

蕭軍：羊

Goats

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I

THE IRON BARS over the window divide the sky's vista into rectangular sections. The colors of these sections often vary; in the mornings and evenings they are most often a reddish-brown or a pale or even deep yellow. But when the color is the red of a delicate rose or the blue of a flawless piece of crystallized jade, that's when it's most fascinating. Looking out through any one of the sections the panorama is all red or all blue. But this isn't common; usually the view is of clouds—ashen and dark like smoke—and of fog, with an atmosphere somewhere between the two. There they lie suspended as if pasted up in the sky, and even the wind seems unable to disperse them. And the ocean, it too seems fused to them, being swallowed up . . . eroded.

Off in the distance the broad expanse of ocean is dotted by the swells of island-groups and by scattered and unimposing islets. These islets seem to be covered with a stunted growth of fleece, with no trace of anyone ever having lived there. They are nothing more than moderately colored islands in miniature. There are some, as I look at them from here, that fail to even fill up one of the squares in my window. If someone wanted to paint a seascape, the scene in one of these openings

would be an ideal one. Sad to say, I'm not an artist and besides there aren't any brushes or palettes here.

Steamships, whether leaving or entering, must all pass along the foot of a continuous row of mountains. The ships appear even greater in size against the mountain backdrop which at the same time gives proof that they are definitely not just anchored out there, but are steadily moving on. . . .

The strait off to the left resembles the leg of a woman stretching too far out to the middle of the ocean. The crests of the waves often are a frenzy of agitation with almost ghastly white caps of foam; when winds come up, every billowing wave breaks up and erupts into a surging pillar of water a dozen feet high, only to come crashing down pell-mell over the surface, each one following closely upon the other. Where the waves are the loftiest and most numerous I have yet to see a single bather or fisherman; even casual visitors are seldom seen there.

And the strait off to the right, what does it look like? Is it much the same as the one on this side? This is something I just don't know. That's because my room has but two windows, one in the front and one directly opposite at the rear. Nothing but mountains can be seen through the window at the back, and as for the one in front, I have to look

past the barred opening in the door and the passageway that runs by, and so whatever view that angle allows, that's how much I can see. If it weren't for those iron bars and the door, I could, of course, stick my head through and then draw it back once I had looked at the view as much as I wanted. Frequently I attempt to see if I can make something out from the reflection on the window glass that is thrust open, but the glass is so filthy that it looks like a dull and opaque piece of board. What good then are any such 'attempts' in here?

Behind me now are a summer and an autumn of looking within the same angle at this small slice of sea and hillside. Each day the worn portions of the floorplanks become imperceptibly paler and sink deeper . . . they neatly form a broad strip from this corner over to that one. Little remains of the heels of my shoes, and I haven't paid any notice to where the shreds of leather and wood that are worn off have disappeared.

I eat; I sleep; I wear out the floor, my shoes, and my allotted span of life and youth. . . .

The swallows like to soar casually in the clear sky at dusk, looking like so many small angular black specks, while sea-birds circle as they climb and descend. At first I was jealous of these feathered creatures, and if I were a hunter armed with a bird gun, in my state of mind of the moment I would shoot down every one of them without mercy. Was this their way of showing off in front of us humans? Or what? But now it's different; I feel as though they should be this way, that they have the freedom and privilege to be as they are. Now I look upon them with complete tranquility, and if at times fewer of them come, I have an empty, lonely feeling, as if things are not as they should be.

On the hill at the rear the leaves on the trees have become sparse. The smell of goat and pig dung and other odors that float up from below aren't as strong as they used to be.

At sea the islets used to be a luxuriant green arched like the backs of small mice. Now they have lost their sheen, and their dreariness is revealed as though, stripped of hair and skin, they are helplessly surrounded by an onslaught of ocean waves. The sailing ships can now no longer trail their long and steady shadows across the ocean's surface as they could in the summer. These days the weather sometimes turns stormy and the ships

begin to roll and toss.

Each day at the fixed time come the sounds of leg-irons and of steel doors opening and closing from down the passageway. The men on their way out to work and the men returning from their work all pass by my door and, as is their habit, they hurriedly throw wolfish glances towards the opening in the door, baring their yellowed or blackened teeth. I know that they are begging for my cigarette butts. The cigarette butts are here all right, but even though there are plenty and I have no use for them, the guards will not permit me to give them away. As they pass by my door the scant slice of ocean view that I have is blocked out. Fortunately the guards don't allow them to stop; if one of them should tarry a moment, he has the 'privilege' of being given a boot in the rear.

A strapping young man, the last one to appear, passed in front of my door gazing off with an unfamiliar and childish look. I knew he was a newcomer, as he didn't have that greedy look of those others who begged for the cigarette butts.

"Is he new?" I asked a guard who was walking by.

"Brought up from below—came only three days ago."

"What's he here for?"

"Theft."

This guard seems to treat every matter as though it were commonplace; there's nothing that can capture his interest, and I have never seen any notable change of expression on his face—is it made of stone? Or carved out of wax? His lips are pursed to the point of being completely colorless. The area around his nose is bowl-shaped with the two lines coming down from the base and forming deeply etched arcs. His mouth is encompassed by these two arcs just as if it were enclosed in a pair of algebraic brackets. Similarly his forehead and brows are artlessly creased with the same kind of irregular, curved wrinkles.

Right below my floor the semi-subterranean rooms are identically equipped with passageways, and they also have doors with openings and iron-barred windows. They differ in that one can't see the ocean from there—they are set up for prisoners who have just arrived.

"He's quite a robust fellow, eh!" I said to myself, with the ring of a sigh of resignation.

"Robust? Hah! We've had stronger ones than

him before! What is he, after all . . . a thief—a goat thief.”

The guard faced me, slowly exposing his darkened teeth, and continued:

“Just wait and see . . . robust? Hah!”

In the evening a couple of Russian children were sent into my room, each of them holding on for dear life to the end of a loaf of bread which he clasped to his breast, even though so little of the bread remained you'd really only call them empty crust ends. Then too, they had a military canteen and an unbearably soiled pulp magazine.

The guard explained to me that these were two youngsters who had wanted to flee to their own country, but they had neglected to buy boat tickets and were delivered here last night by someone from the boat.

“The prisoners here are really detestable. During the night they filched these two ‘Rusky’ kids’ bread and nearly ate it all . . . really detestable!”

The guard locked my door and left, his voice trailing off as he walked away. The two children uneasily scrutinized every nook and cranny with their eyes, and in a moment they began to get restless and started scurrying about like mice, all the while gnawing away at what remained of their loaf of bread.

They sized me up from all angles and finally, after they had talked it over between themselves again and again, in a more relaxed manner they put their canteen, their magazine, and their bread crusts down on my small table.

“You must be a teacher.”¹

The children probably thought that I didn't look like I was in prison for being a thief or a ‘heroin user’—a teacher wouldn't pilfer their bread and eat it—perhaps because they had seen the few sheets of newspaper on my bed. In here, anyone able to come by a newspaper must probably be a teacher.

“I'm a lawbreaker too.”

At first the children didn't understand what I was saying and just stood there staring at me blankly. They had begun by questioning me in a broken Shanghai patois and at this point I felt it best that I explain my meaning to them in Russian.

“I am a person who has committed a crime too. Do you understand? A person who has committed a crime!”

“You are a criminal too? Like them?” The elder of the two pointed downwards—meaning the prisoners below us. The smaller one merely opened wide his eyelashes, leaving the pupils of his eyes, deep gold with a touch of brown, completely isolated from either eyelid, solidly suspended there in the surrounding pale blue of the whites.

“Just like them . . . like a thief or a robber. . . .” I said to them with a smile. Do I look nice when I smile? I don't have the slightest idea myself. There's no mirror here for me in which to look at myself, but I seemed to detect that it may have made them even more uneasy. I scratched my itching scalp with my fingers, and something came down with the scaly white flecks—they were strands of my hair. Lately these superfluous hairs seemed to be shedding more easily, and my forehead, which was not normally very extensive, now seemed a bit broader with more smooth surface.

“Are you a thief too?”

The boys didn't trust me anymore. Once again they—the older one leading the younger one—picked up all of their things from my table—magazine, the bread crusts and the canteen—with the intention of going over to open the door.

I didn't stand in their way, for I knew there was no need for me to do so. I remained seated in the room's lone chair gently twisting a fallen strand of hair around my fingers, and for some unknown reason I felt very content.

They yelled and kicked the door with their feet and together turned their eyes up towards the rectangular opening in the door.

A face like a carved bust appeared at the opening and blocked out every bit of light that had been coming through.

“What the hell are you doing?” The guard's eyes shone and every deeply etched wrinkle on his face quivered slightly. The children were struck dumb; they merely pointed to me and to their crusts of bread.

“He won't steal your bread and eat it. Now if you cause any more trouble, I'll. . . .”

The guard deliberately swung his thick rattan rod past the opening in the door a couple of times. The children came back and looked me over again, while the guard availed himself of the moment to

¹The term *hsien-sheng* could also mean a gentleman, a member of some privileged class.

throw me a smiling glance. Then he walked away.

"Why don't you sit down, kids. I wouldn't take your bread away from you."

I went over and tugged on their arms, but they steadfastly shied away with hopeless looks on their faces. In the younger one's eyes I could already see some moisture welling up. The older one, however, looked as though he knew what to do, and he asked me:

"Are you really not a thief? You won't steal our bread and eat it?"

"Not even a little bit. Why, I could give you something to eat!"

"Then why are you in here? This is a bad place; there are all kinds of people here! Why are you here too, huh?"

How could I answer this child? Even I was at a loss to find a reason for my staying here. I stroked the hair of the younger one and said:

"I like to watch the ocean from here!"

"Watch the ocean?" His eyes began searching for the sea. "Watch the ocean from this opening?" He bounded over and, standing on tip-toe, looked towards the sea. "I can't see it!"

"Sure you can. . . ."

I led them over and brought the chair for them to stand on; the little one started shouting:

"*Mórye! Mórye!*"²

Just then there was a steamship heading out to sea, a long trail of smoke stretching out behind it; perhaps it was the very ship that had brought me back to my homeland. It couldn't know that a passenger it had once carried was just then looking at it through a small opening like this one, watching its comings and goings as it navigated freely.

From somewhere the children turned up with the red-tipped matches I use to light my cigarettes. They withdrew into a dark place and began striking them against their wet, sticky palms, letting off a phosphorescent glow. They roared with laughter.

At night the sea is sheer darkness, deep and somber, while the stars in the sky are set apart by the window's iron bars. Compared to the daytime, the sound of the ocean's crashing waves comes through more clearly and a little more violently.

The children slept on my bed. I listened to the mixed sounds of their snoring and to some in-

distinct and disconnected murmurings in their sleep. As usual I walked along my regular path, from this corner over to that corner. . . .

I picked up the magazine with the unbearably soiled cover from the table and casually flipped through each page; there were both words and pictures. The names of some of the people in the pictures were familiar, but others were completely unknown, and none of them had any connection whatsoever with my thoughts of the moment.

Like a blade of grass that has been existing for a long, long time in a cave with no wind or rain, no sunlight . . . no thoughts. . . . The arrival of these two children today seems to have destroyed me, destroyed my serenity! My thoughts began to revive, like those of a pent-up animal.

II

THE FETID SMELL of goats that gently floats up through the window at the rear is disquieting. I look out through the iron bars at those few suffering goats sleeping, without change, cuddled up at one corner of the enclosure; they are already just a blur of white. The bleating sounds these past few days are neither as regular nor as loud and shrill as they were. I no longer see the goat with the long beard and solid, twisting horns sniffing and chasing the tail of his already pregnant fellow-prisoner as he did when he first came out. All day long he just sleeps there softly, bleary-eyed. Occasionally he stands up, but only when someone has thrown something edible into the enclosure, and then he goes and clashes with his pregnant fellow-prisoner. When he does so his earlier good-natured way of sniffing and chasing the tail of his fellow-prisoner changes completely. For by that time he has already become cruel, and sticking his neck out in an exaggerated manner, he tosses his horns in a threatening gesture towards her. Often his fellow-prisoner is thrown to the ground, exhausted; baring her teeth, she bleats dispiritedly as her exposed belly is wracked with spasms.

It has been three days since the children left me—no, I can only say, since they left this room. When they found out that they were going to be released and, moreover, that they could board a ship returning to their homeland and would be

²Ocean/sea.

given back the five *yuan*³ that had been confiscated, they were so happy they nearly took wing! They danced around me and kicked over my chair; they shredded my newspaper into confetti; they whistled, sang, and then recited poems of their homeland by Tolstoy, as well as the poems of Pushkin and Lermontov. They flipped through the torn magazine about a thousand times and pointed it out to me:

"Look here, this is Moscow! We're going to see Moscow! Look! All of this is our homeland—all of it! There are airplanes there, and cannons. . . ." They shook their heads fitfully and pointed out some enlarged photographs to me. The children simply went berserk, and I was fired by their happiness to the point that my eyes were a little moist. I felt a soreness in my nostrils that is impossible to describe, but all the time I was smiling. Only when the guard's face appeared at the door's opening did the children finally settle down.

"Are you two really going home? Don't you think about your mama and papa?"

I took hold of one hand of each child and sat on the bed. I liked the younger one better, and I was already aware that he wasn't the other one's younger brother—they were just friends. He was only eleven, three years younger than the older boy.

"No. . . ." The younger one stopped, and he just kept his eyes glued on his companion and listened to him speak. The older one pulled his arm back from me, clenched his hand into a fist, and pounded it on his knee.

"We have a country . . . why does everyone want to mind our business? Everyone minds our business! Wherever we go there is always someone. In Shanghai it was the French; then we came here and it was the Chinese. . . ." I knew that the child's past anger was rekindled, and I said:

"Why did you break the law? If you commit a crime, someone will make you his business! My boy, no matter who it is, they can all make you their business."

"What! Break the law! Smashing a pane of glass—is that breaking the law? For that they can keep us a day and a night with nothing to eat or

drink, and take away our freedom! They can lock us up in a dark room like that—a stinking room! Didn't we drink wine before that? That wine was given to us by Papa and Mama. . . ."

On the second day the children were staying in this room with me they told me the reason they just had to return to their own country. They had gotten drunk in Shanghai while celebrating a holiday and had broken some glass in a shop. Their parents wouldn't accept responsibility and make restitution so they were held in custody in the police station for a day and a night.

"Our five *yuan* that was impounded at the dockside detention center, will they give it back?"

"Yes, they will," I answered them without any hesitation.

"They will!" They couldn't speak more than a few sentences without anxiously asking about their five *yuan*. One after another they asked:

"They'll return it? They won't confiscate it?"

"They'll give it to you for sure. Your money isn't 'stolen goods'; probably they won't confiscate it. . . ."

"That's right, we got that money from Papa . . . that day . . . he was drunk . . . there was only five *yuan* in his pocketbook. . . ."

"You had money, so when you were aboard the ship why didn't you buy a ticket? Why let them bring you here?"

"Why should we buy a ticket! If we had used the money to buy a ticket, then there wouldn't be any money for food and lodging. A ship that big and the two of us being so small, what difference could it have made to have two more people on deck? They wouldn't even let us rest on our haunches there on deck . . . they wanted to hit us or throw us overboard. . . ."

"Your parents will be looking for you; the people here will send you back to Shanghai."

"Papa and Mama won't be looking for us . . . will they really send us back from here?"

"Perhaps not, it's hard to say."

"Well, if they want to send us back, then we'll jump into the ocean. We want to return to our homeland . . . we'll return home! We've seen it in the movies, and we've seen it in magazines; in the winter there is snow as white as silver . . . and ice-skating . . . and no foreigner to bully us . . . no foreigner would dare stick his nose in our business there. . . ."

³A Chinese dollar.

They were so excited they didn't know what to do. They haphazardly flipped through their magazine, reading and pointing things out to me. I looked and listened while I tried to calm myself down.

They recited the poems and songs they could recall—especially the younger one—and when he began to chant Pushkin's "My Nurse," I was moved to the point that I could no longer hold back my tears.

"Children, listen to me. . . ."

Softly I too recited for them all the poems that I knew and could remember. But the children couldn't understand their meaning. I explained it to them and at the same time said:

"In your homeland all of these are very popular poems."

The children—the younger one, that is—draped himself around my neck.

"We are friends!"

The elder one gave me a slice of what remained of their crusts of bread and said:

"We begged this bread from someone on the road, but it was taken and eaten up by the fiends below."

.....

Now the children have left me.

Were they sent back to Shanghai? Or have they really returned to their fatherland? I spent a whole day gazing out through the openings between the bars, gazing at the sea, at the sky, at every ship headed north. . . . I didn't know which ship they were carried on or what their situation was at the time. Were they in the hold or were they above deck? If they spotted this prison where they once stayed, this almost black building, would they wave their hands or shout a farewell towards me—no, I should say, towards the whole prison? That was too much to hope for!

When the children left me they kissed my hand and again asked me:

"Why is it that you've come to this place? When will you leave? We're returning to our homeland, but this is your homeland; you don't have to return home like we do!"

"Ai! Once I've seen my fill of the ocean, then I'll leave here."

Every time the children asked me why I had come here, I would say—usually with a laugh—I came to look at the ocean, and if they asked when



I would leave, I would say:

"Wait until I've seen my fill of the ocean, then I'll leave here."

"Will you remember our names? I'm called Kolya; I'm fourteen years old."

"I'm Alyosha; eleven years old . . . sir."

"I'll remember it all . . . my dear friends."

I could only see them as far as the threshold of the iron door, and I shook each of their hands—little Alyosha was actually crying. The noise of the iron gate being locked cut short the sounds of their goodbyes and their shadows; it also severed our earthly ties.

It's now nighttime, and I'm still looking at the ocean, still listening to its breathing and to the repeated blaring of the beacon horn. Occasionally I get a real whiff of the damp and fishy smell of the fog that floats over from the ocean.

I was glancing over the words of the poems they had written down in a rather untidy hand on the newspaper for me. . . .

As you would lovingly cherish an infant, I began to cherish my own heart, to cherish my somewhat untamed emotions.

I'll just have to be patient—like the goats.

The man snoring in the room next to me was awakened by the guard's cursing. I knew it was the robust goat thief.

"You bastard, you! Is this what happens to you when you go to sleep?"

Whenever the goat thief passes in front of my door he no longer has that stupid, far-away look, but is always smiling . . . smiling. At first I saw him

as a guileless lad, full of youth and life.

"You should go to sleep now, sir."

"Um-hm."

The guard's eyes appeared at the rectangular opening of my door, his whole face outlined behind the opening; his face was shiny and sallow and the door was black. . . . His eyes began probing around the room, glancing here and there, and he said:

"This place of yours is really too comfortable; one person in a single room, with a bed and a chair too . . . in a room like this, when we're crowded, at the very least we would damn well stuff forty or fifty. . . ."

When he had gone away from the ocean-viewing opening in my door, I thought about what he had said, and examined this room that I now occupied alone. It was a box of about three or four cubic meters, I guess, constructed of concrete, stone, and iron. Up to now I had overlooked the fact that I was actually one who was receiving kid glove treatment. I should have been grateful, at least I should have been grateful for that much. If my heart wasn't forged of concrete, iron and stone, I should stamp onto it this piece of 'gratitude'.

III

BESIDES LOOKING at the ocean, watching the goats out beyond the back window, and reading with great care every insignificant word in the newspaper—besides walking from this corner over to that corner and wearing out my shoes on the graying path, I have now begun to pay some attention to the goat thief.

"There's frost!" One morning he informed me as he passed by my door. He was right; as I looked out the window, the leaves of the trees on the hillside all appeared drab and somber. The tips of the hair on the goats in the enclosure had also taken on the appearance of dampness.

"Is it cold? Outside. . . ?" I asked.

"Nah!" He moved his bare feet up and down on the pavement and wrapped his arms around himself; his eyes were darting back and forth uneasily.

"Sir, they want cigarette butts. Do you have any? Hurry . . . the guard will be coming out. . . ."

I passed the cigarette butts that I had already gotten together to him through the opening, and he disappeared like a fox. But from somewhere near the door I heard the guard call him to a halt:

"What's that you're holding in your hand?"

"Nothing." His voice was gloomy—childish and very guttural.

"Open your hand . . . what's this?"

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While he was being beaten he never uttered a sound; he merely panted like an ox.

"You can't give these things to them any more. Don't spoil them with treats like that . . . it'll lead to a beating every time." The guard showed me the cigarette butts he had seized and continued:

"This young guy is a damned fool. He doesn't smoke himself, but he comes and begs for cigarette butts for others . . . don't give them any more. . . ."

"There's frost on the ground, and a cigarette or so in the morning makes it a little easier to warm up for work." I forced a smile with my eyes, knowing full well that this explanation would serve no purpose.

"You're really most considerate! If you were the warden here, the prisoners would have the place turned upside down. That would never do! All this is the talk of a bookworm. Ai yo!"

I saw those dozens of cigarette butts that I had so diligently stored up disappear through my ocean-viewing window. As he threw them out I could still see them turn around, end-over-end, like they were flying way off in the distance to the horizon.

I knew that they were carrying earth from somewhere to fill in a mountain gully of dirty water in the courtyard. After they had it filled in, I was told, they were going to construct a new prison building on the site.

"The goat had a kid! My goat had a kid!"

In the morning the goat thief once again appeared at my door. I hadn't yet fully awakened. Cupping his hands into the shape of a horn, he spoke to me in a low and raspy, thick voice:

"The goat had a kid—my goat."

"Last night?"

"Just before dawn this morning—everyone's watching! You can see it through your window too. The big one is going to die!"

I had lost some sleep during the night because

of the goat's cries, but it never occurred to me that she was giving birth. I looked out through the window, but the view, as always, wasn't very clear. I asked the guard:

"I would like to take a walk in the courtyard, is that all right?"

The wrinkles on the guard's face expanded slightly; he didn't answer, but went ahead and opened the door for me.

"You can't take too much time, you know."

"I know."

My eyes which had long been denied the sight of the sun, and my nose, long a stranger to the smell of mud, didn't feel natural now; I was rather like a mole that has lived only in the sunless lower strata of the earth. The vast sky, the unrestricted expanse of ocean, the limitless canopy of floating white clouds, the group of men in the midst of carrying earth under the hot sun . . . it was as though we had all forgotten each other, and the memories were only just then coming back to me.

That gully, it stayed just as greedy, just as sunk-in, and the men looked like ants, crawling back and forth. The guards had rifles on their backs, and they dragged their rattan canes along the ground, casually chatting with one another and yelling curses at the loafers.

Following the line of the base of the wall, I searched out the enclosure that was near my back window.

The goat with the horns was moving his mouth and his chin-whiskers moved lightly in harmony with it. It looked like he was protecting his fellow-prisoner and he looked at me with a blank stare in his eyes. The little kid was sleeping next to its mama, its felt-like hair not yet completely dry.

Inside the enclosure, on several of the rails there was some blood and sweat that had nearly turned black—in the places that had been kicked-in and smashed, one could still discover blood that hadn't completely soaked in. . . .

The belly of the mother which had just given birth seemed to have become uncommonly concave, uncommonly out of balance. That part of her body didn't look like a belly at all, but a rising and falling pit. Even the energy to lick her kid clean appeared to be lacking.

During his rest period the goat thief walked over to where I was standing. I was just then looking

over beyond the wall, where my wife was being held prisoner.

"The little kid won't make it—there's no milk for it. The big ones won't make it either—there's no grass for them to eat. All they have to eat is their own dung . . . I stole them all . . . all of them. . . ."

His compassion for the goats—the goats he had stolen—seemed to be excessive, like he was somehow unaware that they were stolen from someone else. He had already broken the law—he was a thief; what he took had become stolen goods, and stolen goods should be confiscated and made public property. I understand the law—laws always so prescribe. Maybe he was still young and didn't know as much as I did.

"They're stolen goods. You can't count them as yours. They are in the public domain."

"Wouldn't it be great if they let me take them home! I guarantee I'd fatten them up. Keep them here and they'll all starve to death, including the kid. . . . They said that anything stolen that's living is just turned over to this place. The ducks, when they're hungry they eat pebbles; pigs and goats, when they're hungry they eat their own dung. . . . Where our village is there are hills and a stream with water you can drink. . . ."

At the base of the wall one can often discover faded shreds of clothing on the tops of which are layers of white specks. Everyone knows that those are lice that have starved to death.

"They've made rags of our clothes."

I noticed the ghost-like faces of smiling men behind the iron bars; they were there behind every opening, smiling, smiling. . . . My whole body was agitated by the smiles on their faces and I could feel the pounding of my heart. I wondered if when I smiled I looked like these fellows whose destiny I shared. I thought back to the first time I smiled at those two kids. What was the look that had come into their eyes? They were startled!

"When I'm shackled with manacles and leg irons . . . if I have lice . . . all I can do is rip my clothing. Look! That's how I lost this piece."

The goat thief passed up his rest time and just walked round and round the outside of the enclosure talking to himself; then, after a moment, he came back and talked with me. He pointed to his own neck for me to look, showing me how the collar of his undershirt had already disappeared

because of the lice.

"Why is your padded gown so short?" I noticed he had put on a padded gown today, but it only reached to slightly below his knees, and then the sleeves . . . they looked even less becoming. They only came down to just below his upper arms, and his chest was completely exposed.

"Oh, this? This is my mother's. She was afraid I would be cold . . . my mother sent it along to me . . ." As he said this he kept trying to pull the sleeves down further. He had an embarrassed, hard-to-describe look on his face, and his head hung down as he looked once again at his bare feet.

"Your mother is still living?"

"I . . . if I didn't have a mother, I wouldn't be a thief now . . . I must send this padded gown back to her! I'm young—what's a little cold weather to me! Here, feel my arm!"

He stuck out a muscular arm for me to see. I was startled to see that he had such a beautifully formed arm—it could easily be taken for an artist's plaster-of-paris mold. If he had been born into high society, he would have made an excellent athlete; now he is a goat thief.

The earth-filling work began anew.

I returned to my own window and observed the others' flurry of activity; I said to the guard:

"I'll pitch in and carry some earth, all right?"

"You?" he said incredulously. "Not you. . .!"

"Why not? I'm not exactly weak!" To prove my strength, I bared my arm and thrust it towards him—an arm turned so white it would shock someone to see it. The guard's flabby jowls quivered momentarily:

"Strong as you may be, it's still no good! Our orders from above are that you are to receive special treatment . . . it's only the thieves . . . they have to work . . . now, your case. . . . Why don't you rest a little?"

Like always, he locked my door. As was my custom, I looked out from behind the barred window at the ant-like human figures and at the goats inside the enclosure—for the first time I saw that the goat was actually searching out and eating his own dung—at the leaves on the hill at the rear, at the grass, and at the distant mountains bathed in the colors of late autumn. . . . I am separated from all this . . . cut off. . . . I very much regret that I'm not a goat thief . . . some kind of thief. . . . I am immersed in a colorless, sweet,

poisonous liquid! I suppose I'll turn into a lifeless skeleton of rickety bones. My skin . . . my hair, turning so white, and shedding . . . dissipating my strength and flow of blood like this . . . this exquisite punishment . . . this. . . .

The goat thief had taken off his padded gown; contrasted with the collarless undershirt, his neck showed up even stronger and longer. Because of all the energy he was exerting with his shoulders his veins bulged out clearly. He still stood out from the crowd—strong, tall, and large . . . not in the least destitute-looking . . . not looking at all like a thief.

Under the mid-day rays of sunlight evenly spread everywhere the men's shadows grew shorter, and there was no wind. I could not hear the ocean's panting through the window in front. Because of the distance it was hard to tell whether the slanting sails and masts were entering or leaving on the sea, whose surface glittered as though covered with a layer of floating mercury.

The goat munched on his own dung, his whiskers moving unconcernedly. The other one was still there with the skin of her belly listlessly rising and falling—quite possibly even a little slower. The little kid resembled a blind puppy, nudging and pushing between its mother's legs with its greedy little mouth. . . .

IV

AN EVENT THAT smacked of revolt occurred—it was just a few days after the she-goat and her kid died.

The morning that the kid and its mother died the goat thief came and reported to me:

"They're both dead! My goats! The big one and the small one . . . look! They're still lying in the enclosure. . . ." As he was reporting this news to me I saw that he didn't have his normal expression of childish delight, but had begun to look like an old man—exceedingly slow! He kept nervously rubbing his nose with his hand. I said:

"It's just as well they died. Sooner or later they would have died anyway. So what good is there in feeling sad?"

"I stole them . . . all for my mother's illness, to buy medicine . . . but mother didn't die after

all. . . ." He shook the padded gown that he was wearing and then said:

"No one ever comes to see me . . . if someone came . . . they could take the padded gown back for Mother. It's getting cold, and Mother's getting on in years. She can't do without a padded gown."

He raised his eyes and gave me a bleary look and then as usual went out to carry more earth.

He was right. The weather was getting cold, and the time was already here when you could no longer get by in the morning without cotton padded clothing. I said:

"Then what will you wear?"

"Me? I'm young!" He seemed just then to be reminded of his youth and his strength, and with a shrug of his shoulders he walked off.

At noontime I got special permission for a twenty-minute stroll and again I sought him out; he pulled me by the hand over to the skylight of a semi-basement room at the end of the building and pointed for my benefit.

"What is it?" I didn't bend over right away. He shot a furtive glance all around, then bent over and said:

"A man. . . ."

With a confused and strange feeling I followed his lead and looked inside. The man didn't appear very clearly at first, nothing more than an object shaped like a human body lying stretched out on the ground. On top of that, the natural darkness of the room made it look even more gruesome, like a thing carved out of bone. Only with some effort could I make out his facial features.

"Oh!" I had never been that startled before, and I had never before been able to make the sound I had just uttered. But now I found myself holding on tightly to the neck of the man on his haunches next to me; he forced my hands away with an apprehensive laugh:

"They put all the dead ones in this room—the dead ones from upstairs, them too. . . . I once carried earth with him . . . he was a pickpocket . . . young!"

After the goat thief went back to carry more earth I was occupied fully twenty minutes of my stroll time with this event. I had nothing on my mind, so quietly, and for no particular reason, I just leaned on the near side of the enclosure and watched that window at a distance. At the base of the wall the shreds of cloth had increased, and

there were new lice, all swollen and frantically crawling around the pieces of cloth—probably not much time had passed since they had left some human body. I was seized by the rank odor of the goats; the dead mother and her kid were still sprawled out in the enclosure, as insidious flies swarmed noisily around their mouths and eyes. The older goat's eyes were still open, and her ceramic-like eyeballs partially jutted out, but were devoid of any luster, even though the sun was shining brightly in the sky above. There was nothing unusual about the kid—its head was pillowed on one of its mother's legs; there were still some remnants of peach-red moisture around its small tapered mouth and its fleece looked as though it had never even had a chance to stand up.

The billy goat no longer shook his whiskers, no longer moved his mouth. He slept flatly there in the muck of his own dung and urine, his coat all smeared with mud. Yet there was no change in that bright clean, curving long pair of horns. Perhaps, like a warrior who loves his sword, he loved his horns and would not willingly let them be stained by anything. I had often seen him test them by scraping them on the enclosure rails.

"Psst . . . psst . . . sir! Give us a length of wire, how 'bout it? We are being throttled to death!"

The sound came to me from behind—it was a raspy voice like that of a mute. Up there on the other side of the iron bars I could see the outline of bobbing faces with lips puckered out. I was a little frightened; I had no idea what kind of request this was.

"Wire! Sir! Give us a piece of wire . . . you are on the outside. . . ."

From where I don't know, the guard's stick smacked against the iron bars and the shadowy faces dispersed in alarm, then disappeared completely.

"They're back again asking for cigarette butts, I suppose?"

"No, they wanted a length of wire!" I answered the guard without giving it a second thought. I never guessed that one sentence could startle him like that.

"They wanted wire? Which one?"

His eyes lit up and I sensed that this was a rather serious matter. From behind the window I heard the faint 'shhh' 'shhh' sounds of someone trying to stop me from saying anything.



Hsiao Chun (real name Liu Chun 劉均) is remembered, with other native Northeastern writers, for the tales they gave us of their homeland, formerly known as Manchuria, in the turbulent thirties and forties. Born in 1908 in Liaoning Province, Hsiao Chun worked at many jobs after leaving high school, including a short-lived career in a local militia. By 1932, when the Japanese military seized the three Northeastern Provinces, he had established himself in Harbin as a regular contributor to the *International Gazette*. In that year he met the aspiring young writer Hsiao Hung (蕭紅), and they began their life together. They went south in 1934 to Shanghai, where they became protégés of Lu Hsun. Hsiao Chun's novel *Village in August* (八月的鄉村) and Hsiao Hung's *The Field of Life and Death* (生死場)

were both published in 1935, the former translated into English by Evan King in 1942. After Lu Hsun's death in 1936, the couple travelled into the interior, but in 1938 separated.

During the war Hsiao Hung died in Hong Kong, while Hsiao Chun continued to write in Yen-an, Chengtu, and later in Harbin and Peking. His novel *The Third Generation*, published in 1937, was later renamed *The Past Generation* as first part of a planned trilogy which never appeared in print. He is also the author of two collections of short stories, *Goats* and *On the River*, two collections of essays, and a long record of his travels. In 1954 he published his final work, a long novel entitled *Coal Mines in May*.

"Goats" was first published in the October 1935 issue of *Wen-hsueh* 文學 Magazine, Shanghai. It is one of many stories in which the writer described the lives of prisoners, workers, sailors, traitors, thieves, vagabonds and revolutionaries, and has the depressive mood and forceful narrative that link them with his major works.

"I didn't get a good look . . . what difference does it make?" I said.

"Oh, you must be kidding! Your stroll hour is over . . . you can't stand here any longer. And from now on, no more hanging around under this window. Go!"

I walked away from the window, and as I was nearing the last window I again heard a 'shhh' sound.

"Shhh! Sir! Do you have wire? Cigarette butts . . .?"

The fingers of a manacled hand were thrust out, making a hurried, nervous scissoring motion. I could only shake my head and nod in the direction of the guard who was at that moment hitting the bars of the windows and cursing at the top of his voice:

" . . . I'll flay your hides! So, you want wire . . . you want a revolt! I'll flay your hides, that'll do it . . ." He was cursing to himself, for he got no response, though there was a slight echo—perhaps

that was his voice resounding off the stone wall on the slope of the hill. He looked as though he was born to be a guard—a natural. When he cursed people out he did so with unbroken eloquence; not the slightest inadequacy could be found that would make him ill-equipped for this occupation. He was fat and he had the typical face of a guard, oily and glistening, like some kind of congealed and opaque yellow lard on top of which were crudely etched several superfluous wrinkles. These guards . . . their youth, their strength, all are used up in this cursing. It seems as though they are spending their entire lives with this prison, despising man's nature, despising everything outside this prison—that is, everything outside the range of their authority. Their occupation has made them the kind of men they are and has given them this kind of cruel soul and visage.

Yet the guard assigned to me today was a particularly pleasant older man, one whose appearance didn't seem to fit a man whose job it was to watch

over us each and every day.

"You're five minutes over," he said, pointing to an old and dirty horseshoe-shaped watch on the small table.

"Just this once—I won't go over again." Ordinarily I seldom pass the time of day chatting with people like the guards. But today, for some unknown reason, I had a desire to chat with this older guard.

"Have you eaten?" I asked him as he was locking my door.

"Yes, I have . . . it's not enough time for a stroll, is it?"

He rattled his keys but didn't leave right away. We took advantage of the hole in the door to look at each other and impart our facial expressions. I could hear that the cursing downstairs had not yet stopped, and it came in through each and every window like a radio broadcast warning. I asked the old guard:

"He hasn't let up at all with his cursing, has he?"

"Ai!" Simply and without expression he asked:

"Is it again on account of the prisoners' disturbance? They forever take great delight in cursing people out. . . ."

He wasn't looking for an answer from me but was looking for one from himself.

"They take advantage of their own youthful strength. . . . They all love to cuss people out . . . when I was young I was the same."

I was no stranger here, and certainly this wasn't the first incident of verbal abuse, but the cursing had never gone on this long before.

When the time had come for me to take my stroll the following day, the door remained locked. I wondered if my twenty-minute stroll privilege had been cancelled. Perhaps because of what happened yesterday.

Looking out the back window, I could see the earth movers doing their work as usual, only I couldn't see that exceptionally tall goat thief who normally stood out in a crowd.

What could be the matter with him? What could be the reason for his not working today as usual?

I felt like seeking out the guard and asking why my twenty-minute stroll had been cancelled, but I didn't know if he was sitting there in his place. I am afraid that even if my head were half its

present size it would still be difficult to poke it out through the hole in the door. I yelled for the guard:

"Guard!"

"What is it?" The guard appeared in front of my eyes.

"How about it, aren't you going to open the door and let me go out today?"

"Today . . . warden's orders . . . for the time being we can't let you out. You know . . . that incident yesterday. . . ."

"What incident?" I was in a dream.

"Yesterday noon, downstairs, what was it the prisoners wanted from you?"

"They wanted a piece of wire."

"Right, and the disturbance was caused by that piece of wire. So today you can't go out and walk about at will."

I wanted very much to prove to him that I hadn't given in to their request, so I said:

"I certainly didn't give it to them. . . . What was it they wanted the wire for?"

"Hm! Will it do to let them have wire in here? That would lead to a prison rebellion!"

"Then just forget it! How come I'm still not permitted to go out?"

"You don't know; you didn't give them any wire, but someone got some in for them."

"Who?"

"Who else would do a stupid thing like that? Who but that ignorant, good-for-nothing goat thief?" The old guard seemed grieved and threw apart his hands in disappointment.

"He brought some wire in? What happened? What kind of disturbance did he cause?"

"Not a very big one . . . before going to sleep at night they pried open all the shackles and irons . . . had a comfortable sleep . . . when daylight came they still hadn't got up."

Owing to my anxiety to know how the goat thief was being dealt with, my heart was beating so fast it could no longer keep its balance. At the same time I understood the reason why I didn't see him today among the crowd of men carrying earth in the courtyard. My desire to take a stroll outside was forgotten.

"What will happen to the goat thief?" I asked.

"Naturally he'll have to spend some time in the 'black hole.'" The old guard calmed down and uttered, as though he had a premonition: "Those

in the 'black hole' get their share of troubles. There are three of them in there now—with him it makes four—one has already been there twenty days . . . he's nearly finished. . . ."

"How did they know it was that big fellow the thief who got the wire in?"

"That's easy! All you need to do is start the beatings and the prisoners themselves will confess."

Before he left the old guard said with a smile:

"As for you, tomorrow you can probably take your stroll."

The dead goats inside the enclosure were already gone. The lone billy goat trailed along the enclosure stretching out his neck, and occasionally he gave out a cry. The leaves of the hilltop trees were getting sparser day by day, while each day the gully that was being filled in got shallower.

Once again an intimacy was formed between me and the sea that was visible through the rectangular openings in the window at the front. The sea's color had become more turbid—like that of thick ink. Seeing the ocean, I thought again of the two Russian children.

Even though my wife and friends were also imprisoned in those other prison buildings, I had no thoughts for them. I thought most often of other things.

When night came I was no longer blessed with peaceful sleep. Each image that appeared, every thought I had troubled me; this was something that had never before happened in all the months I had been here.

The hardest of all to bear has been the vision of the face in the morgue. Last night it came to torment me and tonight it returned to plague me again. The more I try to suppress it the clearer it becomes—and the more real. Its protruding teeth seem about to engulf me; in fact it's as though I have already become the victim of their bite. I am in the midst of struggling to break out through the cracks between the teeth. Its eyes aren't gentle like

the dead goat's⁴—its ugly face resembles nothing more than that of a clay idol in an old temple, the face of the Buddhist Ruler of Demons. It seems to begrudge its own death; to be full of hatred and a will to struggle, filled with a hankering and an unsatiated, boundless hope for the mortal world . . . or perhaps it is filled with abhorrence, and that alone!

Reading the poems that the children left behind for me, or a newspaper, or whatever books there were here, regardless of whether it was in a poem, or in the newspaper, or on each page of every book . . . this detestable image of a face possessed it all! I thought of every method imaginable but was unable to drive it away. On the contrary, it spread out even larger and appeared as a strange and confused painting.

A great many cigarette butts had accumulated, which I arranged into several pyramids and lined up on the table corners. But each time the men passed in front of my door they scurried by like mice, and in their eyes were the harried looks of rodents. If one of them dropped back a little or yearningly rested his eyes a bit too long on my door, the loud threatening voices of the guards could be heard. Even though time and again I held all of the cigarette butts in the palms of my hands for them to see, there wasn't one who dared to openly come and take them as the goat thief had done. Once I even called out to one of them, saying:

"Hey! Cigarette butts, do you want them?"

At that moment the guard may not have been in his seat, or maybe he was dozing . . . this time the man hastily stuck his hand, bony and black like a raven's claw, in through the opening.

"Hurry, mister, hurry!"

"What about the goat thief?"

"Don't know. Mister, hurry. There's someone walking outside."

With his hands full, he went away with as many as he could possibly carry. Then there were the scattered few that had fallen to the ground, but those he just left behind.

What the occasion was I can't remember. The goat thief passed again in front of my door; I saw him, but I could only see his silhouette. I was startled, thinking I must have seen wrongly. But then I recognized that padded gown. What was different was that his nose, his cheekbones, and his

⁴Here the author uses the term *mien-yang*, which means 'sheep.' This is the only such instance, whereas the term for 'goat' (*shan-yang*) is used throughout. Although not entirely explicit in the text, for the sake of continuity we must assume that the author intended for all three animals to be goats.

jaw, they all jutted out sharply. His neck stretched out long with the veins showing up exaggeratedly. The strong body of several days ago that had presented such a contrast to the padded gown that covered it seemed to have been removed, and now the padded gown fitted him quite well.

During my mid-day strolls I was no longer allowed to pass under the wall of that building, even though the windows outside the iron bars had long since been nailed and sealed up. I walked up near the goat thief. It seemed that he was avoiding me, as his eyes fluttered up and then down. The other prisoners also seemed to be keeping their distance from me.

"Hey, big fellow! Are you working today?" I forced a smile.

"Yes, I'm working today . . . let's not talk! The guards won't allow it!"

Having learned this reason, I felt somehow weak. I could only look out rather uncertainly at the almost completely filled-in gully in front of me; basket after basket of dirt and rocks, clumps of grass and roots of trees . . . I knew that soon this mountain gully would be filled up to the brim, and then atop it they would start laying a stone foundation and then a new prison building.

A pickpocket was brought into my cell in the evening. Inasmuch as a large group of heroin users had been apprehended every cell was completely filled.

The pickpocket was incredibly cheerful and completely familiar with the people here. He was still young, certainly not more than eighteen, with cheerful and lively airs. As he was thrust into my room the guard gave him a kick in the behind.

"Wow, what a spacious room!" He looked up and down, like he was searching for some trace that he may have left behind on the walls of my room. He called out:

"Look! I've stayed in this cell before!" He pointed with his hand to a small hole in the wall and showed me a spot where the traces of blood from bedbugs were most plentiful.

"You must be an old-timer here!"

"I won't kid you . . . not really so old . . . this makes my sixth time."

I began to find myself interested in this little thief. No one introduced us—still we very quickly became good friends. He never did ask me my name nor I his. In here this kind of protocol

doesn't seem necessary; besides, we all have our numbers.

He wasn't even eighteen, yet he had already been in here six times; no wonder he was so familiar, so relaxed and lighthearted. In the evening, to my amusement, he told me a number of things of which I was ignorant. His pleasant-sounding voice drowned out the regular breath-like sounds of the ocean, the panting of the goat under the window, and the snores from the adjoining cells . . . it even blocked out the image of the face on the corpse in the morgue that disturbingly kept me awake night after night. His stories unfolded like a whole motion picture in front of my eyes. He began by telling me how he had come to be a thief in the first place.

" . . . my mother died when I was three years old. I've supported myself by stealing ever since—up 'til now. . . ."

"That scar, how did you get it?" I asked, having noticed that on the right side of his forehead there was a long scar where no hair grew.

"This scar . . . ?" Without being aware of it, he rubbed it. The scar resembled a crescent moon crudely laid out on the young man's forehead.

"I got this scar when I fell while jumping off a train. At the time my only thoughts were of running . . . dammit! It didn't hurt at all, but later I felt something dripping from my head, and then I discovered it was blood. A few days and it was all healed up." He gave it another pat with his hand and said: "Having this sure makes it tough! Everyone can recognize me. Lots of times I go without a haircut just to cover it up . . . if it hadn't been for this tell-tale scar I wouldn't be back in here now!"

"What! You mean they all recognize that scar?"

"They all recognize it. The moment I came here the guards all yelled out: 'Scarface, you back again!' They all call me Scarface."

"What law did you break this time?"

"I stole a foreigner's watch and overcoat."

Without any urging from me he began right in telling his story.

" . . . for several days I hadn't been able to steal a thing, and my money was all gone . . . I just had to steal something . . . one evening there was this foreigner—well, after all, he was a foreigner . . . I can't tell the difference between the English devils, the big-nosed Russians or the American asses—

anyway, I spied that big watch of his—it looked just like a KR watch—and the collar of his overcoat wasn't bad—made of otter; probably it wasn't very cold that day, and he had opened the front of his coat—the lining was most likely real fur, but I wasn't sure—and I thought to myself, if I could lay my hands on that you can bet I'd try it on first—how classy that would be! I was still wearing these clothes at the time. . . .” With his hand he lifted up his undershirt, then tugged his torn and ragged pant leg and said: “The night winds these days are really murder! And that day . . . it happened to drizzle off and on. A place like this near the ocean, it's no picnic. . . .”

He hesitated for a moment and cocked his head as though something were gnawing at him; he kept his eyes fixed on me.

“Listen . . . this ocean; I tell you it's no picnic . . . what time is it now? . . . making all that noise. . . .”

The voice of the ocean was truly loud and resounding. The winds knifed in through the holes in the window, and there was no way a person could stop shaking. He said:

“. . . it was a drizzly day . . . my belly was empty . . . no money to buy a cup of wine . . . my cigarettes were gone . . . I swore that if I made a good haul this time I could lay off all this winter . . . I couldn't take my eyes off him—I'm talking about the foreigner—no matter how I tried I couldn't stop my teeth from chattering. I watched him enter the courtyard and I followed in right after him. . . . The gate watchman was dozing off, giving me a real good opportunity. Some days earlier I had noticed this dirty pig. He lived there all by himself. . . .”

The night winds that floated in through the cracks in the door were unbearable. I wanted to call out to the guard, but it was already too late at night and he wouldn't be very happy about getting up to close the outside window for us. Still we couldn't just go on taking it, so I took all the accumulated newspapers, books, and even the magazine the two Russian children had left behind for me, and stuffed up all the cracks—the wind could no longer pierce in dauntlessly, and the sounds of the ocean seemed much further away . . . we laughed contentedly, laughing at this plan which was of our own making. In times of urgent need people often become much cleverer.

“. . . I followed him . . . kept following him . . . I got a good vantage point where I could see his room clearly, and I hid myself in a corner where I wouldn't be noticed—behind a trash can—and from a distance I kept my eye on his window. I sized up the situation; if the door was locked, then what would I do? Would I run the risk of breaking a leg if I jumped down from that window? Or else. . . . Meanwhile I was waiting for night to fall. The rumblings of my stomach and my body's tremblings were real; but, afraid . . . I really wasn't all that afraid. If a thief can't control himself or is faint-hearted, how can he possibly make it? The rain began falling more and more heavily and I could barely make out the sound of a door opening. The bobbing and weaving silhouette of a man appeared in the window. It was then at least ten o'clock. In other rooms there were record players and there were radios . . . someone was trying to sing along with a record . . . it sounded terrible—like the cries of a cat in heat. I couldn't wait any longer; if I waited any longer the whole thing would fall through. Once he—this goddamn pig—went to bed and locked the door . . . it would be the end of everything! I summoned up all the ability I had, and faster than a shot, before he even returned from the toilet, I had already safely lodged myself under his bed where I could look out, facing the door, and observe this grubby swine. Then if he discovered me, I could immediately use the blanket that hung down from the bed to cover his head and get away. At the time I was using the hanging blanket to conceal myself. I still couldn't stop shivering, so I chewed on my own sleeve. The sleeve had a horrible taste—all salty and bitter—and I wanted to vomit! I lightly rubbed the blanket with one hand; it was a really good blanket—it had a wonderful feel, warm, soft and velvety . . . this grubby swine, it was like he was completely in a dream-world. When he returned he didn't so much as open his eyes; he merely felt around for the key in the door lock, gave it a turn, and jumped right into bed. As he did so the bed springs gave me a knock in the head. I had already fixed in my mind the location of the watch and the overcoat—the overcoat was hanging on a clothes rack in the corner of the room and the watch was on a small bedside stand, its pure gold casing glistening under the lamp, while it kept running with a loud ticking sound . . . I figured that this watch would go for

twenty or thirty *yuan* at least and the overcoat would be a good item too. Naturally, there were quite a few other things in the room that would have brought a good price, but I didn't pay any attention to them. I waited until I heard the swine's grunting snores; at the same time I could hear the sharp tap of a woman's heels in the hallway outside, as well as the laughter of some men. . . .

"I crawled out, and in a flash the little treasure was in my hand. I listened for its ticking sound—there was no mistake—and a feeling of fulfilment came over me. Holding my shoes by my teeth, I started crawling over to the clothes rack . . . naturally, the overcoat found its way into my hands too. My only thoughts were of how I should go about getting out of the room . . . just then that grubby swine spoke out in Russian:

"*Poshol, durák!*"⁵

"I had already grabbed hold of the edge of the key, but I didn't dare turn it at once; I just held on to it tightly for all I was worth. By then I no longer had cold shivers, but had broken out in a sweat.

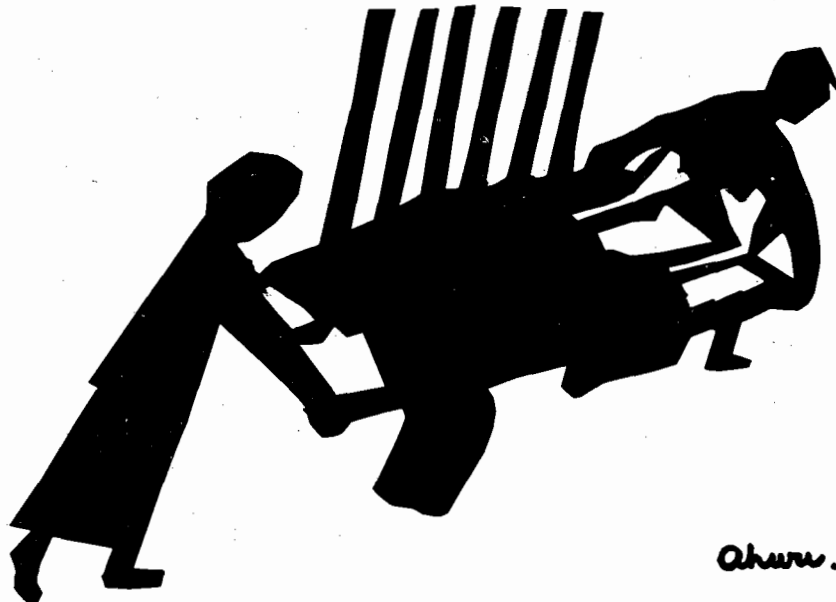
"After a brief pause his snores began again and I knew that grubby swine had been talking in his

sleep. I finally very cautiously opened the door and removed the key. Then I locked the door from the outside so that in case he woke up suddenly I could still get away. Wouldn't you know it . . . that grubby swine had no idea what was going on . . . what annoyed me was that the hallway was too bright, so I had to take a big chance—I was already wearing the overcoat . . . it was much too warm. I held the watch tightly in one hand, while in the other hand I carried my shoes. I had forgotten, I should have taken a pair of shoes along while I was at it. How could shoes like these go with such a coat?

"I stayed there behind the trash can squatting on my heels until the following morning. The young gate watchman came out half-dressed, opened the main gate, and hurried on back—I suppose to get some more sleep. Before anyone came out to sweep up the trash area I turned up the otter-skin collar of the overcoat in a dignified manner so that it covered my face, and just like that I slipped out right through the main gate."

He took a deep breath. He didn't seem as sallow and emaciated as he was when he came in that day. The scar on his forehead glistened against the lamplight. He looked every bit a child, with his thin neck and lanky body—there was just no flesh and muscle on his bones.

⁵Get out, you fool!



"... the first thing after coming out I had to find a place to hide my watch. . . ."

"Where did you hide it?"

"I can't tell you that . . . anyway, we can't have anything on us . . . I put my watch in the crack of a wall."

"How did you run across the police?"

"That was after I had the watch hidden. I ran into an undercover man that knows me, and he wanted to give me five *yuan* for the overcoat."

"Scarface, how's business?" he asked.

"I'm looking forward to your patronage, sir!"

"You haven't paid me your respects for some time now. Where did you come across this? The color of the fur isn't bad!"

"Um hm."

"How much do you want?"

"At least twenty *yuan*."

"Five *yuan*. Why don't you just leave it here with me."

"No. Not enough." I tapped my foot as an expression of my dilemma.

"Scarface, you sure are greedy!"

"Well, he left. I knew then that I had offended him, but I didn't regret it. Because in the past they had chewed up some of my buddies without mercy. They would work like fiends to get their hands on a little something and then these guys would want to buy it up . . . just buy it up. I've suffered at their hands as much myself . . . but this time I had planned on making it for the winter. Naturally, the next day I was arrested, but then I'd known all along that was coming . . . I didn't have any of the money on me that I had made from the sales . . . this time they couldn't seize any loot. . . ."

Finally he said:

"The Ruler of Demons doesn't care if his subjects are skin and bones. The people who live off thieves are worse than the thieves themselves. We get our hands on some small thing or other and they always manage to make it theirs! If not. . . ."

V

THE GOAT THIEF was dead.

Looking in through the window of the morgue I could clearly see his long body stretched out on the ground, and next to it, all crumpled up, was

that ill-fitting padded gown with its graying cotton oozing out here and there like intestines.

Late autumn weather was already upon us.

The morning of the previous day he had passed by my door being dragged along by several guards. I was just then watching the ocean and the clear autumn sky from behind the passageway . . . he was still alive then, and still speaking clearly; he was struggling to get free, resisting having to go downstairs and resisting having to go see the doctor.

As he neared the opening of the stairwell his pants slipped down, and along with them down came—in mixed colors—a mess of excrement that dripped all over the floor. He had a death grip on the bannister of the stairs with his hand, and his ribs and spine were bent and protruding, giving him the appearance of some kind of canine animal. The only things connecting his wrists were bones and veins. By this time he was no longer the same goat thief I had seen that first time.

"You S.O.B., filthy pig . . . my shoes and socks are all soiled!"

"Wrench his hand loose, push him downstairs!"

For all to see, a guard began raining blows on him with his stick where the ribs and thigh bones stuck out. Then another fat guard wrenched his fingers free . . . the sounds the goat thief made weren't clear anymore, but were like the death rattle from the throat of a dying man . . . a hoarse cry.

Finally even this hoarse cry died out in the stairwell. He bumped all the way as he rolled down the stairs.

The smell that his excrement left behind floated back and forth in the passageway.

Now, looking at his corpse through the window of the morgue, what I remember most clearly must be that very padded gown . . . he had said:

"This is my mother's . . . I should mail it back to her. . . ."

Now his mother's padded gown will serve as his burial clothes.

It was about a week earlier that the goat in the enclosure had died. At that time the thief had passed in front of my door and said softly:

"Mister, my billy goat has died too."

At that moment, as he passed in front of the door, I became aware that his eyes had already taken on the dull appearance of a dead fish. His

beard and face were a contrast of deep black and ghostly white. As he walked his steps were unsure, his shoulder blades stuck out precariously, and the back of his skull jutted out.

Each day, along with the others, he had been there filling in the foundation of the planned new prison building—they were in the process of piling rocks up on the foundation. The men were busy as usual and the foundation was already secure and level and sturdy.

I began increasing my pacing from one corner of the room to the other—that pale gray path grew even deeper, while the soles of my shoes had already worn through; as for the heels, the outsides were worn all the way down to the shoe lining. I was convinced that on my feet, before long, even the lining would soon be wasted away—just swallowed up.

As the goat neared his end there was no more of his own dung. For two whole days he simply lay there stretched out, and then he finally died. Before he died there were some people who threw bits of food to him, but what good were they then? By that time he had no more need for food.

Like the female before him, the goat's eyes took on a peaceful look . . . and he was finished.

The ocean is the same as always, the sky is the

same as always, and my vantage point of both the sky and the ocean is the same as always—everything is painted with early winter colors.

I no longer take pleasure in having my noonday strolls. I've grown to detest all those things in sight out there—the animal enclosure, the cell windows, and the new prison building under construction . . . even the window through which I could see the scenery on the hill at the rear, I've sealed it up; all that remains is the slice of ocean in front of me.

Once I received a letter from the two Russian kids. They said they had already reached Harbin, had received permission from their country, and were about to strike out across Siberia and return to their homeland. In the letter they wrote:

“Mr. ____, haven't you had your fill of the ocean yet? Wishing you good health. . . .”

Yes, my dear little friends, I'm still watching the ocean, watching the same slice of ocean . . . I'm healthy. . . .

I shook my head, and some strands of hair fluttered down onto the letter; this time I was truly smiling.

A rainy day
July 11th, 1935

(For Chinese text of Section I see page 154)

An Author's Mentors

My interest in literature began in childhood, and about ten years ago [in the early 1920's] I began to write. I was then in the army. At first I diligently studied Chinese classical poetry, and later I read the works of Lu Hsun and Kuo Mo-jo—the former's stories, the latter's poetry. Among the earliest works of new literature I read was Lu Hsun's *Wild Grass*, which I have always loved most. Among foreign authors I have liked Goethe and Chekhov best. As I read more I discovered the Soviet writers, among whose works I especially liked Gorki's *Mother* and A. Serafimovitch's *Sheleznyi Potok*, both of which greatly moved me, especially the latter, which had a profound influence on me. I have read little of the works of contemporary Chinese writers other than Lu Hsun and Kuo Mo-jo, hence I have not felt their influence.

—HSIAO CHUN (then known as T'ien Chun).

From an autobiographical sketch sent to Edgar Snow, quoted in the Introduction to an English translation of *Village in August*, published in New York, 1942.