

陳若曦：地道
The Tunnel

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COVER DESIGN of The Old Man published by Linking Publishing Co. Ltd., Taipei, 1978.

EARLY IN JULY Nanking launched a "Good Men, Good Deeds" movement and Master Hung, a retired worker, was selected by his neighborhood committee as a "Good Man" and given the additional designation of "model old man." Master Hung had mixed feelings about the honor that had come to him: he felt much like a man chewing on a raw olive and finding it refreshing but also somewhat astringent in taste.

The fact was that Master Hung did not feel old.

He was sixty-four and had been retired from the electron tube factory three years, but people in the dormitory continued to address him as Master Hung¹ or simply Old Master out of affection for him. He could see in the mirror that his

temples had turned white, but his pepper-and-salt hair was thick and healthy and felt firm to the touch, and his short beard gave him an appearance of power and virility. His flesh was firm and his face remarkably free from wrinkles, though somewhat flawed by age spots. His eyes, however, were always blood shot from long years of working under strong harsh light in the factory and had a tendency to become watery under strain. This more than anything else betrayed his age. Otherwise, he was healthy and strong of limb, and proud

¹*Shih-fu* (Master), a term applied to cooks, barbers, carpenters and skilled craftsmen generally, who are "masters" only to their apprentices and are so addressed by others out of courtesy.

of the fact that he could walk four or five *li* without stopping to rest.

Master Hung did not want to retire so early and had several times requested permission to keep on working—but to no avail, because this was the stated policy of the government.

In the matter of retirement, there was a great difference between factory and intellectual workers. According to his oldest son, who taught at the University, many old professors requested permission to retire but were not allowed to do so. These included doddering old men who were virtually invalids. But the University authorities would not let them go, saying that the central government wished to “protect” the old intellectuals.

Master Hung could not understand this policy of the government. With the retirement of the old professors, the young ones would have a chance for advancement. It would also save money for the government since their pension would be only seventy per cent of their regular salary. It didn't make any sense to him to force this kind of “protection” on the intellectuals.

“The general retirement age of 60 for men and 55 for women cannot be applied to the intellectuals at the present,” his son explained to him. “If it were, all professors of 60 and over would retire en masse! It would not only be detrimental to culture and learning but also to our national prestige. Don't you realize that foreign visitors always ask to see these professors and that they serve an important United Front² purpose?”

Master Hung could not quite follow his son's reasoning but he accepted it on faith. Was he not a professor at the University and a fully accredited member of the Communist Party? How could he be wrong?

He would like to have worked a few more years, not because his income would be reduced by thirty per cent if he retired but because he wanted to have something to do. But the work force at the factory was fixed and its regulations

required prompt retirement when a worker reached the mandatory age except under special circumstances. As a matter of fact, he should have retired in 1968, but because of the disruptions during the Cultural Revolution, he had been kept on for another year so that he might train a batch of new workers. So he did not retire until 1969.

Time weighed heavily on his hands the first year. He did not know what to do with his hands, so long used to holding an electric welding gun. He would like to be helpful around the house, but there was nothing for him to do. After his younger son's marriage, he had moved into his older son's dormitory in the University and lived with him and his wife. His daughter-in-law did not work because she had had tuberculosis and was not strong. However, she was a good housekeeper and managed everything well. His grandchildren were then in kindergarten and he got to see them only mornings and evenings. His son and daughter-in-law were very thoughtful of him. He had worked all his life and deserved all the leisure and comforts in his old age. So they treated him as if he were the lord of the manor and would not let him lift a finger.

Thus Master Hung had nothing to do except going out for a stroll on days when the weather was fine. He never went to school, but during the first few years after his wife's death he joined a reading class and learned enough characters to enable him to write simple reports on his work and to read the newspaper with good comprehension. But he was not interested in the newspapers. They were hard on the eyes and their subject matter was dull and of no interest to him. He never learned to smoke and rarely touched any wine. By his example neither of his sons acquired these habits. His older son had thoughtfully provided him with a bottle of grape wine, but it was no fun drinking alone and he did not indulge in it except to take a few sips on cold nights before going to bed. He could do some carpentering and masonry work and used to fix the leaky roof and collapsed wall of his own adobe house. But even that occupation was denied him now because the dormitory rooms were kept in good repair.

Luckily there was an unprecedented activity during those two years in organizing old and young, along with housewives, into neighborhood committees. A committee was set up in the

²*Tung-chan*, abbreviation of *Tung-i chan-hsien* (United Front), a Communist slogan dating from the early days of the anti-Japanese War in the 1930's. It represents the policy of “uniting” with any non-communist or foreign ally against a common enemy. In recent years, the term is also applied to getting Taiwan to unite with the “Motherland”.

dormitory affiliated with the larger neighborhood committee. Master Hung's family was recognized as a distinguished one. Having been a worker all his life, he was considered a man of superior background—that is to say, one “gravely wronged” and therefore an “implacable enemy of the exploiting class”. By virtue of the fact that his younger son was an officer in the Liberation Army, his family became at the same time an “army household”, to say nothing of the fact that his older son was a member of the Party and the younger one was going through his probationary period as a party member. Thus his family became a truly “red” one. It was inevitable that he should be recruited for the dormitory committee and soon elected to the neighborhood committee, to play an important part in the work of fighting the class enemies and investigating men of questionable backgrounds. In the purification campaigns of '68, several old men were ferreted out for investigation and quite a stir was created. When the time came for making a final disposition of the cases, Master Hung was invited to help. Since he had nothing to do with his time, he never missed a meeting and was always eager to do whatever chores he was assigned. He discovered that his words actually carried weight in deciding the political fate of those under investigation; he exulted in his work. He no longer regarded it as a way of passing the time but felt that he was doing something for the Revolution. He became absorbed in the work and put all his heart in it.

It was during this time that he first heard the name of Li Mei.³

AT ONE POINT the neighborhood committee was deliberating whether or not to brand a certain old man as a bad element. The man in question not only had a complex background but kept bad company. At one time he was a good friend of Li Mei's husband, who was said to be a drunkard. During the Great Leap Forward, he had cursed the Communist Party and Mao Tse-tung, and defied authority. He even assaulted some Party cadre, for which he was finally sent to prison. To dissociate herself from such a man, Li Mei asked for a divorce. After it was granted she lived with

³*Mei*, literally “younger sister”, is sometimes used as a girl's name for want of a better word or adopted by women who work as domestic help.

her little daughter and made a living by baby-sitting, cooking and washing for people in the neighborhood. The old man under investigation had pestered Li Mei with his attentions and it was said that she had driven him away with a carrying pole. Members of the committee all took the position that Li Mei must have encouraged the man in some way. Master Hung was inclined to go along with others, and so decided that Li Mei could not have been blameless since her husband was a counter-revolutionary, though no one could put a finger on just what she had done.

It was not until the winter of 1970, when in response to Mao Tse-tung's directive, Nanking like all large cities in China began a mad rush to dig air-raid tunnels, that Master Hung first met Li Mei.

As it was with all past directives “from the highest level”, the latest decree galvanized everybody into action—in government organizations, schools, factories, and residential neighborhoods. The main tunnels were to be deep enough to afford protection against atomic bombs and wide enough for buses to drive through. They were supposed to be spacious enough to accommodate shops and hospitals and the network was to cover the entire city so that within fifteen minutes of air raid warning the entire population of the city would be able to move underground. The city government decreed that each unit was to be responsible for the section of the tunnel in its locality and to begin work immediately without preliminary surveys or blueprints.

There were three entrances to the tunnel planned for the dormitory area where Master Hung lived, one of which being near a locust tree not far from his apartment. Since most of the teachers in the university had been sent to the northern part of the province for re-education on the May 7th school for cadres, the responsibility for digging tunnels fell upon their families, and Master Hung was drafted to direct the work. The older men and women being too frail for any heavy work, the actual digging was done by the housewives.

Master Hung had lost his wife for more than ten years and rarely came into contact with members of the opposite sex. Now thrown together with a crowd of women, he felt strange and not a little thrilled when he happened to come into physical contact with them in the narrow tunnel. Because of his age, the women did not feel

constrained to be reticent. While they labored, they kept up a stream of gossip as if he weren't there at all. One of them was quiet, a middle-aged matron who worked harder than any one else, wielding her pick with abandon. Being a worker himself, Master Hung appreciated her zeal and wondered who she was.

One day she arrived at work before anyone else and he summoned up enough courage to ask her name.

"My surname is Li; I am called Li Mei." She gave him a modest smile with the answer.

So she was the divorced woman! Master Hung was surprised but there was not the slightest trace of distaste in his feeling toward her.

"How does it happen that you have come to work in our section of the tunnel?"

"I do odd jobs for Professor Sun. His loved one⁴ is in poor health and can't do heavy work. I am here to take her place."

Li Mei's voice was soft and low and very pleasant to the ear. Master Hung's wife had a shrill voice and when excited she sounded like quarreling. His daughter-in-law's voice was hoarse and always sounded as if she were short of breath. Li Mei was different. She spoke in a low voice as if whispering into his ears and yet every word she spoke came to him like the clear notes of a bell. He could not hear enough of it and regretted that he had not heard it before. For the first time in his life, he became aware that a woman's voice could actually be enchanting.

That night his mind was full of Li Mei as he rested his weary bones in his bed. Her face was already familiar to him. The image now had a name and was endowed with sound; it began to perform like a motion picture before his eyes.

Li Mei's face reminded him of the goddess Kuanyin whose image he had seen years ago in the country. It was roundish, with arched eye brows, and full of infinite sweetness and compassion for the sufferings of mankind. The physical exertions gave her complexion a healthy glow which overshadowed the wrinkles that were brought on by her smiles and made them seem like added ornaments to her charm. Her eyes were small as was her nose; but her lips were full and purplish red like ripe mulberries. Such thick lips

would have seemed ugly on other women, but on Li Mei they suggested a "happy destiny". It seemed to him unjust that, with such a physiognomy, she should suffer virtual widowhood. She wore a padded coat and trousers, so Master Hung could not tell whether she was fat or thin, but he judged from the fullness of her face that she could not be too thin. His late wife was comfortably plump, and he had always liked women that way. It gives one such a soft, warm feeling.

With this thought, Master Hung forgot about his aching bones. He turned over, put his arms around the pillow, buried his face in it and in his heart called out the name Li Mei.

From then on Master Hung took advantage of every opportunity to be near her. She lived in a lane nearby and once he went to her place on the pretext of notifying her of a meeting. To avoid gossip he stood at the door and called to her. Though he did not go in when she opened the door, he had a good look of her house.

It reminded him of his own old home. Like hers, it was in a dingy lane, a two-room house constructed of wood with plastered earthen walls and tamped earth floor. The difference was that while his became very messy after his wife died, Li Mei's was kept neat and clean. The unpainted table and stools were well scrubbed and shiny and the dirt floor swept. The only decoration on the wall was a portrait of Mao Tse-tung. He saw her daughter too, bent over the table doing her lessons. She was a little over ten and looked somewhat like her mother. It was an ordinary enough house, but with Li Mei smiling and standing in the doorway, it acquired an air of simple dignity. He was so absorbed in what he saw that he would have forgotten his errand if Li Mei had not reminded him of it.

IT WAS PROBABLY because of his lack of education that he could not appreciate the strategic significance of "deep tunnels", Master Hung had always admitted to himself. If he had his way, he would simply spread a quilt under the table and curl up under it instead of crawling into the tunnel in the event the Soviets dropped their hydrogen bombs. But he was very grateful indeed that Mao Tse-tung's sudden inspiration should have made it possible for him to meet Li Mei. He would speak

⁴See Note 1 in the story "Ting Yun" on page 94.

to her whenever he could do so without attracting attention and he was always alert to keep her out of the way of falling earth or a carelessly swung pick. Li Mei appreciated his thoughtfulness and cast him grateful glances.

In the spring of the following year, the tunnels had reached quite a depth and were to be joined very soon. Electric lights were installed and because the air was stagnant and the danger of falling earth was ever present, the workers were divided into two-hour shifts and the night shift abolished. Once he followed Li Mei into the tunnel and heard the sound of crumbling earth just as she lifted her pick. He sprung forward and pulled her back, with the result that they both fell to the ground. She wasn't hit by the falling earth but she was much moved by Master Hung's selflessness in risking his own life to save her. Her eyes were filled with tears as she was helped out of the tunnel.

Just about this time tunnel construction was suddenly stopped in Nanking. It happened that a professor in civil engineering was home on furlough from farm labor and noticed a slight tilt in his dormitory building and that the sinking was due to tunnel work. He reported the risks involved and the school authorities had no choice but to stop the digging. This and similar incidents were brought to the attention of the city government. In the southern part of the city an entire building actually collapsed. The tunnels should have been propped up with beams or shored up with concrete after they reached a certain depth, but because of shortages of construction materials the higher echelon of the government had done nothing except to exhort the people to promote the revolution by practicing economy. The result was collapsed houses and loss of lives. When the city government realized that it was impossible to realize Mao Tse-tung's pipe dream with the resources available, it did what the authorities in Peking had done: it finished in style a few sections of the tunnel in areas frequented by foreign visitors and abandoned the rest.

Though Master Hung was pleased that the government had at last abandoned this senseless undertaking, he was distressed also because it deprived him of the opportunity to be near Li Mei. The day became as monotonous and boring as when he first retired. The only time when life had

any meaning for him was when he caught glimpses of Li Mei as she went from one family to another to do their washing and cooking. He discovered that his days were made or spoiled by whether or not he managed to catch sight of her. He missed above all her enchanting voice, for in dreams people spoke without sound and he always woke up disappointed for not having heard her speak. He also cursed himself for making a fool of himself over a woman at his age, and a grandfather too. But that did no good. If anything, he seemed to think about her all the more.

Winter came, with its predictable storms and snow; his daughter-in-law took care to keep him indoors as much as possible for fear that he would suffer exposure. Confined to his room and gazing through the window at the overcast sky, he felt all the more restless. When he did venture out to attend meetings of the neighborhood committee he made it a point to go by way of Li Mei's home, keeping his eyes fixed on her door as he passed the modest little earthen house as though hoping to catch something. Once it happened that Li Mei was emerging from the house to fetch coal just as he walked by. Their two pairs of eyes met and lingered momentarily, and he paused to exchange a few words with her before resuming his steps. For the rest of the way his heart leaped with joy and he found himself all but humming a tune.

As the lunar New Year approached and everyone was making preparations for celebrating the festival, Master Hung wanted to buy something to give Li Mei but was afraid to let his daughter-in-law know. He waited until the day before New Year's Eve when he finally went out of his way after visiting an old fellow worker and knocked on Li Mei's door.

Li Mei's eyes brightened when she saw who it was and asked him in without a word. Master Hung took from the inner pocket of his padded jacket two *ten-yuan* notes and held it out to her rather timidly, saying, "This is for you to buy some holiday present for the little sister."

Li Mei stepped back and would not take it, her round face reddened in confusion.

Master Hung was never eloquent. Now he stood opened mouthed and did not know what to say. Then taking Li Mei's hand, he pressed it to his heart and said, "It comes from here."

After staring at him for a moment, Li Mei freed

her hand and with both her hands she lifted his and touched her thick, hot lips against it.

Master Hung slept beautifully that night, fondling the hand which Li Mei had kissed. On New Year's Eve, he reverted to the old custom of giving his grandchildren good luck money, which had been condemned by the Red Guards. Thus amid occasional report of fire crackers, he sent off another year. He had not been so happy for a long time and felt more than ten years younger.

Shortly after the Spring Festival, the University sent Master Hung's son to Shenyang on a "learning" mission and he immediately took upon himself the responsibility of the family's morning shopping. He knew that Li Mei shopped for her employers on her way to work, so he waited for her and walked to the market with her.

LI MEI BEING a good listener, Master Hung gradually unburdened to her all that was on his mind. He talked about his grandchildren, of his younger son in Chinghai, even of his dead wife. He told her how fond he was of her and how he was afraid that she considered him too old for her. Then Li Mei would comfort and encourage him, assuring him that he looked as strong as when he first moved into the dormitory. This made him feel more than ever that he was not old after all.

He became more and more fond of Li Mei. She was a woman of few words, but she had a good heart and always meant what she said. She did have an opportunity to marry again but she loved her daughter dearly and did not want to risk marrying someone who might not be kind to her. So she chose to remain unmarried and earn her living by doing odd jobs.

Master Hung should be content with the knowledge that Li Mei was well disposed toward him, but man has a way of courting unhappiness. After a while he began to wonder if she was being nice to other men and to recall the things that had been said about her when he first heard her name. Was there anything between her and that old man under investigation? He was troubled by these thoughts and suspicions.

When Li Mei saw that he doubted her, she was distressed and once burst into tears, saying, "Lao Hung, do you want me to tear out my heart and show it to you?"

He was touched and at the same time ashamed

of himself for being jealous like a young man.

"Don't cry, Li Mei," he said to her, taking her hand and squeezing it. "It is only that I—I love you so much."

His cheeks grew hot to the ears as he uttered the word which belongs to the vocabulary of the young. He never imagined that at his age he would be capable of saying such a thing.

Hearing this, Li Mei threw away all restraint, drew close to him and rested her face on his shoulder.

"Lao Hung, if you do not dislike me and would have me, I would like to throw in my lot with you."

Dislike her? Willing to have her? What absurd talk was this: Master Hung almost shouted right there on the street.

"Li Mei-mei," he was so excited that he stuttered. "For a long time, I have wanted to marry you."

This happened that autumn, a few days before his son returned from Shenyang.

But things will come out. His meetings with Li Mei were observed and talked about, and eventually reached the ears of his daughter-in-law. He had no inkling that she knew, for she never said anything to him. But on the evening of his son's return, the young couple whispered to each other all night. He could not make out what they said but concluded that it was only natural that they should have so much to say to each other after many months' absence. He did not realize what had happened until the following day when they began to reproach him none too subtly.

First his son spoke of his mother who had been dead for fourteen years, how capable she was, how delicious her dumplings were, how thrifty and industrious she was, all for the sake of her husband and her children. Then the daughter-in-law took over and brought up the name of Li Mei, recounted and embroidered upon the rumors about her.

"You can't expect very much of a divorced woman," was her rather arbitrary conclusion. "Otherwise she would have remarried long before this. What could she be waiting for?"

"She asked for a divorce only after the man she married became a counterrevolutionary," Master Hung protested.

"Perhaps she was an opportunist," his son chimed in. "She might have divorced him only to

show that she was a good revolutionary. Who knows what was actually on her mind?"

"You are quite right," the daughter-in-law agreed. "She is a 100 per cent opportunist. The reason she has remained unmarried so long is because she is waiting for someone with an unimpeachable background that she could lean upon. She is only dreaming; no party member or cadre would have a woman like her who will only be a drag on him."

The old man never expected such violent objection from his son and daughter-in-law. They had anticipated him and virtually vetoed him before he had a chance to speak. He was crushed and spoke no more. He realized that he was no match for his son, a high-level intellectual and a member of the Party. He had no chance against him even if he did not have any help from his wife.

What he objected to was the toadyism of the rank and file of the Communist Party such as his son. It seemed so unjust to him that they should be ever-ready to accommodate themselves to Party politics while showing no sympathy whatever for an unfortunate and helpless woman like Li Mei. Moreover, the New Marriage Laws were drawn up by the Communist Party. For a time after the Liberation, the people were encouraged to break their old bonds and to form new, revolutionary ties; yet now his son, a Party member, did not want to be contaminated by a divorced woman. But when he thought more about the matter, he realized that this double standard was typical of the Communists. His son did not invent it and could not be blamed for it. Both Mao Tse-tung and Liu Shao-ch'i divorced their wives and remarried. Yet they would not permit the people to allude to it under the penalty of being charged with slandering the leaders and engaging in counter-revolutionary activity. They did not put much stock in their own marriage and divorce laws.

Not long afterwards he got a letter from his younger son in Chinghai, expressing concern for his welfare and his desire to have his father come and live with him. His son also said something about how gossip is to be feared and how it might adversely affect the brilliant career that his older brother had before him and jeopardize his own chances of full membership in the Party. After reading the letter Master Hung realized he had utterly no chance, with everyone in the family against him. He wanted to cry out in protest but

felt a lump in his throat; he had to swallow his unhappiness, his feeling of having been misused.

That an old man who entertains the idea of becoming a bridegroom again should be subjected to criticism is more or less to be expected. In this respect the New Society was still very tradition-bound; it gave no thought to the loneliness of the old and their needs. For the sake of Li Mei's happiness and his own, he was willing to brave public prejudice, but there was no way for him to cast off the fetters formed by one's own flesh and blood. His children were still young when his wife died. For their sake he had remained a widower, because he was afraid that the woman he married might not be a good stepmother to them. Now that they have both achieved a degree of respectability, it is only natural they did not want anyone to intrude and muddy up clear waters. He had sacrificed his own happiness for theirs when he was still in his prime. There didn't seem to be any valid reason why he should not make a sacrifice of himself again for their sake. He sighed.

He could appreciate his daughter-in-law's point of view too. Of his retirement pay of 56 *yuan* a month, he kept only ten for himself and turned over the rest to her. His son earned 54 *yuan* a month. Even with these two incomes, it took careful management to keep their household of five in a modest degree of comfort. If he were to marry again, the greatest blow will fall on the daughter-in-law. It would be much harder for her to make ends meet, and quite impossible to maintain their accustomed standard of living. The violence of her feelings against Li Mei was only a reflection of her panic.

THUS MASTER HUNG's idea of remarrying died in the womb. His son took back the chore of shopping, and he was deprived of the opportunity to meet Li Mei. He was in fact ashamed of meeting her. In his chance encounters with her in the dormitory, she looked subdued but uncomplaining, as if she understood the position he was in. He wished he could rush up to her, hold her in his arms and have a good cry.

That winter was unusually cold. Master Hung curled up in his room like a frozen snake, numb to all feelings. He lost interest in everything, and barely managed to attend to the work of the neighborhood committee, which he did without his former zeal. His only diversion was the delight

he took in his two grandsons; still, lying awake in the middle of the night, he couldn't help the cold loneliness weighing heavily on him. When it snowed he would stand there, hands in his sleeves, and gaze dumbly at the blank whiteness of the world on the other side of the windowpane. His glance would come to rest across the way on the entrance of the abandoned tunnel near the locust tree. Through prolonged neglect, the tunnel had collected rain-water and become a garbage dump; now the snow covered it all, leaving only traces of a tunnel-mouth like some animal trap. The sight of this recalled to his mind the times when he and Li Mei were laboring shoulder to shoulder, digging and shoveling earth. Then he would be all tensed up and restless, walking round and round in his room like a man lost in a maze. He wanted to forget Li Mei, but he found that it was impossible.

Another Lunar New Year was soon at hand. The people were as usual exhorted to practice thrift and simplicity and celebrate the Spring Festival in a revolutionized way, and as usual every family did everything it could to buy up what was desired. One day in the afternoon Master Hung decided to go downtown and buy some presents for his grandchildren.

Li Mei happened to be on a shopping expedition also and the two ran into each other at the New Street Plaza. They were so happy in seeing each other after such a long absence that they grinned at each other and forgot for the moment their disappointment and heartaches. The department store was crowded. Li Mei led him in and out of the milling throngs, going from counter to counter, making suggestions and selections for him. No long-married couple could have been more thoughtful and understanding of each other than they. Before they parted, he invited her to see the model film "Harbor" with him on the Feast of Lanterns, agreeing to meet in front of the movie theater.

After that they began to meet regularly every two or three weeks at the movies. Since there were not many motion pictures available, they soon saw them all, each many times over until they could re-create everything with their eyes closed. But there was no place else to go. In the theater, Master Hung would take Li Mei's hand as soon as the lights were turned out, place it on his knees and caress it. Only at such times did Li Mei's hands, swollen from long immersion in soapy

water, receive any tender attention. Sometimes he would put her hand against his chest so that she could feel his wild heart beats which restored youth had excited. Only then were they able to close their eyes and luxuriate in the feeling of oneness of body and soul brought on by the touch of flesh against flesh.

A change came over Master Hung. He enjoyed his food and slept well and a smile always played around the corners of his mouth. The beard he had neglected all winter now received meticulous attention. This caused his daughter-in-law to look on with a frown. He kept more of his pension for his own use. His daughter-in-law was naturally suspicious but pretended that she noticed nothing and said nothing about it to her husband. She preferred to see him happy than to have him mope around, as he did lately when hardly a word was exchanged between father and son.

He also took a renewed interest in the affairs of the neighborhood. He read the newspaper, studied Mao Tse-tung's writings, organized campaigns for "Remembering Bitterness", and took the lead in street-cleaning and other public works. It was no wonder then that he should be first to be honored when the movement for good men and good deeds was launched that summer, and the old men and old ladies were called upon to emulate and learn from him. And it was no wonder that he should be dubbed a "model old man" since just then "model plays" were monopolizing the Chinese stage.

There was a heat wave of more than ten days' duration in July. It was so humid that the stone slabs under people's eaves were covered with condensation. On the day agreed upon Master Hung was already waiting in front of the movie theater, though its doors had not yet been opened for the three o'clock show.

Presently Li Mei came, greeting him with a smile the minute she saw him from the distance. She wore a colorful blouse with short sleeves, a black silk skirt and a pair of black plastic sandals. Because of her work, Li Mei had always worn long trousers. Wishing to see her dressed like the women in the dormitory, Master Hung had bought her a piece of silk, and was pleased to see her wearing the skirt she had made of the material.

Li Mei felt shy like a young girl when she came up to him. Having never been exposed to the sun, her unclad legs were white and smooth like

radishes that had been just washed and taken out of the water. Master Hung stared at them awhile and then feasted his eyes on her bare arms, round and smooth like lotus roots. He could hardly take his eyes off her.

"Let's skip the movie today," he suddenly said to Li Mei.

"Where could we go?"

That was a problem. Looking around, he saw a hotel opposite the theater, but without a letter of introduction from the unit where he worked there was no chance of getting a room. He wanted to be alone with Li Mei but big as Nanking was, it afforded no trysting place.

He decided to go as far as he could.

"Let us go to the Chung-shan Mausoleum. Today is Monday. It shouldn't be crowded."

Li Mei agreed and they went on the No. 9 bus.

THOUGH NOT AS crowded as on holidays, visitors were gathered everywhere in groups of twos and threes busily engaged in conversation. It was quiet only in comparison with such thoroughfares as the New Street Plaza. Master Hung had no mind for the scenery; all he was interested in was to find a secluded spot where he could be alone with Li Mei. Half way up the flight of stairs leading up to the mausoleum itself, he turned off and led Li Mei through an orchard and into the woods.

After stumbling around for a while without knowing where they were, they came to an ancient pine with exposed roots that could serve for seats.

"Lao Hung, let's rest for a while and catch our breath."

Li Mei solicitously helped him to sit down on the root and then took out a handkerchief and wiped the sweat off his brow.

He had not done any climbing for a long time and was therefore a little out of breath. He soon

⁵EDITOR'S NOTE: When this story first appeared in the Literary Supplement of the *United Daily News*, Taipei, November 11, 1977, it had a different ending, translated by Mr. Wang as follows:

At six o'clock a park keeper came and locked the iron gate.

A week later, the keeper again came, according to regulations, to open the gate to air the tunnel out and keep it dry.

When the gate was opened, the keeper discovered two corpses right inside, that of a woman curled up against that of a man. On the cement wall near the gate were scrawled two irregular lines of writing in blood:

recovered his breath but Li Mei kept on wiping him off around the neck, her lotus-root-like arm swinging before him. He suddenly seized it, brought it up to his mouth and bit it gently with his teeth, whereupon Li Mei fell into his arms and sat down on his lap.

Master Hung held her tightly and pressed her soft body against his chest as if trying to quiet his beating heart with her weight. Then noticing her white legs, he freed one hand to rub against it.

Just then they heard someone's laughter.

Li Mei jumped up with a start, her face red like cockscomb.

The laughter came from a young couple sitting under a tree not far from where they were. They were stealing glances at Li Mei and Master Hung; the young woman was trying to brush back her hair with her hands and blushing with some embarrassment.

Master Hung stood up and taking Li Mei by the hand walked farther on. The sun was quite low now, casting long shadows of the tree and of the closely entwined figures of the lovers.

The trees thinned out and disclosed the entrance of a tunnel. This tunnel was an impressive one. The entrance was plastered with cement and had an iron gate, which happened to be open. It was dark and quiet inside. Here at last was a spot where they could be alone. Master Hung took Li Mei's hand and walked into the tunnel with her.

They walked on hand in hand, leaning upon each other. The tunnel echoed their foot steps but they did not hear it: they could only hear the voice of their own hearts responding to each other.

At six o'clock sharp a keeper of the park came and locked the gate. It was opened one day a week to air out the tunnel and keep it dry. Another week would pass before it was to be opened again.⁵

*We love each other
We are not suicides*

In the book *Lao jen* (Old Man), published by Linking Co., Taipei, April 1978, the present version is given. The author noted in her Preface that she made the change on the advice of a friend, the noted fiction writer Pai Hsien-yung (see *Renditions* No. 5, Autumn 1975), who thought the ending a "superfluous touch". She explained that the Chinese Communists condemn suicide as an act of "rejection of the people" and that their fear of the consequences of such an act was what originally motivated her to end the story of Master Hung and Li Mei the way she did. She agreed, however, that their story is sad enough without the addition of this grim commentary.

CHI-CHEN WANG:
An Appreciation

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“C.C.”

An early sketch
by George Kao

Almost a half century ago, in 1929, the publishing firm of Doubleday, Doran of Garden City, N. Y., brought out the first contemporary English translation of the classic novel *Dream of the Red Chamber*.^{*} The translator was Chi-chen Wang 王際真, whose latest contribution to the same field of endeavor we have the privilege of presenting in the foregoing pages.

Between then and now, “C. C.”—as he is known to his numerous friends and students—has produced many more literary translations, but such is his honesty about his own work (and, one suspects, about the sundry deficiencies in the original, be it ancient or modern) that more of his volumes seem to have remained in manuscript form than have been published. His severely high and self-imposed standards should be sobering to those of us who are prone to rush into print; his comparative reticence certainly has meant a loss to the cause of East-West cultural interchange.

In addition to translation, C. C. has devoted his years to things that are just as important—like teaching (he is Professor Emeritus at Columbia University) and editing (as an associate editor of *Monumenta Serica*, 1965-75), and above all the encouragement and guidance of younger generations of writers and scholars, Chinese and American. Long before this, he was acquainted with many who were prominent in the May 4th era: He was a contemporary of Wen I-to 聞一多 and Liang Shih-ch’iu 梁實秋 at Tsinghua College. He had known and discussed literature with such as Hsu Chih-mo 徐志摩 and Shen Ts’ung-wen 沈從文. It is not surprising, then, that in 1976 he should have taken favorable notice of a story called “Keng Erh in Peking” in a Hong-Kong monthly written by a new writer named Chen Jo-hsi. He had himself just returned from a visit to his hometown of Tsinan, in Shantung Province, and found “a ring of truth” in what he read.

^{*}See *Renditions* No. 2, Special Fiction Issue, Spring 1974, page 22.

Through Prof. C. T. Hsia, who had succeeded him at Columbia, C. C. became acquainted with the author, with whom he began a correspondence exchanging views on problems of literary creation and translation. These were ultimately reflected, according to Chen, in the revised edition of *Yin hsien-chang* and in its English translation, *The Execution of Mayor Yin etc.* As Chen Jo-hsi puts it, after the two had met in Vancouver, they have become "friends across the generation gap" 忘年交. "Mr. Wang had lost interest in Chinese literary products of the post-1949 years," Chen has told a mutual friend. "He is the oldest in age among my friends, as well as the most straightforward and individualistic. I take pride in his encouragement, his faith and concern in my writing, no less than I value his criticisms, for instance, of where I fall short in the characterization of some of the people in my stories."

C.C. Wang is inclined to deprecate his work as a translator, "not out of modesty," he likes to say, "but because I have delusions that I am capable of doing better than I have." He is more likely to talk about his years as a research assistant at New York's Metropolitan Museum of Art (1928-36), his nearly four decades of teaching at Columbia, (1929-65), and his accomplishment as Curator of its Chinese Collection (1936-42) in helping to make it into one of the finest libraries of its kind in the United States.

To *Renditions*, nevertheless, translation is the thing. And in C. C.'s case the results, manifest in his masterly English and a spare, understated style, are always infused with his own integrity and low tolerance for humbug. Perhaps that is why he may be said to be the first serious and successful introducer of Lu Hsün to the West, in *Ah Q and Others* (Columbia 1941), before that acerbic iconoclast was deified by the Chinese Communists. His other books include three trail-blazing short-story collections: *Traditional Chinese Tales* (1944), *Contemporary Chinese Stories* (1944), and *Stories of China at War* (1947). In 1958 he published a revised and enlarged edition of his *Dream of the Red Chamber* (Twayne), which is also available in a Doubleday/Anchor paperback. Among his current projects is a translation of *Lü-shih ch'un-ch'iu* 呂氏春秋, a classic from the Ch'in dynasty, which he is engaged in under a grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities.

The American educator and critic, Mark Van Doren, has written of Chi-chen Wang's translation of *Dream* that he "has so perfected his style that the inimitable spirit of the original comes to us freely and fully, with neither let nor hindrance nor any least disloyalty of voice." Arthur Waley, who knew about the difficulties of rendering Chinese and Japanese classics into English, concluded his preface to the earlier edition by assuring the reader "that in Mr. Wang's hands he will be perfectly safe. The translation is singularly accurate, and the work of adaptation skilfully performed." There cannot have been higher praise from more authoritative sources, and it applies with equal force to the present case—except that Chen Jo-hsi's stories, being told in the modern Western tradition, require little or no adaptation.

—G.K.