

five thousand years old, and she's decomposing fast. She can't weather the storm of this new age much longer."

Lin Pei-shan smiled wryly, and threw Fan Po-wen a sly glance of pretended vexation.

II

ABOUT five o'clock next morning there were a few drops of rain in the wind. It was much cooler than the evening before—a drop of nearly ten degrees—but by nine o'clock the sun, now blazing high in the sky, had dispersed the lowering clouds and the temperature was up again to eighty degrees. One felt the menace of an even severer heat-wave.

The ushers at the Wus' residence, holding aloft white cardboard signs indicating their function and wearing coarse black gowns tied at the waist with long, wide strips of thick white cloth for belts, scurried to and fro in the scorching sun, from the main gate to the large drawing-room which was being used as a "ceremonial hall," and then back again to the main gate to escort in more newly-arrived mourners. Every one of them was tired and perspiring freely. Until half past ten, the eight of them now and then managed to snatch a moment's rest on the wooden benches beside the funeral musicians at the main gate, where they would mop their brows with the loose ends of their white belts and fan themselves with the cardboard signs while they regained their breath, grumbling because Mr. Wu Sun-fu had not employed more men to do this job. By midday, however, when the sun was beating down mercilessly on their heads, the visitors had begun to arrive in an endless stream, and the two bands, one at the main gate and one before the hall, were both playing non-stop. The ushers rushed back and forth like robots, too busy now even to think of grumbling about Mr. Wu. They could at most cast envious glances at the six masters of ceremonies who were standing idly before the funeral hall.

The hooting of cars . . . the funeral din of flutes, trumpets and gongs . . . the bawling of waiters as they elbowed their way back and forth with shouts of "Tea here!" and "Lemonade for

this gentleman!" . . . the noise of chauffeurs and rickshaw boys clamouring for tips . . . the raised voices of policemen and plain-clothes men shooting idle onlookers away from the main gate . . . the acrid smell of cigarette smoke and the odour of human bodies—all mingled together and penetrated every corner of the Wu mansion and its acre and a half of garden.

The dining-room next to the funeral hall was packed with people. A huge mahogany sideboard stood across it like a bridge, partitioning it into two sections. In the right-hand wall of the interior section were windows looking out on to the garden; close to the windows stood a tall trellis covered with banksia roses, which afforded fragrance and shade to the whole room. In the left wall there were two doors, one of which opened on to a veranda on which guests were sitting clustered around tea-tables, holding forth noisily on "gold bullion," "silver bars," "cotton yarn," and "taels and cents," their talk punctuated by the pfft! of lemonade bottles being opened. Close by a door at the extreme end of the veranda sat a man of about thirty in a khaki uniform and long riding-boots, with three or four enamel badges on his chest. He was sitting alone in a rocking-chair, slowly sipping lemonade and glancing every so often at the door beside him. It was closed, but whenever it opened an inch or two an intoxicating perfume and silvery laughter escaped through the crack.

Suddenly the man in uniform put down his glass and stood up, his spurs jingling, and sprang to attention, then made a low bow to a woman appearing in the doorway.

Mrs. Wu Sun-fu was rather taken aback by this unexpected show of courtesy, but by the time he had straightened up she had recovered her composure and nodded with a smile.

"Ah, Colonel Lei! You here? . . . Nice of you to come."

"Oh, don't mention it. I was planning to come tomorrow to say goodbye, but when I heard that this had happened, I felt I had to come to pay my last respects. They tell me Old Mr. Wu passed away yesterday evening. If so, Madame, you must have had quite a time of it!" replied Col. Lei, smiling respectfully, at the same time glancing over Mrs. Wu Sun-fu's mourning dress: an ankle-length black gauze dress with tight-fitting three-quarter length sleeves discreetly flattering her tall, elegant figure. She

wore no make-up. Beneath her fine arched brows, her eyes, though just a little red from crying, were still as bright as they always had been, dancing and shining with infinite wisdom and boundless charm. The colonel's heart fluttered. This was the first time he had seen this lovely creature as "Madame Wu." Deep in his heart lingered the memory of another lovely creature of five years ago, when she was not yet "Madame Wu" but just "Miss Lin Pei-yao" and her image suddenly rose before his eyes again and tugged mercilessly at his heartstrings. The reappearance of this ghost from the past—and at such a moment as this—seemed so cruel. Without waiting for her reply, he compressed his lips, made another bow, and left hurriedly. He made his way through the babel of voices holding forth on "gold" and "cotton yarn," and into the inner half of the dining-room.

As soon as he stepped into the room, he was hailed by two voices simultaneously:

"Look, here's Colonel Lei! You're just in time to help us out." This simultaneous appeal to a third party worked like a charm and the voices which had been raised in argument suddenly subsided. All eyes turned to Col. Lei as he stood in the doorway, causing the vision of Mrs. Wu Sun-fu's simple beauty to vanish from his mind. He smiled and let his eyes travel over the faces turned towards him, then swung his right hand up in a salute and cut it sharply away. He walked over to the group, clapped a short, fat man on the shoulder and grasped a hand held out to him, and said heartily:

"Not talking about gold and cotton yarn and the prices again, are you? Quite beyond me, all that sort of thing." The short, fat man raised his eyebrows in mock incredulity and laughed, but before he had a chance to say anything, the youngster who had shaken hands with the colonel broke in with:

"Gold and cotton yarn? No, nothing like that—and not the subjects you are an expert in, either, like the foxtrot or the tango or the 'Rio Rita' songs. No, we're discussing the military situation. Come on and sit down with us."

"I know you, Huang Fen: you've never got a good word to say for it," said Col. Lei frowning in feigned protest and squeezed in on the sofa beside Huang Fen, who was in European dress.

The two had been fellow-cadets at the Whampoa Military Academy and after graduation had been in action together. They were on fairly good terms, but the things in which Col. Lei was interested and at which he excelled were a closed book to Huang Fen; conversely, whenever the conversation came round to Huang Fen's "work," on which he was so keen, Col. Lei, although he could be trusted to respect the other's confidences, always shook his head. Just lately the two of them had seen each other almost every day, but every time they met they quarrelled. Seeing that Huang Fen was in one of his provocative moods again with all these people present, Col. Lei felt ill at ease. He would have liked to escape but he could not just walk out on him.

There was a brief spell of modest silence as if, before the newcomer, nobody was in a hurry to express his opinion now. Meanwhile, the gathering in the other half of the dining-room broke into peals of laughter and someone shouted: "Serve him right! . . . Give him what for!" The voice sounded rather familiar to Col. Lei. He looked to see who it was, but his view was blocked by the short, fat man and another man with a small head perched on a slender neck, sitting with their backs to the huge sideboard at a square table cluttered up with lemonade bottles and fruit-dishes. When the short, fat man saw that the colonel was looking at his companion, he thought that the colonel probably wanted to get to know him, so he quickly rose and said:

"Let me introduce my friend to you, Colonel Lei: Mr. Sun Chi-jen, manager of the Pacific Steamship Company."

The colonel smiled and nodded to Sun Chi-jen, who produced a card. Col. Lei gave it a cursory glance and said:

"Oh, I see, Mr. Sun, you're also running a long-distance bus service in northern Anhwei. Congratulations on your possessing the means of both land and water transportation!"

"Quite so," chimed in the short, fat man, before Sun Chi-jen could reply. "Mr. Sun's a man of energy and vision. Unfortunately, that part of Anhwei is at present involved in the war, and consequently Mr. Sun's business has had to be temporarily suspended. . . . But tell us, Colonel Lei, how is the war really going just lately?"

He had a reputation for engineering friendships between strangers and was a skilful flatterer. He was nicknamed "Red-tipped Match"—not only because he owned the Kwang Tah Match Factory, but also because he had the knack of kindling the flame of friendship. His real name—Chou Chung-wei—was therefore eclipsed in a way by this nickname.

No sooner were the words out of his mouth than several other voices chorused:

"Yes, tell us what really is going on."

Col. Lei smiled slightly and answered vaguely:

"More or less what you read in the papers."

"The papers keep telling us the Central Army is winning, but according to the rumours going round the town things aren't going so well. And if the papers don't give reliable information, their readers get all the more panicky," a man in his forties with a drooping moustache observed in a ringing voice. Col. Lei recognized him as Wang Ho-fu, general manager of the Ta Hsing Coal-mining Company. They had met once in a county in Honan, where the colonel was commanding a regiment.

Everybody nodded agreement with Wang Ho-fu's observation. Sun Chi-jen spoke next, wagging his head on his long neck: "Perhaps the rumours are exaggerated, but there's no end of wounded coming in just now. One of our boats called at Pukow the day before yesterday and was immediately commandeered to move over a thousand wounded to Changchow, Wusih, and some other places along the railway. According to some of the wounded, things are in a pretty bad way."

"And the Japanese papers say that a certain important man from the South has reached an understanding with a certain important man from the North and that he'll soon stage a *coup d'état*," put in a man named Chu Yin-chiu, the owner of a silk factory, sitting opposite Sun Chi-jen. As he said this, he cast a malicious glance at Col. Lei and at the same time nudged his neighbour, a thin man of about forty named Chen Chun-yi, the owner of the Wu Yun Silk Goods Factory, but the latter just smiled.

Col. Lei was not conscious of the malicious look in Chu Yin-chiu's eyes, nor did he notice the quick exchange of knowing glances between Chu and Chen; nevertheless he felt rather

uneasy. As an officer on the active list, he was naturally embarrassed, at such a conversation, especially with the indiscreet Huang Fen at his side. After a moment's hesitation he said to Sun Chi-jen:

"I see, one of your boats was used to move more than a thousand wounded, eh? Yes, well, there have been quite a lot of casualties just lately. But it only means our troops are doing a real job at the front. And sacrifices are inevitable when there's any serious fighting. But don't forget the enemy is being hit even harder. Huang Fen, don't you remember when we were fighting along the Peking-Hankow Railway in '27? The casualties among our 4th and 11th Armies were well over twenty thousand and you saw nothing but wounded men in Hankow and Wuchang. But we won in the end, didn't we?"

By this time he was slightly flushed, and he glanced round at his listeners to see what effect his words had produced. He was now eager to change the subject but Huang Fen jumped in with a sarcastic smile and asked pointedly:

"Did you mention the battle of '27 along the Peking-Hankow Railway? That was altogether different from what's happening now. The casualties were heavy then because our men fought and died with a will. But, today, I'm sure it's quite a different story, eh?"

The colonel's face suddenly blanched, as if a shell had fallen beside him. He stood up, looked all round, sat down again, and managed to cover his nervousness with a smile:

"My dear fellow, don't talk such nonsense!"

"Nonsense, is it? It's the truth, and you know it is. Otherwise, why are you still back here, and not at the front?"

"I'm leaving for the front the day after tomorrow," Col. Lei answered loudly with a triumphant smile. This heroic declaration of his greatly moved his listeners, and was even heard by people in the front half of the room. There was a sudden silence, and several people came round from the other side. They hadn't quite heard what it was all about; they only saw Chou Chung-wei, the "Red-tipped Match," his face wreathed in smiles and his hand on the colonel's shoulder, saying to Sun Chi-jen:

"Mr. Sun, I suggest that we give Col. Lei a send-off tomorrow evening. Do you agree?"

Before Sun Chi-jen could answer, Wang Ho-fu chimed in: "Col. Lei's an old friend of mine, so let it be on me . . . or, if you insist, we can split it three ways."

Then the group split up. Chou Chung-wei, Sun Chi-jen, Wang Ho-fu and three other men sat at a square table, centred round Col. Lei and exchanging compliments and commonplace politenesses. The other group consisted of Chu Yin-chiu, Chen Chun-yi and several others with Huang Fen in their centre, were clustered under the windows on the right-hand side of the room, most of them standing, still discussing the military situation. The few people who had come across from the front half of the room joined this group. Huang Fen spoke loudly and unreservedly to one of the newcomers, a man by the name of Tang Yun-shan:

"Yun-shan, do you know what? Col. Lei is going to the front! That proves that they're hard pressed there; otherwise they wouldn't have posted him."

"You're telling me! A few days ago the New First Division, a crack division, was practically wiped out in a battle at Yachikang. Trained by German officers, and with the most up-to-date German equipment, they still didn't have a chance against the daredevils of Feng Yu-hsiang's Northwestern Army. . . . But what's the colonel going to do at the front? Just be a staff officer?"

"They'll probably give him a brigade, as so many brigade commanders and regiment commanders have been killed in action—at least half a dozen of them so far."

"They say," broke in Chu Yin-chiu, "that an army commander has been killed and another high-ranking officer wounded. Is that true, do you know?" Tang Yun-shan laughed, glancing at Huang Fen as much as to say: You see how news gets around! Before his chuckle had died away somebody added:

"No, the army commander hasn't been killed. He's seriously wounded. Someone has seen him in the French Hospital on Route Père Robert."

Chen Chun-yi, as if afraid that his listeners might not readily credit his statement, said this in a categorical tone of voice and also appealed to a tall, hefty man, Dr. Ting, to bear him out:

"Dr. Ting, I'm sure you can confirm that what I just said is not just a rumour. I understand Dr. Po of the French Hospital was a fellow-student of yours. You must have heard about it from him?"

All eyes now turned to Dr. Ting. At first he seemed not to understand what it was all about and why Chen Chun-yi was bringing him into it. Then he smiled as if he had just understood and said with deliberation:

"You're right, lots of officers have been wounded. In my profession I have to know the difference between different kinds of wounds—bullet wounds, bayonet wounds, shrapnel wounds, and so forth. But when it comes to commanders of armies or brigades or regiments I don't know one from the other. In the eyes of the surgeon, there's no difference between the wounds of army commanders and the wounds of common soldiers: I just deal with them as they come, and I've no idea who is an army commander or even if there are any."

His attentive audience laughed and then fell silent, as if not satisfied with this answer and Chen Chun-yi shook his head in disappointment. Then a babel of argument broke out again. Suddenly, someone dashed over from the other side—a young man wearing a flannel suit and with his hair sleeked back. He hurriedly squeezed into the doctor's group, where his keen eyes singled out a middle-aged man in a pale-blue silk gown and with a toothbrush moustache. He clapped him on the shoulder and cried excitedly:

"Hey! Chuang-fei, government bonds are dropping again! What are you going to do with your hundred thousand Army Disbandments? There are rumours flying about and everybody's expecting prices to drop even further."

This was even more alarming than the news from the front. Li Chuang-fei, the man with the toothbrush moustache, turned deathly pale. Chou Chung-wei, Col. Lei and the rest of their group hurried over to find out just what was happening. This was an age of speculation. How could anybody with any sum of money resist dabbling in government bonds? People reacted differently to the news of slump. The bears were jubilant and grinned from ear to ear, while the bulls tried hard to swallow their disappointment.

"Government bonds down again! Limit reached and trading closed!" somebody shouted through the door to the people on the veranda, and immediately there was a rush into the dining-room of those who had been expatiating on "gold" and "cotton yarn." With staring eyes and craning their necks, they peered and jostled back and forth, all shouting at once and demanding:

"Is it Tariff going down?"

"Army Reorganization, did you say?"

"Army Disbandment?"

The five or six people who had remained in the front section of the dining-room were also attracted by this sudden turmoil over government bonds, but kept their distance and just looked on. Among them were Fan Po-wen and Wu Chih-sheng, a sociology student and a distant relative of Wu Sun fu. Fan Po-wen narrowed one eye and muttered:

"Oh, speculation fever, speculation fever! And you, deluge of gold, may you overflow, overflow and smash through your dikes! . . ."

He gave Wu Chih-sheng a hearty slap on the back and boomed: "Chih-sheng, do you know that smart young fellow in the white flannel that dashed in a moment ago? He's a queer fish. Han Meng-hsiang is his name; stockbroker by profession, but writes poetry as well—quite good poetry, too. Funny combination, that—poetry and lucre! But that's enough about him: let's go and look for Tu Hsueh-shih and Pei-shan. We may find them in the small drawing-room, and the air there may be cleaner and not reek of money-grubbing as it does here."

Without waiting for his agreement, Fan Po-wen dragged Wu Chih-sheng away with him. By now the dining-room had thinned out, and only a handful of businessmen who were not greatly concerned about the vicissitudes of government bonds and a few people who were more concerned with politics, such as Col. Lei, Huang Fen and Tang Yun-shan, still lingered there, helping themselves to more lemonade and chattering away. But their conversation had now turned from war and politics to amusements—roulette, bordellos, greyhound racing, romantic Turkish baths, dancing girls, film stars. Col. Lei felt more at home on these subjects and threw his reserve to the winds.

war = politics = debate

As midday approached the mourners decreased in numbers and the two bands took turns to play, occasionally stopping altogether. When they did so, the unusual quiet made the people in the dining-room feel as if their ears had been suddenly unstopped and their talk about Turkish baths, dancing girls and film stars sounded unusually loud.

Suddenly, they all fell silent as if ashamed to hear their own smutty talk in the sudden quiet.

Tang Yun-shan involuntarily raised his hand to scratch his bald head, glanced round, and burst out laughing; then all the others quickly took their cue from him and laughed in unison to cover the embarrassing situation.

When the laughter had subsided, Col. Lei turned to Chou Chung-wei and said seriously:

"Everybody is saying that while gold is dear and silver is cheap Chinese industrialists have an excellent opportunity to develop their enterprises and sell their products. How far is that true?"

Chou Chung-wei closed his eyes and shook his head, then opened them again and replied with some bitterness:

"I for one am the victim of dear gold and cheap silver. The raw materials needed for making matches, such as chemicals, timber and boxes, are all imported. The price of gold rises and with it the prices of raw materials: does that do me any good? Shall I use Chinese materials, then? If I do, I am confronted with a whole string of taxes—raw material tax, transit duty, *likin* levy—which make our own raw materials dearer than imported ones. On top of that, Japanese and Swedish matches offer serious competition to Chinese matches, and our people don't know what patriotism is and won't buy Chinese-made goods...."

Chou Chung-wei broke off in the middle of his patriotic speech when his eyes chanced upon a box of "Phoenix" brand matches, made in Sweden, lying beside a silver-plated ashtray. He coughed with embarrassment, pulled out a handkerchief, and wiped his plump face vigorously. Tang Yun-shan sniggered, purposely reached out for the Swedish matches, and lit a Garrick. Blowing out a cloud of smoke, he slapped Chou Chung-wei heavily on the shoulder and said:

"I beg your pardon, Mr. Chou, but to tell the truth, your own products could bear improvement. Leaving out your safety matches for the moment, people say that your red-tipped matches don't strike easily. They won't stand comparison with your esteemed name."

Chou Chung-wei's face reddened like one of his own red-tipped matches, but Sun Chi-jen came to his rescue:

"Mr. Chou's hardly to blame for that. His workers are pretty tough and not easy to manage. Since trade unions have come into being, a lot of factories have been suffering from idleness and have been turning out poor-quality products. Isn't that so, Mr. Chu?"

"That's it, but that isn't all. Take our silk industry, which is in a pitiful state. It's being attacked from four sides: workers demand higher wages; we're up against competition from Japanese silk in foreign markets; taxes at home are crushing; and the bankers are stingy with their loans. I ask you, what hope is there for us, what with high production-costs, dwindling markets, and a shortage of capital? It breaks my heart just to think about it all."

This sad tale came from Chu Yin-chiu. As he told it, the vision of his four enemies hovered before his eyes, with the bankers in the lead trying to strangle him. The Dragon-boat Festival* would be upon him soon and all the banks and money-lenders that had had dealings with him had warned him that they would make no more advances and that he would have to settle up promptly what was outstanding. But how could he settle up with them? The price of silk was dropping, and his exports were falling off. He drew a deep sigh and went on resentfully:

"Since last year there's been plenty of cash about in Shanghai. Nobody can say money's tight. But our bankers only invest in government bonds and land, ten or twenty million dollars at a time—simply throwing money about. When we industrialists get a bit short and try to get a loan of a paltry hundred thousand or eighty thousand dollars on some securities, they fight shy of us as

* The Dragon-boat Festival (*Tuan Yang Chieh*) falls on the fifth day of the fifth lunar month. Chinese merchants used to settle accounts on this day and also on the Mid-Autumn Festival.

if we were murderers after their blood. . . . And their terms are so extortionate that—well, they make me see red!”

They all thought Chu Yin-chiu was being rather too outspoken and nobody seemed willing to make any comment. Though Huang Fen seemed sympathetic, he could not help saying:

“I don’t see why you have to depend entirely on foreign markets to sell your products. If you do, where do our own silk goods manufacturers get their silk?”

“Yes, I don’t see that, either. Mr. Chen, you’re the man to explain that to us,” Col. Lei interposed, appealing to Chen Chun-yi, the owner of the Wu Yun Silk Goods Factory.

But the manufacturer merely smiled, and Chu Yin-chiu, the silk producer, supplied the answer:

“The silk goods manufacturers used to buy only our second-grade silk, and now they buy very little even of that; they prefer to buy Japanese silk and rayon. For our top-grade silk, we have always had to rely on the French and American markets, but for the last couple of years the Japanese Government has gone all out to encourage the Japanese silk producers to export their silk and cocoons by making such exports duty-free. As a result, Japanese silk has crowded out Chinese silk in Lyons and New York.”

Col. Lei and Huang Fen sprang up with exclamations of amazement and looked one by one at the circle of faces around them, hoping to discover in them some sign of agreement, but, to their even greater astonishment, there was not the slightest expression of surprise on any of these faces, as if it were quite natural for Chinese silk goods manufacturers not to use Chinese silk. Chen Chun-yi said with deliberation:

“We’ve no other way out than to use some Japanese silk or even rayon. Take Mr. Chu’s silk, for example. Production-costs are high, which means a high price. If we buy his silk, we pay the high price and 65 dollars and 60 cents purchase-tax per picul into the bargain. As for silk produced in the provinces, the prices have recently gone up as those of local silk have, and we have to pay 111 dollars and 69 cents purchase-tax per picul as well. And all that is just paying for the raw material. When it’s been made into silk goods, we have to pay a whole string of taxes in addition—production duty, transit

duty, market duty, and what have you. Every move the goods make, there’s another tax to pay. Of course, all these taxes are paid eventually by the consumers. But it means our sales are reduced. Now, if we are to keep up our sales, we must find a way of reducing costs, and the only way we can do that is to use cheaper raw materials. . . . The consumers complain of high prices, but it doesn’t mean that the producers are making anything out of it.”

For a while no one spoke. The sound of the trumpets and flutes of the band outside drifted in on the wind, so melancholy that it might have been a dirge for the Chinese silk industry. Wang Ho-fu, who had been silent all the while, suddenly stood up, clapped his hands together, and said jokingly:

“Let’s leave it at that, then! Mr. Chen goes on using his Japanese silk and rayon, while Mr. Sun and I, as long as the war lasts, hang on in Shanghai and have a good time going around the dog-tracks and brothels! To hell with industry! Let’s enjoy ourselves while we can.”

As he was saying this a sudden breath of perfume heralded a young woman in a sleeveless, black silk summer dress in the latest Paris style, which set off her smooth, white skin and her fresh red lips. She did not speak at once, but just stood smiling in the doorway and sweeping her eyes over the gathering.

The first to realize that she was there was the short, fat man, Chou Chung-wei. He sprang up with a cry of delight, waved his arms excitedly, and cried:

“Everybody stand up and welcome Miss Hsu Man-li, the Flower of Society!”

All the men turned round. Before they could assume the special smile which they reserved for greeting attractive women, Miss Hsu was already giggling uncontrollably, her hips swaying and her mouth hidden behind a handkerchief. Col. Lei rose and stepped forward, holding out his hand, and said:

“Miss Hsu, you’re late. We’ll have to punish you!”

“And how are you going to do that?” asked Hsu Man-li with mock seriousness, swaying her hips once more and tilting her head on one side. She went up to Col. Lei, squeezed his hand, held it a few seconds, then dropped it and turned to greet the others.

The conversation revived magically. Chu Yin-chiu and Chen Chun-yi, who had a moment ago been grumbling, were now beaming. While Hsu Man-li was busy chatting with the others, Chu Yin-chiu leant across and whispered something to Tang Yun-shan, who burst out laughing and looked at her intently. Chu Yin-chiu turned to Chen Chun-yi, deliberately raising his voice: "I remember now, Mr. Chen. The woman who booked in at the Cathay Hotel with Chao Po-tao yesterday was . . ."

Hsu Man-li turned her head sharply, riveted her eyes for a fleeting moment on Chu Yin-chiu and immediately looked away again. Without interrupting the smooth flow of her small-talk, she strained her ears to catch every word Chu Yin-chiu might be saying for her benefit.

But it was Chen Chun-yi's voice that she heard next:

"Chao Po-tao? The one who goes in for government bonds? He's a big bull—grabs anything that's going in the way of government stock."

"And anything going in the way of women, too. Only yesterday I met him with a certain widow."

Chu Yin-chiu pretended to lower his voice, but he knew very well that Hsu Man-li could still hear it. He noticed that she seemed to be trembling all over and that even her laugh was rather forced and shaky.

By now Col. Lei was completely engrossed in the "Flower of Society" and their conversation became more and more lively and intimate, until he said something which set her blushing; she tilted her head coquettishly and giggled. Wang Ho-fu, who was sitting nearby, stuck up his thumb in admiration and was going to applaud, when Tang Yun-shan brushed past, grasped Col. Lei by the shoulder and cried:

"I say, old chap! What are you trying to do—kill a bull?"

"Why? I never go in for government bonds," replied the colonel blankly.

"Well, then, when somebody else has already cornered something, why do you try so hard to get her away from him?"

As he said this, Tang Yun-shan burst out laughing himself. Chu Yin-chiu and Chen Chun-yi applauded gleefully and roared with laughter. Hsu Man-li blushed furiously though she pretended not to notice the taunt, and tried to pass it off by calling

for lemonade. But everybody guessed what it was all about and the big dining-room rang with peals of laughter.

The ragging might have gone on if Tu Chu-chai had not suddenly appeared.

As if suddenly realizing that they had come to mourn the death of Old Mr. Wu, who was at this moment lying in the next room, and that Tu Chu-chai was the dead man's son-in-law, they all instantly checked their levity and tried to look serious, and some of them yawned.

As usual Tu Chu-chai was all smiles and greeted everybody courteously, at the same time mumbling as if to himself:

"Where's Wu Sun-fu gone? He isn't here either!"

"He hasn't been here," said one of them. Tu Chu-chai frowned in perplexity, excused himself politely, and hurried out again. Then Hsu Man-li slipped out, closely followed by Col. Lei. By now everyone was tired of sitting about, and some of them went out on to the veranda to look for friends. Only Huang Fen, Tang Yun-shan, Sun Chi-jeu remained, still huddled on a sofa, talking quietly and seriously about the "Enlarged Conference of the North"* and the strategy of General Yen Hsi-shan and General Feng Yu-hsiang.

*

Failing to find Wu Sun-fu anywhere, Tu Chu-chai went out into the garden, cut across the asphalt drive and clambered up a big artificial hill. In a hexagonal pavilion at the top of the hill two gentlemen were waiting for him rather impatiently. One of them was in his forties, of medium height, with a pointed face and black, piercing eyes. He was Chao Po-tao, the wizard of the stock market, the man Chu Yin-chiu and the rest of them had

* In May 1930 Yen Hsi-shan and Feng Yu-hsiang, then warlords in the North, joined with Li Tsung-jen, a warlord in Kwangsi Province, and certain other warlords in the South in the formation of a military alliance aimed against Chiang Kai-shek and launched a full-scale war against him in Honan Province and other places. In July of the same year the Kuomintang politician Wang Ching-wei, in conjunction with Yen Hsi-shan, Feng Yu-hsiang, and the various other warlords who were opposing Chiang Kai-shek, held their Enlarged Conference in Peking, at which they decided to set up a government in opposition to the Chiang Kai-shek régime in Nanking. This military alliance was smashed by Chiang Kai-shek's forces soon after it was formed.

just been talking about. Seeing Tu Chu-chai panting up the steps, he said to his companion:

"Mr. Shang, look, Tu Chu-chai's on his own. It looks as if Wu Sun-fu won't bite."

"Mr. Shang" slowly fingered his three-inch bushy beard, but made no reply. Sixty if a day, he had a square face, large ears and small eyes, and bore himself with dignity. If the Hung Hsien dynasty of Yuan Shih-kai had not collapsed, he, Shang Chung-li, might have qualified for the honour of "Literary Attendant" in the imperial court. As it was, he had abandoned an official career and gone into business and become chairman of the board of directors of a trust company, which he regarded as quite a come-down.

Tu Chu-chai sat down and mopped his brow with a handkerchief, then looked up and said to Chao Po-tao and Shang Chung-li:

"I couldn't find Sun-fu anywhere about the house. He wasn't in the ceremony hall nor in his room, nor in the dining-hall. His wife and sisters couldn't tell me where he'd gone. And I couldn't very well go around asking everybody I met, as you'd told me to be careful not to attract too much attention. . . . Well, you might as well tell me all about your plan so that I can talk it over with Sun-fu later on."

"Well, as I told you just now, the idea is that the four of us club together on the quiet to buy long in the government bonds,* but first we must raise four million dollars in ready cash

*In those days government bonds were the chief object of speculation on the Shanghai Stock and Bond Exchange. Independent of their face value, their market quotation constantly fluctuated as a result of the ceaseless civil strife. Quotations were also greatly influenced by the manipulation of speculators. Those who expected a change in the political situation in favour of the government would "bull" the market, i.e. buy long, in the belief that prices of the bonds would rise, while those who thought prices would weaken would "bear" the market, i.e. sell short. In addition there were the small speculators who gambled on skillfully-spread rumours or "inside information"—all the tricks and ruses of the big "bulls" and "bears" to influence the market in their favour. So the prices of the bonds went up or down at each session of the Exchange, depending on the buying or selling pressure. Thus, even though political conditions might actually remain unchanged, the cut-throat fight between the "bulls" and the "bears" went on in the Exchange. In these speculative transactions no delivery of the bonds themselves or the total amount of cash involved was looked for. All the money

within two days. Mr. Shang and I haven't the necessary capital, but if you and Sun-fu are willing to come in on it, we'll go right ahead with it. If you're not, we'll say no more about it," said Chao Po-tao, talking quickly in Pekinese with a Cantonese accent, while his deep-set eyes flashed a keen glance at Tu Chu-chai to observe his reaction.

"I don't see why you should want to buy long, though. For the past few days, government bonds have been dropping as a result of the war, and although they may come up again some time in the future, you surely don't think the war's going to be over straight away? Anyway, it's an open secret that the government troops are very hard pressed just now. Small holders are selling out in a rush. Even if you buy in heavily, you won't be able to hold up the prices. Besides, the settlement's only ten days away. Does it mean that you want to do the buying beyond that date? If so, four million won't be enough . . .!"

"That's the way everybody looks at it, but there's more to this than meets the eye: we have a secret!" interrupted Chao Po-tao, cutting Tu Chu-chai short and smiling mysteriously. Tu Chu-chai tilted his head back and closed his eyes as if he were thinking hard. He knew that Chao Po-tao was infinitely resourceful, knew how to bluff his way, and had contacts in the army and in political circles, so perhaps he had got hold of secret information about the military situation. But on second thoughts that didn't seem likely. Tu Chu-chai opened his eyes again only to meet Chao Po-tao's, sharp and cunning. It suddenly occurred to Tu Chu-chai that Chao Po-tao, a bull, confronted with the coming settlement at the Dragon-boat Festival, was probably in a panic about his financial affairs and that his "secret bull company" idea was merely a scheme to save himself. . . . But why was Shang Chung-li going in with Chao Po-tao? The old rogue was not buying long! With these thoughts racing through

the "bear" or the "bull" needed to have was the amount he thought would be sufficient to cover his net loss by the settlement date. This made it possible for speculators to gamble in bonds involving many times the money they possessed. Such general practice, however, did not exclude the employment by the more powerful speculators like Chao Po-tao, as described in the latter part of the book, of all sorts of political tricks to bring their opponents to ruin.

his mind, Tu Chu-chai looked into Shang Chung-li's face for his answer.

But the old man looked perfectly at ease and raised three fingers to stroke his beard.

"What's the secret?" Tu Chu-chai asked offhandedly, at the same time weighing all the possibilities in his mind. He had almost made up his mind to put them off and make good his escape before he was persuaded to have a hand in their "plot." But Chao Po-tao's answer came as a shock:

"Mr. Shang guarantees that the Northwestern Army will call a halt to their advance. Before the settlement for this month is due government bonds will certainly rise again."

Although Chao Po-tao said this in a very low voice, the news struck Tu Chu-chai like a bolt from the blue, blotting out the din in the garden and the efforts of the two bands. He looked at Shang Chung-li in amazement and asked doubtfully:

"Are you so sure about it, then, Mr. Shang?"

"It isn't a matter of *being* sure; it's a matter of *making* sure," replied Shang Chung-li quietly, stroking his beard and smiling at Chao Po-tao. Tu Chu-chai was still in the dark: the words "making sure" puzzled him. In the ordinary way he had enough confidence in Shang Chung-li when he acted as a guarantor for some business transaction or other, but this case was out of the ordinary and so much would be at stake that he felt he had to make sure of everything. Hesitation and uncertainty were written all over his goat-like face.

Chao Po-tao slapped his thigh and laughed, then leant across and said quietly and seriously to Tu Chu-chai:

"As I was saying, we have a secret. Everybody knows that an army can be bribed to win, but nobody seems to have thought of bribing it to *lose* a battle. What's one defeat more or less if you're getting paid for it?"

Tu Chu-chai could scarcely believe his own ears. He racked his brains, stood up, stretched out his right hand to give Shang Chung-li the "thumbs up" sign, and burst into compliments:

"Mr. Shang, my congratulations on your rare wisdom and acumen! This is really wonderful!"

"So you've made up your mind to go along with us, then. How about Wu Sun-fu? Will you speak to him as soon as pos-

sible?" Chao Po-tao immediately urged, wanting to clinch the matter there and then.

But Shang Chung-li saw that Tu Chu-chai was still wavering slightly. He knew that the latter, although he always had an eye for the main chance, was extremely wary, unlike Wu Sun-fu who was fearless and energetic, so he qualified his remarks:

"Although the person who deputizes for us in negotiations with the authorities on the other side has reached agreement on the terms, we wouldn't say that it's irrevocably fixed. Any deal with military men, you know, is necessarily touch-and-go, as they may change their minds at the last minute. My idea is, you'd better talk it over with Wu Sun-fu and get in touch with us later in the day."

"So you've agreed on terms?"

"Yes: three hundred thousand dollars," Chao Po-tao answered with an air of impatience.

Tu Chu-chai stuck out his tongue, withdrew it, and grinned. "No more, no less. We can't afford more, and they won't do it for less. Thirty thousand dollars a mile. If they retreat ten miles, they'll get three hundred thousand dollars," said Shang Chung-li deliberately, fixing his cunning little eyes on Tu Chu-chai's goat-like face.

For a moment no one spoke; then Tu Chu-chai, the light of determination in his eyes, looked first at Shang Chung-li and then at Chao Po-tao. Simultaneously, the three of them burst out laughing, then put their heads together in an animated conversation.

Meanwhile, on the other side of a pond in front of the pavilion, three young men and two girls were sitting on a lawn in the shade of some willows, debating hotly among themselves. The girls were not taking a very active part in the debate, but their giggles were enough to disturb the geese who were enjoying a siesta on the waters of the pond.

"Let's leave it at that," said a lively cat-faced youngster. "Be quiet, everybody, and I'll run and fetch them." He was Tu Chu-chai's brother Hsueh-shih, an engineering college student.

"Do you agree, Miss Lin?" Wu Chih-sheng asked Lin Pei-shan, who pretended not to hear, but continued to hold Chang Su-su's hands and seesaw backwards and forwards.

Fan Po-wen, standing next to Lin Pei-shan, smiled non-committally.

"No objections? Passed unanimously!" cried Tu Hsueh-shih as he ran off towards the house. Wu Chih-sheng walked up and down with bent head for a while, stopped before Fan Po-wen and challenged him excitedly:

"There's another point. Will you take a bet on it?"

"Let's hear it. It may not be worth betting on."

"My point is: can Hwei-fang and Ah-hsuan change their temperaments?"

"I won't take a bet on that."

"I will, Chih-sheng, but tell me first what *you* think. Will they change or *won't* they?" interrupted Chang Su-su, letting go of Lin Pei-shan's hand and coming over to Wu Chih-sheng.

"What's the bet—a kiss?"

"If I win, I certainly don't want to kiss *your* ugly mug!"

Fan Po-wen and the others roared with laughter, except for Chang Su-su herself, who just stood there hopping on one foot. She was thinking about Hwei-fang's reserve and her staid expression. It was enough to exasperate you and make you feel sorry for her just to look at her. As for Ah-hsuan, although he was fairly good-looking, he was rather scatter-brained—sometimes he seemed bright enough, but at other times he was terribly muddle-headed. Hwei-fang and Ah-hsuan were two monuments to the educative influence of the late Old Mr. Wu and his *Book of Rewards and Punishments*. It made her feel uncomfortable to think about them and she forgot all about the bet. Just then Tu Hsueh-shih ran back with two men in tow: Prof. Li Yu-ting and Mr. Chiu Chun, Wu Sun-fu's legal adviser.

From the hexagonal pavilion on the artificial hill opposite, the laughter of Chao Po-tao, Shang Chung-li and Tu Chu-chai carried down to the lawn. Li Yu-ting looked up at them, then tugged at Chiu Chun's arm and whispered:

"Look! The Big Three of the financial world. What do you think they are up to now?"

Chiu Chun smiled and was going to answer, when Wu Chih-sheng's voice broke in:

"Mr. Chiu Chun and Prof. Li, we want your opinion. . . . Speak frankly, as I've got a bet on with Fan Po-wen: Can a

man protect his national interests and his class interests at the same time? Is there a conflict between the two?"

"Mr. Chiu and Prof. Li, don't be afraid to state your views squarely. This is very important, as Wu Chih-sheng and Fan Po-wen have a bet on it," Tu Hsueh-shih put in emphatically, glancing at Lin Pei-shan, who tried to look indifferent. Squatting down, she began picking up fallen rose petals and arranging them in the character *wen*.

Chiu Chun shook his head modestly, so Li Yu-ting spoke up first:

"That all depends on the social status of the man concerned." "Yes, we've had examples of that. Suppose, in view of the depression in the silk industry, Wu Sun-fu said to his workers: 'Our production-costs are so high that we can't compete with Japanese silk producers and our silk industry'll be ruined. To cut the cost of production we must cut your wages. For the sake of our national interests, you'll have to bear up and be content with lower wages.' The workers would reply: 'The cost of living's so high that we don't get enough to eat as it is. If you cut our wages any more, we're done for. You mill-owners have plenty of money and never know what starvation is. If you want to look after our national interests, you'll have to put up with a cut in your profits.' So you see that there is something to be said for both sides, but on both sides there is a clash between national and class interests."

"Of course, starvation is no joke . . ." began Li Yu-ting, then hesitated and raised a hand to scratch his head. Chang Su-su looked hard at him, but he was not conscious of it. There was silence as everybody waited for him to finish the sentence. Across the pond, the pavilion echoed with another gust of laughter. Li Yu-ting looked up with a start and then went on to finish what he was saying:

"On the other hand, capitalists must make a profit. No profit, no business!"

Wu Chih-sheng laughed exultantly and turned to Fan Po-wen:

"There now! What did I say? This is just what I expected from Prof. Li. My dear poet, you've lost one bet already. Now for the other one. If you'll just state your side of the case. . . . Su-su, see that Pei-shan doesn't run away."

Fan Po-wen smiled icily but remained silent, so Tu Hsueh-shih jumped in and spoke for him:

"The workers put in a demand for higher wages. The boss says: 'If you want higher wages, you'd better go and work somewhere else. I can easily get someone to replace you.' But the workers refuse to go and insist on their demand for higher wages. . . . There's a problem for our legal adviser."

"Both capital and labour are under contract. Neither can force the other to do anything against their will."

Wu Chih-sheng and the others laughed and even Fan Po-wen joined in. Lin Pei-shan, who had been squatting on the ground and pretending not to take any notice, sprang up and was about to make her escape, when Wu Chih-sheng and Chang Su-su blocked her way, crying:

"Now, now. Don't run away! The poet's absolutely defeated and you must settle his account for him, otherwise we'll take our case to the lawyer here. Tu Hsueh-shih, you're our guarantor and you must fulfil your obligations."

Lin Pei-shan giggled but refused to speak. At the first opportunity, she slipped under Chang Su-su's arm and raced away along a parti-coloured cobbled path, skirting the pond and turning right. With a surprised "oh!" Chang Su-su followed in pursuit. Fan Po-wen, holding Wu Chih-sheng by the shoulder, said:

"Don't get excited. Just wait. Tu Hsueh-shih's going to pass judgement."

"What? A guarantor be a judge? Simply isn't done. Besides, we didn't agree on this beforehand."

"It was agreed: 'If the lawyer's or the professor's views prove inconclusive, Tu Hsueh-shih shall arbitrate.' Now I consider both their views ambiguous. It isn't fair just to say that I'm the loser."

"Both views are irresponsible and superficial, since they didn't give any reasoning," broke in Tu Hsueh-shih, his cat-like face suddenly very stern.

Not only was Wu Chih-sheng surprised at this, but the lawyer and the professor were also puzzled. Everybody clustered round Tu Hsueh-shih, waiting for him to go on.

"All this talk about national interests, class interests and capital-and-labour contracts is a lot of nonsense — mere words. I recognize only the state. And the helm of the state must be in the firm grip of men of iron. What's important is to get things done, not to theorize about them. No one should be permitted to oppose these men of iron who rule the state. For instance, if Chinese silk can't compete with Japanese silk, then it's the duty of the rulers to cut the workers' wages on the one hand and on the other to compel the Chinese capitalists to sell at the lowest possible prices, so that Chinese silk can hold its own against Japanese silk in the European and American markets. If the capitalists refuse to obey, then the state should confiscate their factories."

Tu Hsueh-shih concluded his speech abruptly, glaring around and swaggering as if he were one of these "men of iron."

His listeners smiled, but no one spoke. They heard Chang Su-su and Lin Pei-shan giggling as they approached from the clump of trees at the other end of the pond. Fan Po-wen looked round at the sound of the voices, then clapped Tu Hsueh-shih on the shoulder and jeered:

"Jolly good! But, unfortunately, you're neither a capitalist nor a worker, still less a 'man of iron hand.' And what's more, your little speech was just as 'superficial and without any reasoning' as anything else. Please remember, my bet with Wu Chih-sheng wasn't about what should be done, but who could guess what the lawyer and the professor were going to say. . . . But let's say no more about this betting business—let's call it a day."

With this Fan Po-wen ran off to meet the girls.

"Oh, no, my dear poet, you don't get away with it as easily as that," shouted Wu Chih-sheng, running after Fan Po-wen, while the lawyer and the professor stood there and laughed.

Just as Fan Po-wen and Wu Chih-sheng got up to Chang Su-su and Lin Pei-shan, they saw three men coming towards them: Chao Po-tao, Shang Chung-li and Tu Chu-chai. They were talking in an undertone as they walked along, but, at the sight of the youngsters, they fell silent and turned aside without a word along the cobbled path towards the willow grove, at the same time making a detour on their way back to the house to avoid being seen by Chiu Chun and Li Yu-ting. But Li Yu-ting's sharp

eyes had spotted them and, tugging at the corner of Chiu Chun's jacket, he said quietly:

"Look, the Big Three of the financial world! See them? Something big in the air, by the look on their faces."

"Perhaps they're worried about the 'man of iron' who's just been born in our midst!" replied Chiu Chun with a smile, and Li Yu-ting laughed. Absorbed in his own thoughts, Tu Hsueh-shih did not hear the quip meant for him.

On the stone steps in front of the ceremonial hall Tu Chu-chai ran into a new arrival, a distant relative of the Wu family, Lu Kuang-shih by name, a stockbroker and assistant manager of the Great Asia Trust Company. The moment he saw Tu Chu-chai he buttonholed him and whispered in his ear:

"I've got a tip for you. The Central Army's fighting better now, and government bonds will soon be up again. Strictly confidential! But most people are still expecting a fall, and small holders are anxious to sell out while they can. Why not make the most of this opportunity and buy up several hundred thousand? I know you've only been going in for gold bars, but now you must try government bonds as well just this once. Go on, do yourself a bit of good while you've got the chance."

Lu Kuang-shih may have given this tip with the best of intentions, but it only scared Tu Chu-chai, who was contemplating having a hand in the secret bull-company. As he listened, he paled and began to have misgivings: surely the news of Shang Chung-li's plan hadn't leaked out already? Or was the Central Army in fact getting the upper hand now? Were Chao Po-tao and Shang Chung-li playing a shabby trick on him? Or was this man Lu Kuang-shih just rumour-mongering for his own ends? Tu Chu-chai was in a quandary and did not know what to say. He tipped Chao Po-tao a wink—he had in fact only meant to look and see what his reactions were, but somehow the look turned into a wink. Even an old hand like him had made a blunder this time.

Fortunately, he was rescued from his embarrassment by the arrival of the butler Kao Sheng, who hurried over to him and said:

"Mr. Tu, the master would like to see you. He's in the library."

Relieved, Tu Chu-chai answered "Thank you" and turned to Lu Kuang-shih:

"Excuse me a moment. I'll be seeing you later. Please make yourself at home in the dining-room. —Kao Sheng, get Mr. Lu some tea."

Having got rid of Lu Kuang-shih, he and the other two went out into the garden again and found a quiet corner, where they held another whispered conference, their faces lighting up with pleasure.

"Well, I'm off to see Sun-fu. Po-tao, you'll deal with Lu Kuang-shih; you can find him in the dining-room. Mr. Shang, you'll get things straightened out with the man from the North," said Tu Chu-chai finally, and the three men went their different ways.

When he reached the library Tu Chu-chai was surprised to find Wu Sun-fu sitting there with his brows knitted in a deep frown. He had not looked so upset as this even when Old Mr. Wu had died the night before. Directly Tu Chu-chai sat down, and before he could say a word, Wu Sun-fu tossed over a sheet of paper. It was a telegram, and it read: "Unrest among peasants, troops inadequate, situation critical, advise measures, urgent, Fei, 7th." Tu Chu-chai paled. Though he had not so much property at stake in their home town as Wu Sun-fu had, it was inevitable that he should feel upset to hear that the place where he had his ancestral home and graveyard was now in danger. Laying down the telegram, he glanced at Wu Sun-fu and said briefly:

"What do you propose to do, then?"

"I'll do what's humanly possible. It's lucky the old man and Hwei-fang and Ah-hsuan got out two days ago, otherwise I shouldn't know what to do with them. At the moment I've only a pawnshop, a local bank and a rice-mill marooned there, and although they're worth more than a little, they're not a matter of life or death. . . . You ask what I propose to do. Well, I've wired my agent Fei Little Beard to put my ready cash in a safe place and move out what goods he can from the business premises. Of course, it may be that it's only a false alarm and that things will settle down again soon. That garrison is under

strength and something ought to be done about it; we should send a joint telegram to the provincial government to send down the security troops immediately to restore order."

Wu Sun-fu did not look quite like his usual self. He had been rambling on before he came to the point—the wire to the provincial government. He handed Tu Chu-chai the draft which he had made and pressed the bell on the wall behind him.

The door opened softly and two men entered, the butler Kao Sheng and Mo Kan-cheng, the chief clerk in the factory.

Wu Sun-fu frowned even more when he saw that Mo Kan-cheng had come without being sent for and snapped sternly:

"I didn't send for you. I told you that you needn't come here today, but stay and look after the factory. It's more important for you to remain there."

The old clerk was frightened out of his wits by this reproof. He simply answered "Yes, yes" and stood rooted to the ground.

"Has anything gone wrong in the factory?" asked Wu Sun-fu offhandedly, relaxing his features. He was not thinking of the factory, but of his home town and the threat of a riot among the peasants. Mo Kan-cheng's tremulous reply came as a surprise:

"Things in the factory are none too pleasant, sir. . . ."

"What? Out with it! What's the matter?"

"Perhaps it isn't all that important, but . . . but I don't like the way things are shaping. We haven't yet announced the wage-cut, but the women have somehow found out about it. Since this morning they've been . . . well, they've been going slow. So I came to ask you, sir . . . what should we do about it?"

Wu Sun-fu's face suddenly darkened and he sat speechless, the purplish pimples on his face turning livid with rage. All of a sudden he sprang up and bellowed like a madman, cursing the women workers and cursing Mo Kan-cheng and his subordinates:

"So they're going slow now, are they, the bitches? I'll show them a thing or two! And what have you lot in the office been doing about it all this time? Huh! all you're fit for is loafing about and skylarking and flirting with the girls! Perhaps it was one of your fools who let on about the wage-cut."

Mo Kan-cheng just stood there hanging his head and hardly daring to breathe. His helpless manner served only to fan the



"So they're going slow now, are they, the bitches?
I'll show them a thing or two!"

flames of Wu Sun-fu's rage: his right hand on his hip and his left clenched and poised on the edge of the steel desk, he glared round the room with eyes ablaze as if looking for something to fix his teeth into. He suddenly discovered the butler Kao Sheng standing stiffly in the corner, and immediately turned on him furiously:

"What are *you* doing here?"

"I just came in when you rang, sir."

Wu Sun-fu remembered the telegram and realized that Tu Chu-chai was still there, sitting on the other side of the table. By now he had glanced through the draft and was engrossed in his own thoughts, his eyes closed and a cigar jutting from the corner of his mouth.

Wu Sun-fu picked up the telegram and handed it to Kao Sheng, waved him away and said:

"Send this off at once—the quicker the better."

He sat down on the chromium-plated swivel-chair, scribbled a few words on a slip of paper, then crumpled it up and threw it into the waste-paper basket. He hesitated, his pen poised.

Tu Chu-chai opened his eyes, and when he saw Wu Sun-fu's perplexity he said softly:

"Sun-fu, I think the smooth way is better than the rough."

"That's what I was thinking . . ." replied Wu Sun-fu, a little calmer now. Rolling his pen between his fingers, he turned to Mo Kan-cheng:

"Kan-cheng, sit down and tell me all about what happened this morning."

The old clerk, who was quite used to Wu Sun-fu's moods, realized that he could now speak up boldly and that there was no longer any need to keep up the pretence of terrified helplessness, so he sat down at once in an easy-chair beside the desk and began slowly:

"This morning at about nine o'clock, forewoman No. 2, Wang Chin-chen, ran into my office to report that Yao Chin-feng in Row No. 12 had made a mistake and was being insubordinate about it. Then forewoman No. 9 Hsueh Pao-chu asked Yao Chin-feng to come along to my office. Then what should happen but that all the women in Row No. 12 switched off their machines and were backing up Yao Chin-feng by making a disturbance. . . .

I was just going along to see what I could do to stop it, when I heard a lot of shouting and screaming, and up came Hsueh Pao-chu dragging Yao Chin-feng along with her. By this time all the women had switched off their machines. . . ."

Wu Sun-fu frowned, looked sharply at Mo Kan-cheng, and cut him short impatiently:

"Make it brief. Just tell me how things stand now."

"At the moment only a small proportion of the five hundred and twenty filatures are running . . . and the women who are still working are only spoiling the cocoons."

At this Wu Sun-fu growled angrily, sprang up, dropped back into his chair, and asked quickly:

"What's the reason for this go-slow?"

"They're demanding that we sack Hsueh Pao-chu."

"Why's that?"

"They say she hit Yao Chin-feng. . . . And they are demanding a cost-of-living allowance, too. They made the same demand once before when the price of rice went up to twenty dollars per picul and now they're bringing it up again."

Wu Sun-fu snorted and turned to Tu Chu-chai. "Chu-chai, I can tell you it's no fun running a silk factory. When rice goes up, the workers demand a cost-of-living allowance; but when the price of silk drops, we make a loss—but no one makes us a silk allowance! Right: go back, Kan-cheng, and tell them this: if they want a cost-of-living allowance, I will close down my factory."

Mo Kan-cheng said "yes" but his little rat's eyes stared at Wu Sun-fu with great embarrassment.

"What now?"

"Yes, sir . . . er . . . excuse me, but I'm afraid that if you tell them you're going to close down the factory just at this moment, it might cause trouble. . . ."

"What do you mean?"

"This time, the women seem to be more united, as if it's all been arranged beforehand."

"Pooh! What are you—a lot of zombies? You haven't a clue what's going on until something happens, and then you come crying to me. Forewoman No. 2, Wang Chin-chen, and the overseer Pockmarked Li both get my special bonus, don't they? Yet

they don't seem to be doing much in the way of keeping an eye on the women. You'd think I had too much money and nothing to spend it on, the way I keep feeding those dogs for nothing."

By now Mo Kan-cheng had plucked up courage again and spoke up. "They do do their best, both of them. They're continually watching and listening to see what the women are up to, but you'd think they had the word 'informer' written all over them: everywhere they turn they come up against a brick wall and they find it difficult to ferret out any information at all. I'm telling you, sir: you'd think the women were possessed, the way they go on. Yao Chin-feng used to be quite obedient, but now she's one of the ringleaders. All you hear in the workshop now is: 'The last time we demanded a cost-of-living allowance, you soft-soaped us with false promises, but this time we really mean business! Don't you dare tell us you're going to cut our wages. We want a cost-of-living allowance. D'you hear? A cost-of-living allowance!' I hear they're having trouble in other factories, too. You'd think the workers were all possessed by devils."

"Possessed by devils, eh? Ha, ha! I can tell you what sort of devils, too: high cost of living and hunger. But there's another devil, a much more terrible one than that: world depression and slump. . . ."

Wu Sun-fu broke into loud, cynical laughter, pain and despair written all over his purplish face; but he quickly recovered his customary firmness and determination. Gesticulating excitedly, he went on, his lips twisted in a savage smile.

"Very well, you devils—we'll see! Think I'm done for, eh? Oh, no! We'll have a go first!—Now, Kan-cheng, how did the women come to know about the wage-cut? One of your people in the office must have let on about it!"

Mo Kan-cheng was taken aback by this question, and cold shivers ran down his spine. He hesitated, then a sudden idea struck him, and he said furtively:

"I suspect Tu Wei-yueh. That young man has gone daft just lately. All he thinks about all day is Chu Kuei-ying, one of the girls in Row 19. People are always seeing him going in and out of her house. . . ."

The door suddenly opened, and the voice of Fu-fang interrupted Mo Kan-cheng in the middle of what he was saying.

"Sun-fu, the men from the International Undertakers have arrived with the funeral things, but I don't think the coffin is quite good enough," said Fu-fang, pausing in the doorway and looking in at her husband sitting opposite to her brother.

"Hold on; I'll be with you in a minute. Chu-chai, could you just go and have a look at it?"

Tu Chu-chai, waving a hand, spoke to his wife through the cloud of cigar-smoke:

"We shan't be long. It's early yet. If the coffin's no good, we can change it in plenty of time."

"Early? It's a quarter past twelve already and the visitors are having lunch."

So saying, Fu-fang went away again. Wu Sun-fu turned to Mo Kan-cheng and snapped out his orders:

"Now, go straight back to the factory and put up a notice announcing a paid half-holiday this afternoon in memory of the late Old Mr. Wu. See to it that the women go home—we don't want them staying in the factory and making trouble. But you and your men will have some special work to do this afternoon: you will go about among the women, work on them separately and break their unity. You've got until this evening to get the job done. Meanwhile, you can call in policemen from the Bureau of Public Safety to guard the factory, and send a report to the Bureau of Social Affairs about the trouble. As for that fellow Tu Wei-yueh, send him round to me this evening. Got that? All right, then, make yourself scarce."

Having got rid of Mo Kan-cheng, Wu Sun-fu stood up, drew a deep sigh, and muttered to himself:

"Damn this factory business! I should have had a bank instead of a factory right from the start. If I had, I could have had something by now to show for it, with my ability and capital. The Shanghai Commercial and Savings Bank only had a hundred thousand dollars when they started up, and look at them now. . . ."

He paused and stroked his chin, then pulled himself together and smacked his right fist into his left hand.

"No! I must carry on! There are not many of China's national industries left: you can count them, on the fingers of one hand. And the silk industry is especially important to the future of the nation. . . . If only the country were something like a country and the government were something like a government, Chinese industry could really do well in the future. . . . Chu-chai, I've got an idea, but there's no time to tell you about it just now. Let's go and see the coffin they've sent first."

Just a minute. I've got something important to tell you, too." Tu Chu-chai took the cigar-stub out of his mouth and stood up. He moved closer to Wu Sun-fu and told him the whole story of the "plot" devised by Chao Po-tao and Shang Chung-li. When he came to the end, he asked, "Now, Sun-fu, do you think there's a catch in it? If you won't go in, I won't either."

"A million each? Half the sum cash down today?" Wu Sun-fu asked rather non-committally and with a straight face.

"Yes, that's their idea. Chao Po-tao's plan is this: this afternoon, he'll sell out three million short to bring the price down even more. . . ."

"Yes, that would certainly do the trick. There may be a drop of two or three dollars. Then we cover, I suppose?"

"No, not yet. In tomorrow's first session, we'll sell another—five million short, in Chao Po-tao's name."

"Oh! Then the slump will set in. If Chao Po-tao, the famous bull, sells, the small-fry holders will panic and rush to sell out. Then, of course, when people see the market is falling, a lot of new bears will be coming on the scene."

"Exactly. So we'll wait until tomorrow's afternoon session before we begin covering. We'll cover slowly and in small lots, here and there, so as not to attract attention. When we get to within a few days of the settlement, we should have collected at least fifty million. . . ."

"And then the news of the Northwestern Army's retreat will suddenly break and there'll be an uproar!"

"Exactly. Then all the small-fry will rush to buy and turn bulls. With the settlement and the Dragon-boat Festival only a few days off, the bears will also be anxious to cover, faced as they will be with a rapid rise."

"Then we'll unload our fifty million, and they'll look on us as their saviours!"

At this the two of them roared with laughter together, their eyes gleaming with delight and excitement.

Wu Sun-fu stopped and said briskly, "Done! Let's go in and win! But we are making it so easy for the big bull Chao Poptao to take advantage of this deal, and make a packet out of it for himself. We must put forward our own terms, in addition to what we shall gain on the bonds. Let's go and find him and talk it over."

With these words they left the library. The "great scheme" which Wu Sun-fu had been turning over in his mind for some time had now flooded his entire consciousness.