shouted. He dipped his finger in the tea, then wrote on the table the one word – "Go."

Mr. Lin shook his head. Tears flowed from his eyes. He looked at his wife, he looked at his daughter, and again he sighed.

"That's the only way out, Mr. Lin! We can still scrape together a hundred dollars in the shop. Take it with you; it'll be enough for a month or two. I'll take care of what has to be done here."

Although Shousheng spoke quietly, Mrs. Lin overheard him. She curbed her hiccups and interjected:

"You go too, Shousheng! You and Xiu. Leave me here alone. I'll fight to the death! Hic!"

Mrs. Lin suddenly appeared remarkably young and healthy; she whirled and ran up the stairs. "Ma!" called Miss Lin, and dashed after her mother. Mr. Lin stared at the stairway, bewildered. He felt he had something important to say, but he was too numb to recall what it was.

"You and Xiu go together," Shousheng urged softly.

"Mrs. Lin will worry if Xiu stays here! She says they want to snatch – "

Tears in his eyes, Mr. Lin nodded. He couldn't make up his mind.

Shousheng felt his own eyes smarting. He sighed and walked around the table.

Just then, they heard Miss Lin crying. Startled, Mr. Lin and Shousheng rushed up the stairs. Mrs. Lin was coming out of her room with a paper packet in her hand. She went back into the room when she saw them, and said:

"Please come in, both of you. Listen to what I've decided." She pointed at the packet. "In here is my private property – hic – about two hundred dollars. I'm giving you two half. Hic! Xiu, I give you in marriage to Shousheng! Hic - tomorrow, Xiu and her father will leave together. Hic – I'm not going! Shousheng will stay with me a few days, and then we'll see. Who knows how many days I have left to live – hic – So if you both kowtow in my presence, I can set my mind at ease! Hic – "

Mrs. Lin took her daughter by one hand and Shousheng by the other, and ordered them to "kowtow." Both did so, their cheeks flaming red; they kept their heads down. Shousheng stole a glance at Miss Lin. There was a faint smile on her tear-stained face. His heart thumped wildly, and two tears rolled down from his eyes.

"Good. That's the way it'll be." Mr. Lin heaved a sigh. "But Shousheng, when you stay here and deal with those people, be very, very careful!"

VII

The shop of the Lin family had to close down at last. The news that Mr. Lin had run away soon spread all over town. Of the creditors, the local bank was the first to send people to put the stock into custody. They also searched for the account books. Not one was to be found. They asked for Shousheng. He was sick in bed. They grilled Mrs. Lin. Her reply was a string of explosive hiccups and a stream of tears. Since she after all enjoyed the social position of "Madam Lin," there was nothing they could do with her.

By about eleven a.m., the horde of creditors in the Lin shop were quarrelling with a tremendous din. The local bank and the other creditors were wrangling as to how to divide the remaining property. Although the stock was nearly gone, the remainder and the furniture and fixture were enough to repay the Creditors about seventy per cent; but each was fighting for a ninety, or even one hundred, per cent for himself. The head of the Merchants Guild had talked until his tongue was a little paralysed, to no avail.

Two policemen arrived and took their stand outside the shop door. Clubs in hand, they barked at the crowd that had gathered to see the excitement.

"Why can't I go in? I've got a three hundred dollar loan in this shop! My savings!" Mrs. Zhu argued with a policeman, twisting her withered lips. Tottering, she was elbowing her way through the mass. The blue veins on her forehead stood out as thick as little fingers. She kept pushing. Then suddenly she saw Widow Zhang, with her five-year-old baby in her arms, pleading with the other policeman to let her enter. He looked at the widow out of the corners of his eyes, and while feigning to tease the child, furtively rubbed the back of his hand against the widow's breasts.

"Sister Zhang - " Mrs. Zhu gasped loudly. She sat down on the edge of the stone steps, forcibly moving her puckered mouth.

Tears in her eyes, Widow Zhang took an aimless step, which brought into her line of vision Mrs. Zhu panting on the edge of the stone stairs. She practically stumbled over to Mrs. Zhu and sat down beside her. Then, Widow Zhang began to cry and lament:

"Oh, my husband, you've left me alone! You don't know how I'm suffering! The wicked soldiers killed you - it was three years ago the day before yesterday.... That cursed Mr. Lin - may he die without sons or grandsons! - has closed his shop! The hundred and fifty dollars that I earned by the toil of my two hands has fallen into the sea and is gone without a sound! Aiya! The lot of the poor is hard, and the rich have no hearts - "

Hearing his mother cry, the child also began to wail. Widow Zhang hugged him to her bosom and wept even more bitterly.

Mrs. Zhu did not cry. Her sunken red-rimmed eyes glared, and she kept saying frantically:

"The poor have only one life, and the rich have only one life. If they don't give me back my money, I'll fight them to the death!"

Just then, a man pushed his way out of the shop. It was Old Chen. His face was purple. He was cursing as he jostled through the crowd.

"You gang of crooks! You'll pay for this! One day I'll see you all burning in the fires of Hell! If we have to take a loss, everybody should take it together. Even if I got only a small share of what's left, at least that would be fair - "

Still swearing vigorously, he spotted the two women.

"Mrs. Zhang, Mrs. Zhu, what are you sitting there crying for!" he shouted to them. "They've finished dividing up the property. My one mouth couldn't out-argue their dozen. That pack of jackals doesn't give a damn about what's reasonable. They insist that our money doesn't count - "

His words made Widow Zhang weep more bitterly than ever. The playful policeman abruptly walked over to her. He poked her shoulder with his club.

"Hey, what are you crying about? Your man died a long time ago. Which one are you crying for now!"

"Dog farts!" roared Old Chen furiously. "While those people are stealing our money, all a turd like you can do is get gay with women!" He gave the policeman a strong push.

The policeman's nasty eyes went wide. He raised his club to strike, but the crowd yelled and cursed at him. The other policeman ran over and pulled Old Chen to one side.

"It's no use your raising a fuss. We've got nothing against you. The Merchants Guild has ordered us to guard the door. We've got to eat. We can't help it."

"Old Chen, go make a complaint at the Guomindang office!" a man shouted from the crowd. From the sound of it, it was the voice of Lu, the well-known loafer.

"Go on, go on!" yelled several others. "See what they say to that!"

The policeman who had mediated laughed coldly. He grasped Old Chen by the shoulder. "I advise you not to go looking for trouble. Going there won't do you any good! You wait till Mr. Lin comes back and settle things with him. He can't deny the debt."

Old Chen fumed. He couldn't make up his mind. The idlers were still shouting for him to "go." He looked at Mrs. Zhu and Widow Zhang.

"What do you say? They're always screaming down there how they protect the poor!"

"That's right," called one of the crowd. "Yesterday they arrested Mr. Lin because they said they didn't want him to run away with poor people's money!"

Almost involuntarily, Old Chen and the two women were swept along by the crowd down the street to the Guomindang office. Widow Zhang was crying as she walked, and cursing the wicked soldiers who had killed her husband, and praying that Mr. Lin should die without sons or grandsons, and reviling that dirty dog of a policeman!

As they neared the office, they saw four policemen standing outside the gate with clubs in their hands. The policemen yelled to them from a distance:

"Go home! You can't go in!"

"We've come to make a complaint!" shouted Old Chen, who was in the first rank of the crowd. "The shop of the Lin family has closed down, and we can't get hold of the money we put to –"

A swarthy pock-marked man jumped out from behind the policemen and howled for them to attack. But the policemen stood their ground, restricting themselves to threats. The crowd in back of Old Chen began to clamour.

"You cheap mongrels don't know what's good for you!" screamed the pock-marked man. "Do you think we have nothing better to do than bother about your business? If you don't get out of here, we're going to fire!"

He stamped and yelled at the policemen to use their clubs. In the front ranks, Old Chen was struck several times. The crowd milled in confusion. Mrs. Zhu was old and weak, and she toppled to the ground. In her panicky haste, Widow Zhang lost her slippers. Pushed and

buffeted, she also fell down. Rolling and crawling, she avoided many leaping and stamping feet. She scrambled up and ran for all she was worth. It was then she realized that her child was gone. There were drops of blood on the upper part of her jacket.

"Aiya! My precious! My heart! The bandits are killing people! Jade Emperor God save us!"

Wailing, her hair tumbled in disorder, she ran quickly. By the time she fled past the closed door of the shop of the Lin family, she was completely out of her mind.

June 18, 1932