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DRAMA
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be heated by means of flues running through it. It is used for sleeping on at night, and for sitting on by day.

8. This gesture indicates the Eighth Route Army (the forerunner of the People's Liberation Army), and hence, in popular speech, Communists.

9. The expression here rendered as "a loaf" is "a pound of *taping*." *Taping* (literally "big cake") is a large, slightly leavened girdle-cake made of wheat flour; it may be a foot or more in diameter and about an inch thick, and is therefore often cut for sale by weight.

10. This was formerly a notorious place for robberies and fights.

11. One of the eight divisions in which the Manchu army was organized, the color being that of the banner under which they fought.

12. A traditional peasant dance which had almost died out but was revived in the liberated areas and has since become an expression of the new freedom throughout China.

13. The expression here translated (literally) as "The Women's Army" could equally well be translated as "The Lady's Army." It is double joke: (a) at the expense of the women in general, who are doing all the talking, and (b) at the expense of Niang-tse in particular, who is so full of ideas. It is also a historical allusion, to the Princess of Pingyang, who led an army known as "The Lady's Army" and, by defeating the last of her father's opponents, enabled him to become the first emperor of the Tang Dynasty (A.D. 618-907).

THE WHITE-HAIRED GIRL*

(An Opera)

By Ting Yi and Ho Ching-chih

Translated by Yang Hsien-yi and Gladys Yang

CHARACTERS

YANG, tenant of LANDLORD HUANG, aged over fifty.

HSI-ERH, YANG's daughter, aged seventeen.

AUNTY WANG, YANG's neighbor, a peasant woman of over fifty.

TA-CHUN, AUNTY WANG's son, about twenty.

UNCLE CHAO, YANG's old friend, a tenant peasant of about fifty.

LI, a peasant, over forty.

TA-SO, a young peasant.

HUANG, a landlord in his thirties.

MRS. HUANG, LANDLORD HUANG's mother, over fifty.

MU, the HUANG family steward, in his thirties.

AUNTY CHANG, a servant in the HUANG family, in her forties.

TA-SHENG, a servant in the HUANG family, in his twenties.

TWO THUGS EMPLOYED BY THE HUANG FAMILY.

THE DISTRICT HEAD.

HU-TZU, a young peasant.

FOUR PEASANTS.

FOUR PEASANT WOMEN.

CROWD.

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ACT I

Time: Winter, 1935¹

Place: Yangko Village in Hopei. There is a plain in front of the village, and hills behind.

SCENE 1

[It is New Year's Eve in the Yang home, and heavy snow is falling. HSI-ERH, daughter of the tenant peasant YANG, comes on through the snowstorm carrying maize flour.]

HSI-ERH [sings]:

The north wind blows, the snowflakes whirl,
A flurry of snow brings in New Year.
Dad's been hiding a week because of his debt,
Though it's New Year's Eve, he's still not back.
Aunty's given me maize flour, and I'm waiting
For Dad to come home and spend New Year.

[Pushing open the door, she goes in. It is a humble room, containing a stove with a kitchen-god beside it and firewood and pots stacked in one corner. On the stove stands an oil lamp.]

HSI-ERH: Now it's New Year's Eve, everybody's steaming maize cakes and dumplings, burning incense and pasting up door-gods for New Year. Dad has been away for a week, and still isn't back. We've nothing in the house for New Year. [Pauses.] There are only Dad and I at home; my mother died when I was three. My father cultivates one acre of land belonging to rich Landlord Huang. Dad works in the fields with me at his heels, in the wind and in the rain. . . . Every year we're behind with our rent, so just before New Year he always leaves home to escape being dunned. [Anxiously.] Now it's New Year's Eve, and getting quite dark—why isn't he back yet? Oh, I went to Aunty's house just now, and she gave me some maize flour which I'm going to mix with bean cake to make cakes for Dad to eat when he comes back. [She fetches water, mixes the dough, and starts making cakes.]

[The wind blows open the door. HSI-ERH runs over, but finds no one there.]

HSI-ERH: Oh, it's the wind that blew open the door. [Sings.]

Wind whirls the snow against our door,
Wind batters the door till it flies wide open.

I'm waiting for Dad to come back home,
And step inside the room again!

When Dad left, he took beancurd to sell. If he's sold the beancurd and brings back two pounds of flour, we could even eat dumplings. [Sings.]

I feel so restless waiting for Dad,
But when he comes home I'll be happy.
He'll bring some white flour back with him,
And we'll have a really happy New Year!

[She continues making cakes.]

[Enter YANG covered with snow. He has his peddler's pole and kit for carrying beancurd, and over his shoulders the cloth used to cover the beancurd. He staggers along.]

YANG [sings]:

Three miles through a snowstorm I've come home,
After hiding a week from the duns.
As long as I can get by this time,
I don't mind putting up with hunger and cold.

[After looking round apprehensively he knocks at the door.] Hsi-erh! Open the door!

[HSI-ERH, overjoyed, opens the door.]

HSI-ERH: You're back, Dad!

YANG: Yes. [He signs to her not to talk so loudly.]

HSI-ERH [brushing the snow from her father's clothes]: It's snowing very hard outside, Dad! Look how thickly you're covered!

YANG: While I was away, Hsi-erh, did the landlord send anyone to press for payment?

HSI-ERH: On the 25th, Steward Mu came.

YANG [taken aback]: Oh? He came? What did he say?

HSI-ERH: When he found you were away, he left again.

YANG: And then?

HSI-ERH: He hasn't been back since.

YANG [rather incredulous]: Really?

HSI-ERH: Yes, Dad.

YANG [still unconvinced]: Are you sure?

HSI-ERH: Why should I fool you, Dad?

YANG [reassured]: Well, that's good. Listen, Hsi-erh, how strong the wind is!

HSI-ERH: And it's snowing so hard!

YANG: It's growing dark, too.

HSI-ERH: And the road is bad, Dad.
 YANG: I don't think Steward Mu will come now. I owe the landlord one and a half piculs, and my debt with the interest amounts to twenty-five dollars; but this time I've got by.
 HSI-ERH [*happily*]: So we've got by again, Dad!
 YANG: Hsi-erh, fetch some firewood so that I can dry myself. Have you still not finished that maize flour?
 HSI-ERH: I finished that long ago. This is some Auntie Wang gave me just now.
 YANG: So you've been to the mountain for firewood again in such cold.
 HSI-ERH: I went just now with Ta-chun. [*She fetches firewood.*] You must be hungry, Dad.
 YANG [*warming himself by the fire*]: I'm hungry all right. [*Chuckles.*]
 HSI-ERH: The cakes are mixed; I'm going to steam them.
 YANG: Just a minute, Hsi-erh. What do you think this is? [*Producing a wallet from his pocket.*]
 HSI-ERH [*clutching at it in delighted surprise*]: What is it, Dad?
 YANG [*sings*]:
 With the money I made by selling beancurd,
 I bought two pounds of flour at the fair;
 But I didn't want Landlord Huang to see it,
 So it's been in my wallet the last few days.

HSI-ERH [*sings*]:
 With the money he made by selling beancurd,
 Dad bought two pounds of flour at the fair.
 He's brought it home to make dumplings,
 So now we'll have a happy New Year!

Dad, I'll call Auntie Wang over to make dumplings.
 YANG [*stopping her*]: Wait a bit, Hsi-erh! Look what this is.
 HSI-ERH: What, Dad?
 YANG [*takes a thickly wrapped paper packet from his pocket. When all the paper wrappings are removed, a red ribbon is disclosed. While taking off the wrappings, he sings*]:
 Other girls have flowers to wear,
 But your dad can't afford to buy flowers;
 So I bought two feet of red ribbon
 To tie in my Hsi-erh's hair!

[*HSI-ERH kneels before YANG who ties the ribbon in her hair.*]

HSI-ERH [*sings*]:
 Other girls have flowers to wear,
 But Dad can't afford to buy flowers;
 So he's bought two feet of red ribbon
 For me to tie in my hair!

[*HSI-ERH stands up.*]
 YANG [*laughs*]: Turn round and let me have a look at you. [*HSI-ERH turns.*] Good. Presently we'll ask Ta-chun and Auntie Wang to come and have a look, too. [*HSI-ERH tosses her head shyly yet coquettishly.*] Oh, I brought two door-gods, too. Let's paste them up. [*He takes out two pictures.*]
 HSI-ERH: Door-gods! [*They paste them up and sing*]:
 The door-gods ride roan horses!

YANG:
 Pasted on the door they'll guard our home!

HSI-ERH:
 The door-gods carry such big swords!

YANG:
 They'll keep out all devils, great and small!

BOTH:
 They'll keep out all devils, great and small!

YANG: Aha, now neither big devils nor little devils can get in!
 HSI-ERH: I hope that rent collector, Steward Mu, will be kept out, too!
 YANG: Good girl, let's hope we have a peaceful New Year.
 [*They close the door.*]
 [*Enter AUNTY WANG from next door.*]
 WANG: Today Ta-chun bought two pounds of flour at the fair. I'm going to see if Uncle Yang has come back or not, and if he's back, I'll ask them over to eat dumplings. [*Looks up.*] Ah, Uncle Yang must be back; the door-gods are up. [*Knocks.*] Hsi-erh! Open the door!
 HSI-ERH: Who is it?
 WANG: Your aunty.
 HSI-ERH [*opens the door and WANG enters*]: See, Auntie, Dad's back!
 WANG: How long have you been back, Uncle Yang?
 YANG: Just the time it takes to smoke one pipe.
 HSI-ERH: Auntie, Dad's bought two pounds of flour. I was just going to ask you over to make dumplings, and now here you are. Look, look!

WANG: Ta-chun has bought two pounds of flour too, child, and for half a pint of rice he got a pound of pork as well. I was going to ask you both to our home.

HSI-ERH: Have them over here!

WANG: No, come on over.

HSI-ERH: Do stay here, Aunty!

YANG: Yes, stay here.

WANG: Look at you both! Why stand on ceremony with us! [Turns and whispers to YANG.] Uncle, after New Year Hsi-erh and Ta-chun will be one year older. I'm waiting for you to say the word!

YANG [afraid lest HSI-ERH hear, yet apparently eager for her to hear]: Don't be impatient, Aunty. When the right time comes, we'll fix it up for the youngsters. Ah

HSI-ERH [pretending not to understand, interrupts them]: Aunty, come and mix the dough.

YANG: That's right; go and mix the dough.

[AUNTY, chuckling, goes to mix dough.]

[Enter the landlord's steward, Mu. He carries a lantern bearing the words, "The Huang Family—House of Accumulated Virtue."]

MU [sings]:

Here I come collecting rent
And dunning for debt!
I've four treasures as tricks of the trade:
Incense and a gun,
Crutches and a bag of tricks.
I burn the incense before the landlord,
I fire the gun to frighten tenants,
With my crutches I trip folk up,
And with my bag of tricks I cheat them!

This evening the landlord has sent me on an errand to the tenant peasant Yang—a secret errand, not for everybody's ears! The landlord has given me instructions to take Yang to him for a talk. [Knocks.] Old Yang, open up!

YANG: Who is it?

MU: I, Steward Mu!

[The three inside start, and AUNTY WANG and HSI-ERH hastily hide the flour bowl.]

MU: Old Yang, hurry up, and let me in!

[There is no help for it but to open the door, and MU enters. All remain silent.]

MU [makes a round of the room with his lantern, HSI-ERH hides behind AUNTY WANG]: Old Yang! [With unusual politeness.] Are you ready for New Year?

YANG: Oh, Mr. Mu, we haven't lit the stove yet.

MU: Well, Old Yang, I have to trouble you. Landlord Huang wants you to come over for a talk.

YANG: Oh! [Greatly taken aback.] But . . . but . . . Mr. Mu, I can't pay the rent or the debt.

MU: Oh no, this time Landlord Huang doesn't want to see you either about the rent or your debt, but to discuss something important. It's New Year's Eve, and the landlord is in a good humor, so you can talk things over comfortably. Come along!

YANG [pleadingly]: I . . . Mr. Mu

MU [pointing to the door]: It's all right. Come along. [YANG has to go.]

HSI-ERH [hastily]: Dad, you

MU [shining the lantern on HSI-ERH's face]: Oh, don't worry, Hsi-erh. Landlord Huang will give you flowers to wear. Your dad will bring them back. [Laughs.]

WANG [putting the beancurd cloth over YANG's shoulders]: Put this over you, Uncle! The snow is heavier now When you get there, go down on your knees to Landlord Huang, and he surely won't spoil our New Year.

MU: That's right. [Pushes YANG out.]

[YANG looks back as he goes out.]

HSI-ERH: Dad! . . .

[YANG sighs.]

MU: Hurry up! [Pushes YANG off.]

HSI-ERH: Aunty, my dad! . . . [Cries.]

WANG [putting her arms round her]: Your dad will be back soon. Come on, come to our house to mix dough.

[They go out.]

Curtain

SCENE 2

LANDLORD HUANG'S HOUSE.

[The stage presents the entrance and a small room near the reception hall, furnished with a table and chairs. The candle in a tall candlestick on the table lights up an account book, abacus, inkstone and old-fashioned Chinese pipe.]

Sounds of laughter, clinking of wine cups, and the shouts of guests playing the finger-game are heard offstage. LANDLORD HUANG comes in, cheerfully tipsy, picking his teeth.]

HUANG [sings]:

With feasting and wine we see the Old Year out,
And hang lanterns and garlands to celebrate New Year's Eve!
There are smiles on the faces of all our guests
Who are drunk with joy, not wine.
Our barns are bursting with grain,
So who cares if the poor go hungry!

[The servant TA-SHENG brings in water, and HUANG rinses his mouth.]

HUANG: Ta-sheng, go and tell your mistress I have a headache and can't drink with the guests. Ask her to entertain them.

TA-SHENG: Very good, sir. [Exit.]

HUANG: Well, I haven't lived in vain! I have nearly a hundred hectares of good land, and every year I collect at least a thousand piculs in rent. All my life I've known how to weight the scales in my own favor and manage things smoothly both at home and outside. During the last few years our family has done pretty well. Last year my wife died. My mother wants me to marry again, but I feel freer without a wife at home. Women are cheap as dirt. If one takes my fancy, like this one tonight, it's very easy to arrange.

[Mu leads YANG on.]

YANG [sings timidly]:

The red lanterns under the eaves dazzle my eyes,
And I don't feel easy in my mind.
I wonder what he wants me for?
Hsi-erh is waiting for me at home.

MU: Old Yang, Landlord Huang is here. This way.

[They enter the room.]

HUANG [politely]: So it's Old Yang. Sit down, won't you? [Indicates a seat.]

[YANG dare not sit.]

MU [pouring tea]: Have some tea.

[YANG remains silent.]

HUANG: Have you got everything ready for New Year, Old Yang?

YANG: Well, sir, you know how it is. It's been snowing more than ten days, and we have no firewood or rice at home. I've not lit the stove for several days.

MU: Bah. See here, Old Yang, there's no need to complain about poverty. Landlord Huang knows all about you, doesn't he?

HUANG: Yes, Old Yang, I know you're not well off. But this year is passing, and I have to trouble you for the rent. [Opens the account book.] You cultivate one acre of my land. Last year you were five pecks short, this summer another four and a half pecks, in autumn another five and a half pecks.

MU [reckoning on the abacus]: Five times five . . . two fives makes ten

HUANG: And remember the money you owe us. In my father's time your wife died, and you wanted a coffin, so you borrowed five dollars from us. The year before last you were sick and borrowed two and a half dollars. Last year another three dollars. At that time we agreed upon five per cent monthly interest. At compound interest it amounts to—

MU [reckoning on the abacus]: The interest on the interest amounts to—five times five, twenty-five. Two fives is ten Altogether twenty-five dollars fifty cents. Plus one and a half piculs' rent.

HUANG: Altogether twenty-five dollars and fifty cents, and one and a half piculs' rent. Right, Old Yang?

YANG: Yes, sir. . . . That's right.

HUANG: See, Old Yang, it's down here quite clearly in black and white, all correct and in order. This is New Year's Eve, Old Yang; the rent must be paid. If you've got it with you, so much the better; you pay the money and the debt is canceled. If you haven't got it with you, then go and find some way of raising it. Steward Mu will go with you.

MU: So it's up to you. I'm ready to go with you. Get going, Old Yang!

YANG [pleadingly]: Oh, Mr. Mu Sir Please let me off this time! I really have no money; I can't pay the rent or the debt. [His voice falters.] Sir . . . Mr. Mu

HUANG: Now, Old Yang, that's no way to act. This is New Year's Eve. You're in difficulties, but I'm even worse off. You must clear the debt today.

YANG: Sir

HUANG: Come, you must be reasonable. Whatever you say, that debt must be paid.

MU: You heard what Landlord Huang said, Old Yang. He never goes back on his word. You must find a way, Old Yang.

YANG: What can I do, sir? An old man like me, with no relatives or rich friends—where can I get money? [Beseechingly.] Sir

HUANG [seeing his opportunity, signals to MU]: Well

MU [to YANG]: Well, listen, Old Yang, there is a way. Landlord Huang has thought of a way out for you, if you will take it

YANG: Tell me what it is, Mr. Mu.

MU: You go back, and bring your daughter Hsi-erh here as payment for the rent.

YANG [horror-stricken]: What!

MU: Go and fetch Hsi-erh here as payment for the rent.

YANG [kneeling beseechingly]: Sir, you can't do that! [Sings.]

*The sudden demand for my girl as rent—
Is like thunder out of a cloudless sky!
Hsi-erh is the darling of my heart,
I'd rather die than lose her!
I beg you, sir,
Take pity on us, please,
And let me off this once!
She's all I have,
This is more than I can bear!*

HUANG [stands up in disgust]: Well, I'm doing you a good turn, Old Yang. Bring Hsi-erh to our house to spend a few years in comfort, and won't she be better off than in your home, where she has to go cold and hungry and has such a hard time of it? Besides, we are not going to treat Hsi-erh badly here. And this way your debt will be cancelled, too. Isn't that killing two birds with one stone? [Laughs.]

YANG: No, sir, you can't do that. . . .

MU: Well, Old Yang, it seems to me you poor people try to take advantage of the kindness of the rich. Landlord Huang wants to help your family. Just think, Hsi-erh coming here will have the time of her life. She will live on the fat of the land, dress like a

lady, and only have to stretch out her hand for food or drink! That would be much better than in your house where she goes cold and hungry. In fact Landlord Huang is quite distressed by all you make Hsi-erh put up with. So you'd better agree.

YANG: But, sir, Mr. Mu, this child Hsi-erh is the apple of my eye. Her mother died, when she was three, and I brought her up as best I could. I'm an old man now and I have only this daughter. She's both daughter and son to me. I can't let her go . . . sir! [Turning to HUANG.]

HUANG [adamant]: Bah!

[YANG turns to MU who also ignores him.]

HUANG [after a while]: I'm not going to wait any longer, Old Yang! Make your choice. Give me your girl or pay the debt.

MU: Old Yang, Landlord Huang is in a good humor now. Don't offend him, or it'll be the worse for you.

HUANG [angrily]: That's enough! Make out a statement! Tell him to send the girl tomorrow! [Starts angrily off.]

YANG [stepping forward to clutch at him]: Don't go, sir!

HUANG: Get away! [Pushing YANG aside, he hurries off.]

MU: All right, better agree, Old Yang. [Goes to the table to write a statement.]

YANG [barring MU's way wildly]: You . . . you mustn't do that! [Sings.]

*What have I done wrong,
That I should be forced to sell my child?
I've had a hard time of it all my life,
But I little thought it would come to this!*

MU: Get wise, Old Yang. Don't keep on being such a fool. You've got to agree to this today, whether you like it or not! [Pushes YANG aside and takes up a pen to write the statement.]

YANG [seizing MU's hand]: No! [Sings.]

*Heaven just kills the grass with a single root,
The flood just carries off the one-plank bridge.
She's the only child I ever had,
And I can't live without her!*

MU [furiously]: Don't be a fool! Presently if you make the master lose his temper, it'll be no joke!

YANG: I . . . I . . . I'll go somewhere to plead my case! [About to rush out.]

MU [banging the table]: Where are you going to plead your case?

The county magistrate is our friend, this is the yamen door; where are you going to plead your case!

YANG [aghast]: I . . . I

MU: It's no use, Old Yang! You're no match for him. I advise you to make out a statement and put your mark on it to settle the business. [Writes.]

YANG [stopping him again]: You . . . you
[Enter HUANG impatiently.]

HUANG [in a towering rage]: Why are you still so stubborn, Old Yang! Let me tell you, it's going to be done today, whether you like it or not! [To MU.] Hurry up and make out a statement for him.

YANG [at a loss]: Ah!

MU [reading as he writes]: "Tenant Yang owes Landlord Huang one and a half piculs of grain and twenty-five dollars fifty cents. Since he is too poor to pay, he wants to sell his daughter Hsi-erh to the landlord to cancel the debt. Both parties agree and will not go back on their word. Since verbal agreements are inconclusive, this statement is drawn up as evidence . . . Signed by the two parties, Landlord Huang and Tenant Yang, and the witness, Steward Mu. . . ." Right, talk is empty but writing is binding. Come on, Old Yang! Put your mark on it!

YANG [frenziedly]: You can't do this, sir!

HUANG: What! All right, then tell Liu to tie him up and take him to the county court!

YANG [panic stricken]: What, send me to the county court! Oh, sir!

MU [seizing YANG's hand]: Put your mark on it! [Presses his fingers down.]

YANG [startled to see the ink on his finger]: Oh! [Falls to the ground.]

MU: Aha, one fingerprint has cleared the debt of all these years. . . .

[Hands the document to HUANG.]

[HUANG makes a gesture to MU.]

MU [ascertains that YANG is still breathing]: He's all right.

HUANG: Old Yang, you'd better go back now, and bring Hsi-erh here tomorrow. [To MU.] Give him that document.

MU [helping YANG up]: This one is yours, here. . . . [Hands him the document.] Tomorrow send Hsi-erh here to give New Year's greetings to Landlord Huang's family. Tell her to come here to spend a happy New Year. Go on. [Pushes YANG out, then shuts the door.]

[YANG collapses outside the gate in the snowstorm.]

HUANG: Old Mu, you take a few men there early tomorrow. We don't want the old fellow to go back and decide to ignore the debt and run away. In that case we'd lose both girl and money.

MU: Right.

HUANG: Another thing. For heaven's sake don't let word get about; it wouldn't sound well on New Year's Day. If those wretches spread the news, even though we've right on our side, it would be hard to explain. If anyone questions you, say my mother wants to see Hsi-erh and you're fetching her to give New Year's greetings to the old lady.

MU: Very good. [Exit.]

HUANG: Ah! The only way to get rich is at the expense of the poor. Without breaking Old Yang, I couldn't get Hsi-erh!

YANG [comes to himself outside the gate, and gets up]: Heaven! Murderous Heaven! [Sings.]

Heaven kills folk without batting an eye!

The landlord's house is Hell!

I'm an old fool, an old fool,

Why did I put my mark on that paper just now?

I've gone and sold my only daughter,

Your dad's let you down, Hsi-erh!

You're happy, waiting at home for me for New Year,

But I'm in despair!

With this hand I've sold my only child,

How can I face you when I get home?

[He staggers off.]

Curtain

SCENE 3

[YANG's old friend, the tenant peasant CHAO, enters with a basket containing a small piece of meat and a pot of wine. He is taking the path by the village.]

CHAO [sings]:

In the gale the snow whirls high,

Nine homes out of ten are dimly lit;

Not that we don't celebrate New Year,

But the poor have a different New Year from the rich.

*There's wine and meat in the landlord's house,
While we tenants have neither rice nor flour!*

[He hears sounds of merriment from LANDLORD HUANG'S house in the distance.] Bah! At New Year the rich could die of laughing, while the poor could die of despair! Old Yang's been away a week to escape paying his debt, but he ought to be back now. I've bought four ounces of wine to drink with him. Getting his troubles off his chest is the poor man's way of spending New Year. [Sings.]

*Just as officials are all in league,
The poor stick together, too.
I'm going to spend New Year's Eve with Old Yang,
To share four ounces of cheap wine with a friend. [Exit.]*

[Enter YANG.]

YANG [sings]:

*I feel as befuddled as if I were drunk,
In such a snowstorm where can I go?
The deed in my pocket is like a knife
That's going to kill my own flesh and blood.*

Where are you, Hsi-erh? You don't know what your dad
[Falls.]

CHAO [enters and sees a prostrate figure. When he goes to help him up, he recognizes YANG]: So it's you, Old Yang?

YANG: Who's that?

CHAO: It's Old Chao.

YANG: Oh, Old Chao, friend

CHAO [raising him]: What happened to you, Old Yang?

YANG: Ah! [For an instant he appears to be in a frenzy, but then fights down his feelings.] Nothing No, nothing. Just now I went to the rich man's house

CHAO: Oh, so you were badly treated up there. It's snowing faster; let's go back now and talk it over. We'll have a good talk. [Helps YANG along.]

YANG: Talk Talk Talk it over Have a good talk.

CHAO: Here, how is it the door is closed? [Opens the door and helps YANG in.] Why is there no light? [Gropes for the matches to light the lamp.] Where are you, Hsi-erh?

YANG [hearing HSI-ERH'S name]: Ah, Hsi-erh, Hsi-erh!

CHAO: What is it, Old Yang?

YANG [controlling himself]: Nothing, Hsi-erh has gone with Auntie Wang to make dumplings.

CHAO: So this New Year's Eve you have dumplings to eat? Your daughter must be happy. Old Yang, look, I've got a pound of pork for you, for you two to eat tomorrow. And I've brought four ounces of wine. Tonight the two of us can drink a few cups. [Heats the wine.]

YANG: Right, drink. Drink a few cups. . . . Drink a few cups. [Sits by the stove. They drink.]

CHAO: What happened, Old Yang, in the landlord's house just now?

YANG: That . . . nothing . . . Old Chao.

CHAO: What is it? Tell me. I'm your friend.

YANG: Ah, yes

CHAO: Go on, Old Yang! What's there to be afraid of?

YANG: I

CHAO: You'd try the patience of a saint, the way you never take other people into your confidence, but keep all your troubles to yourself! But we two have always talked frankly, and tonight you mustn't brood. Come on, Old Yang, out with it!

YANG: Very well, I'll tell you. I came home today, hoping to have escaped paying the debt. Then Steward Mu called me to the landlord's house.

CHAO: Yes.

YANG: Landlord Huang opened the account book and Mu reckoned on the abacus, and insisted on my clearing the debt. I couldn't pay it, so he

CHAO: So what?

YANG: He wanted Hsi-erh as payment.

CHAO: Did you agree?

YANG: I . . . No.

CHAO [excitedly]: Good for you, Old Yang! You did right. To let Hsi-erh go to his house in payment for the debt would be like throwing your child to the wolves. As the proverb says, "Buddha needs incense, and a man needs self-respect." That's something we must fight for. You've shown the right spirit, Old Yang. [Raises his cup.] Come on, Old Yang, drink up.

YANG [in agony of mind]: Old Chao . . . Old Chao, you know tomorrow—no, next year—next year the landlord will still want Hsi-erh to go.

CHAO: Next year? Well, Old Yang, I'm considering that. Next year I'm not going to stay here. I'm going north.

YANG: Where? Going north? Ah, even a poor home is hard to give up. If we leave, we'll starve.

CHAO: Not necessarily. Here we cultivate these small plots of poor land, and can't live anyway, what with the rent. This year I worked fifty days for the landlord, but even so I didn't clear all the rent for the melon field; yesterday he was pressing me again. Bah! Why should an old man like me, all alone and without children, end my days on these small fields? I think we'd better take Hsi-erh to the north, until she's grown up. At our age, we can't expect to live long, and our death doesn't matter; but we mustn't ruin the child's life.

YANG [*sadly, weighing his words*]: Our death doesn't matter, but we mustn't ruin the child's life.

CHAO: Think it over, Old Yang! I consider next year, as soon as spring comes, we should take our things and go. [*Raises his cup again.*] Drink up!

YANG: Ah!

[*Enter AUNTY WANG, HSI-ERH and WANG TA-CHUN, carrying the dumplings.*]

WANG: Has Uncle Yang really come back, Ta-chun?

TA-CHUN: I saw him coming out of the landlord's house. [*To Hsi-erh.*] Hsi-erh, the path is slippery; let me take that.

HSI-ERH: I can carry it, Ta-chun.

[*YANG, hearing voices outside, hastily wipes his eyes and pretends all is well.*]

HSI-ERH [*approaching, sees a light through the door*]: Aunty, I think Dad is really back. [*They enter.*]

HSI-ERH [*joyfully*]: Dad, you're back!

TA-CHUN: Uncle, you're back!

WANG: Uncle Chao, you're here too

CHAO: We two have been chatting quite a time.

TA-CHUN: Uncle, what happened in the landlord's house?

YANG: I went, and couldn't pay the rent or settle the debt, so he

ALL: What did he do?

YANG: Nothing . . . I . . . I went down on my knees to him, that's all, and then came back.

TA-CHUN: Really, Uncle?

HSI-ERH: Really, Dad? That was all?

YANG: Certainly, child. Have I ever deceived you?

CHAO: That's right.

WANG [*wiping her eyes*]: Thank heaven! All's well then, and we can enjoy New Year. Uncle Chao, we have a few pounds of flour not taken by the landlord, and we made some dumplings. You and Uncle Yang come and eat.

CHAO: Right.

YANG: Yes.

WANG: Ta-chun, empty out the garlic from that bowl, and give it to Uncle Yang. Hsi-erh, you take this one to Uncle Chao.

TA-CHUN [*handing the bowl to YANG*]: Try our dumplings, Uncle. [*YANG takes the bowl in silence.*]

[*They eat.*]

HSI-ERH [*sings*]:

Dad's come home after hiding from the duns!

TA-CHUN and WANG:

We're eating dumplings for New Year!

ALL:

*Old and young we're sitting around,
Enjoying a very happy New Year!
Enjoying a happy New Year!*

WANG:

The snow's been falling for a week or more,

ALL:

But we're all safely here together!

WANG:

Hoping by the time our young folk grow up,

ALL:

*We can all pass some years in peace!
Yes, pass some years in peace!*

HSI-ERH: Dad, you aren't eating!

YANG: Yes, I am.

CHAO [*reminiscently*]: Ta-chun and Hsi-erh, today we're celebrating New Year and eating dumplings, so let me tell you a story about dumplings. It was 1930,² the thirteenth day of the fifth moon, the day when the War God sharpened his sword. There was a fine rain falling. That day troops appeared from the southern mountains. They were called the Red Army.

WANG: So you're harping back to that, Uncle. Better eat now.

HSI-ERH: Let Uncle Chao talk, Aunty! I like to hear.

CHAO: Yes, they had red all over them, their red sashes bound cross-wise from shoulder to waist; and they were all ruddy-faced, hefty

fellows, so they were called the Red Army. They went south of the city to the Chao Village. I was there then, when the Red Army came and killed that devil, Landlord Chao. Then they distributed the grain and land among the poor, so on the thirteenth of the fifth moon all poor folk had basketfuls of white flour, and we all ate dumplings. In every house I went to then they offered me dumplings to eat. . . . [Chuckles.]

TA-CHUN: Where did that Red Army go to then?

CHAO: They went to the city, but they hadn't held it long when some Green Army arrived; then the Red Army went to the Great North Mountain, and never came down again. And after the Red Army left, the poor had a bad time of it once more.

TA-CHUN: Tell us, Uncle, will the Red Army be coming back?

CHAO: I think so.

HSI-ERH: When will they come?

CHAO: In good time, a day will come when the War God sharpens his sword again and the Red Army comes back. [Chuckles.]

WANG: Don't keep on talking but eat now. [To YANG.] Uncle, eat. There's plenty more.

HSI-ERH: Dad, have some more.

YANG [holding the bowl, unable to eat, after a painful pause]: Ah, Hsi-erh, isn't Auntie good?

HSI-ERH: Yes, she is!

YANG: Auntie, isn't Hsi-erh good?

WANG: She's a good child.

YANG: Hsi-erh, tell me, is your dad good?

HSI-ERH: What a question! Of course you are, Dad!

YANG: No, no. . . . Dad's no good.

WANG: What's got into you, Uncle Yang? Why are you talking like this?

CHAO: We've been drinking, and he may have had a drop too much. . . . [Chuckles.] It goes without saying you two are both good, Hsi-erh and Ta-chun. It won't be long now! [Laughs.]

[HSI-ERH turns away shyly.]

WANG: Stop talking and eat!

YANG: Yes, eat. . . .

[They all eat.]

HSI-ERH [sings]:

Dad's come home after hiding from the duns!

TA-CHUN and WANG:

We're eating dumplings for New Year!

ALL:

*Old and young we're sitting around,
Enjoying a very happy New Year!
Enjoying a happy New Year!*

WANG:

The snow's been falling for a week or more,

ALL:

But we're all here safely together!

WANG:

Hoping by the time our young folk grow up,

ALL:

*We can all pass some years in peace!
Yes, pass some years in peace!*

[In a state of mental agony, YANG cannot keep still, so he withdraws to a corner, where he clutches the document in his pocket with trembling hands.]

WANG: What are you doing, Uncle Yang? Come and eat.

YANG [startled]: I'm looking, looking. . . . Ah, it's empty, my pocket. Not a single coin. I can't even give the two youngsters money for New Year.

WANG: Come on. To have dumplings is good enough. Come and eat, Uncle.

YANG: I . . . I'll eat later.

WANG: Uncle Chao, have some more.

CHAO: I've had enough.

WANG [to TA-CHUN and HSI-ERH]: How about you two?

TA-CHUN and HSI-ERH: We've had enough.

WANG: Then let's clear away. [They clear the table.] Uncle Yang has been on his feet all day and is tired; he should rest now.

YANG [mechanically]: Rest now.

WANG: We would go on chatting forever, but we can talk again tomorrow. Tomorrow Ta-chun will come to give you New Year greetings.

CHAO: I'll be going too. Hsi-erh, take good care of your dad. Old Yang, tomorrow I'll come and wish you a happy New Year. I'm off now.

YANG: Good night, Old Chao.

[Exit CHAO.]

TA-CHUN: We're going too, Uncle.

YANG: See your mother back carefully, Ta-chun.

HSI-ERH: Are you going, Aunty!

WANG: Good night. [She and TA-CHUN go out.]

[HSI-ERH starts to close the door.]

TA-CHUN [at the door]: Hsi-erh, Uncle is tired! Get him to rest early.

HSI-ERH: Yes. [Closes the door. WANG and TA-CHUN go out.]

YANG: You'd better go to bed, Hsi-erh.

HSI-ERH: So had you, Dad.

YANG: Your dad . . . your dad will see the New Year in.

HSI-ERH: I'll stay up, too.

YANG: Then put on some more firewood.

[HSI-ERH adds wood to the stove and sits by the fire.]

YANG [coughing]: Hsi-erh, your dad is old and good for nothing.

HSI-ERH: Whatever do you mean, Dad! Come and warm yourself!

[They sit by the stove. The silence is oppressive, while snow falls outside. Time passes.]

YANG: Are you asleep, Hsi-erh?

HSI-ERH: No, Dad. . . .

YANG: I'll trim the lamp. [He trims the lamp.] [Presently the lamp on the stove burns low, and HSI-ERH falls asleep.] The wick is burnt out, and the oil is used up. [The lamp goes out.] The light is out, too. . . . Hsi-erh! [HSI-ERH is sound asleep.]

YANG: Asleep? Hsi-erh! [Sings.]

*Hsi-erh, my child, you're sleeping,
Dad calls you, but you don't hear.
You can't imagine, as you dream,
The unforgivable thing I've done.*

Hsi-erh, Dad has wronged you! Aunty Wang, I've wronged you! Old Chao, I've wronged you! I made a statement and put my mark on it. . . . When Hsi-erh's mother died, she said, "Bring Hsi-erh up as best you can." And I brought her up. Hsi-erh has had a hard time of it with me for seventeen years. Today . . . I've wronged Hsi-erh's mother; I've sold our child. . . . Tomorrow the landlord will take her away. Neither the living nor the dead, neither human beings nor ghosts can ever forgive me! I'm an old fool, a criminal! But I can't let you go! I'll have it out with them! [He runs wildly out, to be buffeted by the wind and snow.] Ah, magistrates, landlords! . . . Lackeys. . . . Bailiffs! . . . Where can I go? Where can I turn? [He clutches the document.] Ah! [Sings.]

Magistrates, rich men—you tigers and wolves!

Because I owed rent and was in debt,

You forced me to write a deed,

Selling my child. . . .

The north wind's blowing, snow's falling thick and fast!

Where can I go? Where can I fly?

What way out is there for me?

[He pauses, bewildered.] Ah, I still have some lye for making bean-curd—I'll drink that! [He drinks it.] Now I'll drink some cold water. . . . [He takes off his padded jacket to cover HSI-ERH, then rushes outside, falls on the snow and dies.]

[Crackers sound in the village, signaling the arrival of the New Year.]

Curtain

SCENE 4

[In front of the Yang's home the next day. Crackers sound and TA-CHUN comes in gaily.]

TA-CHUN: Uncle Yang! Uncle Yang! I've come to wish you a happy New Year! [He suddenly stumbles on the corpse.] Oh! [Clearing the snow from the face of the dead man he recognizes YANG.] Oh! Uncle Yang! You! What's happened? [He hurries to the door and knocks.] Hsi-erh, Hsi-erh! Open the door, quick! [Hastily turning towards the backstage.] Mother! Mother! Come quick! Come quick!

HSI-ERH [wakened from her sleep]: Dad! Dad! [She looks for her father.]

TA-CHUN: Hsi-erh! [Pushing open the door.] Hsi-erh! Look! Your dad—

HSI-ERH: Has something happened to Dad? [Runs out, and seeing her father's body, falls on it and cries.] Dad! Dad!

TA-CHUN: What happened, Hsi-erh?

HSI-ERH [cries. Then sings]:

*Yesterday evening when Dad came back,
He was worried but wouldn't tell me why.*

*This morning he's lying in the snow!
Why, Dad, why?*

TA-CHUN [*helplessly turning toward the backstage*]: Mother, come quick!

[*Enter AUNTY WANG.*]

WANG: What is it, Ta-chun?

TA-CHUN: Mum, look at Uncle Yang! He—[*pointing to corpse.*]

WANG: What's happened to Uncle Yang? [*She kneels beside the corpse and touches it, hoping the dead man will wake up.*] Ta-chun, go and call Uncle Chao and the others at once.

[*Exit TA-CHUN.*]

WANG [*finding the body stiff and lifeless, wails*]: Uncle Yang! Uncle Yang!

HSI-ERH: Daddy! [*Cries.*]

[*Enter TA-CHUN with UNCLE CHAO, LI and TA-SO.*]

CHAO: What's happened?

TA-SO: What happened, Ta-chun?

LI: It's Old Yang.

WANG [*crying as she tells the story*]: Friends, last night when he came back he was all right. Who could imagine this morning he would—[*Unable to proceed.*]

CHAO [*stoops and examines YANG*]: He's drunk lye.

HSI-ERH: Daddy!

CHAO [*noticing the dead man's clenched fist*]: Ah! [*He starts forcing open the fingers. TA-CHUN and TA-SO help him, and they take the deed of sale.*]

LI [*reading the deed*]: Tenant Yang owes Landlord Huang rent . . . Since he is too poor to pay, he wants to sell his daughter Hsi-erh to . . . [*Unable to finish he lets the deed fall to the ground. They are all horror stricken.*]

WANG: Merciful heavens! This . . .

HSI-ERH [*shrieks*]: Oh, Dad! [*Sings.*]

*Suddenly hearing that I've been sold,
I feel as if fire were burning me!
Could it be Dad didn't love me?
Or thought me a bad daughter, could it be?*

CHAO [*addressing the corpse indignantly*]: Old Yang, last night you only told me half! You shouldn't have died! Because you wouldn't leave your little patch of land, you let them hound you to death!

TA-SO [*loudly*]: Last night they took away my donkey! Today for this paltry rent they drove Uncle Yang to suicide! They won't let the poor live! It's too much! [*Too angry to speak he turns to rush out.*]

TA-CHUN [*unable to suppress his anger*]: They killed Uncle Yang, and they make Hsi-erh . . . I'm going to have it out with them! [*He rushes after TA-SO.*]

[*CHAO and LI pull TA-SO back, while AUNTY WANG restrains TA-CHUN.*]

WANG: Ta-chun! Ta-chun!

LI: It's no good, Ta-so, Ta-chun! It's there in black and white! Uncle Yang put his mark on it.

TA-CHUN: His mark? They forced him, didn't they? I'll send in an appeal!

TA-SO: Right!

LI [*sighs*]: To whom can you appeal? The district head? The magistrate? Aren't they hand in glove with the rich? I think we'd better accept it, if we can.

TA-SO: Accept it? I can't!

TA-CHUN: How are we poor folk to live! [*Stamps his foot and strikes his head in despair.*]

CHAO: Ta-chun, Ta-so, blustering is no use. Time's getting on, and the landlord will soon be here to fetch the girl; we'd better hurry to prepare the dead for burial, so that Hsi-erh can at least attend her father's funeral. We all know what goes on nowadays, but they've got the whip hand. Where can we turn to look for justice? . . . [*To HSI-ERH.*] This has happened today because we old people are no good. We've done you a great wrong, child! Ta-chun, Ta-so, we'd better first bury the dead! Aunty Wang, get ready quickly, and put Hsi-erh in mourning!

[*They bow their heads in silence, wiping their eyes in sorrow and anger.*]

[*Enter STEWARD MU with thugs.*]

MU: A happy New Year, friends! I wish you good luck and prosperity! [*They are all taken aback.*]

MU [*seeing the dead man in their midst, realizes what has happened, but feigns astonishment*]: Ah! Who's that?

LI: It's Old Yang.

MU: What, Old Yang! . . . Why, last night he was all right, how could he . . . ? Well, well . . . [*Feigning sympathy.*] Who could

have thought it? Such an honest fellow. . . . [Turns.] Well then . . . let us all help, and prepare his funeral. . . . Oh, Hsi-erh is here. Let's do it this way: let Hsi-erh come with me to beg the landlord for a coffin for her father. Come on, Hsi-erh. [Tries to lead HSI-ERH off.]

TA-CHUN [unable to contain his anger, darts forward and shakes his fist at Mu, who steps aside]: I know why you've come. You shan't take her!

TA-SO [stepping forward too]: You dare!

THUGS [stepping forward to cover TA-CHUN and TA-SO with their guns]: Hey, there! Don't move!

MU [changing his tune]: All right, let's put our cards on the table. Old Yang has sold Hsi-erh to Landlord Huang! Here's the deed. [Taking the deed from his pocket.] Old Yang put his mark on it, so justice and reason are on our side. . . . Sorry, Wang Ta-chun, but Hsi-erh belongs to the landlord now.

TA-CHUN: Steward Mu, you dog aping your master, bullying the poor!

MU: So! You are cursing me? Very well, fellow, just wait and see!

CHAO: Mr. Mu, this is too much. The child's father has just died, and you want to carry her off, on New Year's Day, too.

MU: Too much? [Pointing to the deed.] Here's our reason. Better mind your own business.

WANG: Mr. Mu, let the child attend the funeral first. . . .

MU: Can't be done. Landlord Huang wants the girl taken back immediately. [Sizing up the situation he adopts a more conciliatory tone.] Well, actually I can't make any decisions; you must talk to Landlord Huang. Still, I think Hsi-erh will enjoy herself later on. [He takes hold of HSI-ERH again.] Come on, Hsi-erh.

TA-CHUN, TA-SO: You! . . . [They want to rush forward again, but are stopped by the guns of the thugs.]

[AUNTY WANG timidly steps in front of TA-CHUN.]

CHAO [signing to them to stop]: Ta-chun! Ta-so!

HSI-ERH [shaking off MU's hand, darts back to CHAO and AUNTY WANG]: Uncle! Aunt! [Rushing to the dead man, she cries bitterly.] Daddy! Daddy! . . .

MU [pulling at HSI-ERH again]: Well, Hsi-erh, we're all mortal. It's no use crying, better come with me. [Pulls hard.]

HSI-ERH [frightened, screams and struggles]: Uncle! Aunt!

WANG: Steward Mu, do let the child put on mourning for her father.

MU: All right, put on mourning.

[AUNTY WANG goes inside and fetches out a piece of white cloth which she ties round HSI-ERH's head.³]

CHAO [holding HSI-ERH, speaks to the dead man]: Old Yang, Hsi-erh can't attend your funeral today. This is all the fault of us old folk; we've done her a wrong. [To HSI-ERH.] Come, Hsi-erh, kowtow to your father.

HSI-ERH: Uncle! Aunt! [Kneels and kowtows.]

[Mu drags HSI-ERH off crying and screaming, followed by AUNTY WANG. TA-CHUN and TA-SO want to pursue them, but are stopped by CHAO.]

CHAO: Ta-chun, Ta-so They have the whip hand, what can we do? Let us remember how many people the Huang family has killed. Their day of reckoning will come! A day will come when power changes hands. . . . [They sob.] Don't cry, but come and bury the dead! [They carry YANG off.]

Curtain

ACT II

SCENE 1

Time: As in the last scene.

Place: The Buddhist shrine of LANDLORD HUANG's mother. Big, bright candles are lit, and incense smoke wreathes the air.

[MRS. HUANG comes in bearing incense sticks in her hand.]

MRS. HUANG: Yesterday my son told me our tenant Yang was sending his daughter here as payment for the rent. Why hasn't she come to see me yet? [Sings.]

At New Year our family gains in wealth and we old folk in longevity,
Thanks to the virtues of our ancestors and holy Buddha's protection.

I carry incense to the shrine where bright candles are lit on the altar,

And bow three times in all sincerity.

One stick of incense I offer Ju-lai of the Western Heaven—

May we grow wealthy, and our rents increase!
The second stick I offer Kuan-yin of the Southern Seas—
Grant peace in the four seasons, and may all our house grow
rich!

The third stick I offer Chang Hsien, giver of children—
Protect us, and may we increase and multiply!

[She closes the door and sits down.]

Now money is depreciating, one maidservant costs so many years' rent! Last year was better, when we bought that girl Hung-lu for only eight dollars; while that girl bought by the northern household only cost five dollars and fifty cents. But this year everything is expensive!

[Mu comes on with HSI-ERH.]

MU: Come along, Hsi-erh. [Sings.]

What a queer girl you are!
Why act so strangely here?
Just now, when we saw the landlord,
You wouldn't look up or say a word,
And when he gave you a flower,
You wouldn't wear it!
Now that we're going to see the old lady,
You'll have to be on your best behavior!

Look happy now!

[HSI-ERH gives a frightened sob.]

MU: Don't cry! If you make the old lady angry, even with her fingers she can scratch holes in your face. [They enter the room.] Ah, Mrs. Huang, the Yang family girl, Hsi-erh, has come to give you her New Year greetings.

MRS. HUANG: Oh, it's Old Mu. Come in. [Enter MU and HSI-ERH.]

MU [to HSI-ERH]: Kowtow to the mistress! [Pushes her down on her knees.]

MRS. HUANG: All right, get up.

MU [raising HSI-ERH]: Get up, and let the mistress look at you.

MRS. HUANG: H'm, a good-looking child. Come over here.

MU [to HSI-ERH]: Go on. [He drags her again.]

MRS. HUANG: The child looks intelligent. What's her name?

[HSI-ERH remains silent.]

MU: Answer the mistress. You're called . . . called Hsi-erh.

MRS. HUANG: Hsi-erh? Well, that's an auspicious name.⁴ It needn't

be altered much to match Hung-fu and Hung-lu; we'll just add the word Hung in front. Let her be called Hung-hsi.

MU [to HSI-ERH]: Thank the mistress for your new name. From now on you won't be called Hsi-erh but Hung-hsi.

MRS. HUANG: How old is the child?

[HSI-ERH remains silent.]

MU: Seventeen.

MRS. HUANG: Ah, seventeen. Good girl, better than Hung-fu. Hung-fu is a regular scarecrow; she looks like nothing on earth! This girl is good. Old Mu, presently you tell my son I shall keep her with me.

MU: Oh! That's too good for her.

MRS. HUANG: Well, her family is poor. Think of the hardships her father made her suffer—nothing to eat, no clothes to wear. Now that you've come to our house, Hung-hsi, you'll live in comfort. Are you glad?

[HSI-ERH remains silent.]

MU: Speak up. . . . You are glad, you are glad! You are a lucky girl!

MRS. HUANG: See, the girl is dressed like a beggar! Old Mu, tell my maid Chang to change her clothes and bring her cakes to eat.

MU [calling]: Ta-sheng! [There is a response offstage.] The mistress orders Chang to change Hung-hsi's clothes and bring cakes for Hung-hsi! [Voice offstage: "Yes, mistress! Visitors have come from the north village to pay their respects to you and Landlord Huang."]

MRS. HUANG: All right. [Stands up. To HSI-ERH.] Hung-hsi, soon Chang will come to change your clothes and look after you. [Starting out.] Ah, whoever does good deeds in his life will become a Buddha and go to the Western Paradise. [Mrs. HUANG and MU leave.]

[Voices off: "We've come to pay our respects to Mrs. Huang!" "We've come to wish Landlord Huang a happy New Year!"]

HSI-ERH: Oh dear! [Sings.]

Oh, Dad!

I hear so many voices here,

I'm all of a tremble!

So many bolts, so many doors!

I call my dad, but he doesn't answer.

Who'll wear mourning for my dad?

Who'll cry at his funeral?

[Enter TA-SHENG holding a plate, and CHANG with clothes.]

TASHENG: So this is Hung-hsi. Here, come and eat your cake.

CHANG: You must be hungry; have something to eat.

TA-SHENG: Hurry. I have to go and look after the guests.

[Out of nervousness HSI-ERH drops the plate and breaks it.]

TA-SHENG: What a bad girl you are, breaking a plate on New Year's Day! I'm going to tell the old lady.

CHANG: Don't, Ta-sheng! [Picks up the broken pieces.] The old lady's in a good temper today; don't make her angry. The girl's just come. She doesn't know how to behave. Let her off this time.

TA-SHENG: Huh, little wretch! We'll wait and see how she behaves in the future. [Exit.]

CHANG: Hung-hsi, come with me to change your clothes. [Taking her arm.] Child, this is not your own home, not like with your own parents; you'll have to fit in with these people's ways. . . . Come, don't be afraid. I'm Auntie Chang; I'm a servant too. We shall be together a long time; if there's anything you can't do, I'll help you. If you have any trouble, let me know. . . . Come now, come and change your clothes. [Exeunt.]

Curtain

SCENE 2

One month later.

At the gate of AUNTY WANG's house.

[Enter TA-CHUN.]

TA-CHUN [sings]:

Uncle Yang's been dead for a month, and Hsi-erh
In the landlord's house is treated like dirt;
My mother's in tears the whole of the time,
And it's harder than ever to make ends meet.
How can I ever get even with them?
My whole heart seems to burn with hate!
When I went just now to look for Hsi-erh,
Huang's thugs wouldn't let me in at the gate!

[Stamps.] Today I wanted to go and see Hsi-erh in my spare time, but that gateman saw me. . . . It was Ta-so who suggested that some day, when I had time, I should fetch Hsi-erh out; but although I've been there several times, I haven't been able to

see her. Yesterday Landlord Huang pressed me to pay my debt, saying if I didn't pay they'd evict me, and drive me away. This evening Steward Mu's coming again. Bah! [He pushes open the door and goes in.] Mother! [No one answers.] She must have gone over to see Uncle Chao. When she gets back, there'll be more sighing and sobbing. [Enter TA-SO.]

TA-SO: Ta-chun!

TA-CHUN: Who is it?

TA-SO: Me! [Coming forward.] My! That bastard Mu has got his knife into us! Just now when I was out, he went to my home and took away five pints of kaoliang seeds, driving my mother nearly frantic. Some day that bastard's going to get what's coming to him. . . .

TA-CHUN: I've just come back from the Huang house. It was no good, I still couldn't see Hsi-erh. . . . [Pauses.] Presently Steward Mu is going to throw me out. . . .

TA-SO: What, is he coming soon? [Looking at the sky.] It's getting dark. . . . [Looking at the door.] Is your mother home?

TA-CHUN: No.

TA-SO: Ta-chun, I think we ought to have a fling at him tonight!

TA-CHUN: What do you mean, Ta-so?

TA-SO: When the bastard comes, we'll [Makes a gesture and whispers.]

TA-CHUN [worked up]: Yes . . . but . . . if it leaked out, my mother and Hsi-erh

TA-SO: Don't be afraid. It's dark, and when we're through with the rogue we'll drag him to the North Mountain gully to feed the wolves!

[He whispers again.]

TA-CHUN: All right, we'll be ready for him this evening! [The watch sounds. TA-CHUN and TA-SO take cover, and TA-CHUN fetches a rope from the house.]

[Enter Mu, weaving tipsily.]

MU [sings]:

Kings and queens, kings and queens,
And all the aces too!
I don't care for kings or queens,
All I want, my knave, is you!

[Laughing he reaches the gate.] Ta-chun! Ta-chun! Why haven't

you gone yet, you rascal? Clear out of the house and be off with you!

[TA-CHUN remains angrily silent.]

MU: You want to spend all your life here, don't you, you rogue! You won't give up! Today you were hanging about the Huangs' gate again! Do you still want another man's girl? True, Hsi-erh was promised to you before, but she belongs to our Landlord Huang now. . . . Ah, that wench! Let me tell you, Landlord Huang knows you won't keep quiet, you rogue, so he says we've got to get rid of you. You clear out of this house now, and look sharp about it! [He advances as he speaks. TA-CHUN does not answer, and as MU approaches he falls back.] Where are you going, fellow? Why don't you say something? . . . Where are you going? [Pressing TA-CHUN.]

[TA-so suddenly seizes MU from behind and throws him to the ground.]

MU: Who's that?

TA-so: Don't you dare shout! [To TA-CHUN.] Stop his mouth, Ta-chun. [MU struggles.]

TA-so: You're going to dun for debts in hell! [As they beat MU, two of LANDLORD HUANG's thugs enter.]

THUGS: What's up?

[TA-CHUN and TA-so, seeing them, start to make off but are seized. However TA-CHUN breaks loose and escapes.]

THUGS [helping MU up]: Well, Mr. Mu, you've had a fright!

MU [panting]: Lao San, Lao San—go after him! Go after Wang Ta-chun! [Pointing to TA-so.] Well, so it was you, Ta-so, my fine fellow! . . . Old Liu, take him back for questioning.

[TA-so is pushed off by the thugs, kicking and struggling. MU also leaves.]

[The inner curtain falls.]

[TA-CHUN hurries to Uncle Chao's house, and hammers at the door.]

TA-CHUN: Uncle Chao! Uncle Chao!

[CHAO enters.]

TA-CHUN: Uncle Chao, where's my mother?

CHAO: She's gone home, Ta-chun. Why have you got the wind up like this?

TA-CHUN: Uncle, something's happened! Ta-so and I beat up Steward Mu, but we were found out, and Ta-so was caught. Now they're after me!

CHAO: You young fellows! Just rashness is no use. I knew you were smoldering with rage, but our time hasn't come yet, Ta-chun. You can't stay here now; you'd better make off quickly.

TA-CHUN: Uncle

CHAO: Go northwest quickly!

TA-CHUN: Uncle . . . my mother and Hsi-erh

CHAO: I'll look after them. Go now. When times change, you can come back and see your mother and me.

[TA-CHUN runs off, and CHAO goes out.]

Curtain

SCENE 3

The HUANG house.

[Enter LANDLORD HUANG holding a lantern.]

HUANG [sings]:

Fate's been kind to me, I'm rich and respected,
My barns are stuffed with grain and my chests with gold.
The poor, of course, must go cold and hungry,
Because that's their destiny, fixed by Fate!
If cattle won't budge, I whip them;
If pigs won't die, I slaughter them;
And if the poor set themselves against me,
They'll find out to their cost what fools they've been!

A few days ago Ta-so and Ta-chun refused to pay their rent, and beat up Steward Mu. Tch! It's really preposterous! They should remember who I am. . . . Even rats think twice before coming out of their holes. Do they think they can get anywhere by making an enemy of me? Ta-so I have sent to the district jail. Ta-chun ran away, but let him go! I don't think he dares to come back even if he wants to. As for Hsi-erh [Chuckles.] The only trouble is she's kept by my mother, so I've not been able to get hold of her yet, which is beginning to make me impatient. . . . Today I went to the north village to feast with some friends, and I'm feeling rather restless. Now that it's dark I'll go and have another try at it—try, try, and try again! . . . [Laughs.]

[The second watch sounds, showing that it is after ten.]

[Sings.]

Hearing the second watch,

I tiptoe to my mother's room.
I've hit on a fine plan
To get my way tonight.

[Exit.]

[The back curtain rises, disclosing Mrs. HUANG's bedroom.]

[Enter HSI-ERH, carrying broth.]

HSI-ERH [sings]:

The few months I've been here,
My life has been so bitter—
First I am cursed, then beaten,
They treat me all the time like dirt.
But I have to swallow my tears,
My only friend is Auntie Chang.

[She approaches the left side of the bed, and calls timidly: "Mistress!" Then approaches the right side of the bed and calls again, "Mistress! Mistress!"] Ah! [Sings.]

Rich people are hard to please,
I haven't a minute to myself;
And if I'm careless and annoy her,
I'm afraid she may do me in!

[Voice from within the bed curtains: "Hung-hsi, is the lotus-seed broth ready?"]

HSI-ERH: Coming, mistress! [A hand comes out from the curtain to take the bowl.]

[Voice from the bed: "So hot! Do you want to scald me? You damn slave! Cool it!" She passes the bowl back.]

HSI-ERH [holding the bowl, sings]:

It's either too hot or too cold,
She's never satisfied.
I'm so tired and sleepy,
But it's more than my life's worth to sleep!

[Voice from the bed: "Give me the broth!"]

HSI-ERH: Coming, mistress! [A hand from the bed takes the bowl.]

[Voice from the bed: "What, so bitter? You can't have taken out the roots properly. You make me furious, damn you! Kneel down!"]

HSI-ERH [frightened]: I . . . I [Kneels.]

[Voice from the bed: "You bitch, who can drink such bitter broth? Open your mouth!" Reaching out with an opium pin she slashes at HSI-ERH's mouth.]

HSI-ERH: Oh! [Cries.]

[HUANG steals on, and listens at the door.]

[Voice from the bed: "Don't cry! You really are infuriating!"]

HSI-ERH: I . . . I [Cries.]

[Voice from the bed, angrily: "Damn slave!" She parts the bed curtain and emerges.]

MRS. HUANG: Damn slave! [Beats her again and again with a feather duster.]

HUANG [coming in quickly to stop her]: Mother, Mother, don't be angry! Mother! [Helps her to the bed.]

MRS. HUANG: What brings you here? . . . [To HSI-ERH.] Get up.

[HSI-ERH gets up.]

HUANG: Don't be angry, Mother. You're not feeling well these days, and Hung-hsi has offended you. . . .

MRS. HUANG: What brings you here so late?

HUANG: I came to see you, and . . . I would like Hung-hsi to sew something for me.

MRS. HUANG: I need Hung-hsi to make my broth.

HUANG: Oh

MRS. HUANG: My, how you reek of wine! Better go to bed at once!

HUANG: Yes, Mother. . . . Yes . . . er . . . Mother, you rest and have some opium. Don't be angry. [HUANG prepares the opium pipe for his mother, who smokes; then he puts down the bed curtains.]

HUANG: Come, Hung-hsi, come.

HSI-ERH [in alarm]: Young master, you

MRS. HUANG: Son, what are you doing? Haven't you gone yet?

HUANG: Mother, I was saying that Hung-hsi is quite clever, isn't she [Taking HSI-ERH's hand.] at looking after you! . . . [Pinches her arm.]

[HSI-ERH gives a scream.]

MRS. HUANG [angrily getting out of bed again and sitting down]: You wretched slave, have you gone crazy again?

HUANG: Er . . . er . . . Mother, I think tomorrow I'd better ask Dr. Chen from the town to examine you again.

MRS. HUANG: Humph!

[Enter CHANG, and sets a teapot on the bed.]

CHANG [sizing up the situation]: Has Hung-hsi offended you again, mistress? [To HUANG.] Why are you here, sir? It's getting late, you should rest now.

HUANG [to himself]: Huh, this servant Chang

CHANG: The old lady is not feeling well and it's getting late. . . .

Better go to bed, sir.

MRS. HUANG: Go to bed, son.

CHANG [*judging HSI-ERH*]: Sir, here's your lantern. [*Passing him the lantern.*]

MRS. HUANG: Go on back, son. Hung-hsi, prepare that broth for me.

HUANG: Well, Mother, you'd better sleep. [*To CHANG.*] Tomorrow you wash those clothes of mine.

CHANG: Yes, sir.

[*Exit HUANG.*]

CHANG: Hung-hsi, come and heat the old lady's broth.

[*HSI-ERH moves to take the bowl, but CHANG signs to her to be seated, and heats the broth herself.*]

[*HSI-ERH remains silent, and they watch the broth.*]

CHANG [*softly letting down the curtains*]: How did you offend the old lady, Hung-hsi?

HSI-ERH: She said I hadn't taken the roots out of the lotus seeds, and they tasted bitter; but I had picked them clean. . . .

CHANG [*indignantly*]: Well! She feels bitter because she's had too much opium. . . .

[*Voice from the bed: "Chang! What are you talking about?"*]

CHANG: I was telling Hung-hsi not to cry, so as not to wake you. . . .

[*Voice from the bed: "Oh. . . ."*]

[*Silence.*]

CHANG [*softly*]: Hung-hsi, you couldn't have had enough to eat this evening. [*Taking a dumpling from her sleeve.*] Have this.

HSI-ERH [*biting eagerly into the dumpling, gives a cry because her mouth hurts*]: Oh!

CHANG [*surprised*]: What's the matter? [*Looks at the wound.*] Oh, so she's hurt you with the opium pin again. . . . [*Indignantly.*]

Well! Presently I'll go to the kitchen and get some soup for you.

HSI-ERH [*in pain*]: No . . . no need.

CHANG [*looking at MRS. HUANG*]: Well, the old lady is asleep. . . .

[*Sits by HSI-ERH and fans the fire.*] Ah, Hung-hsi, it's a hard, hard life. Only we two know it. It was because my family couldn't pay our rent either that I was sent to work here in payment for the rent. The things I've seen during these years! Every single maidservant like us has a wretched life of it. [*She sighs, then pauses.*] Hung-hsi, I'll tell you something, but you mustn't let it upset you. . . .

HSI-ERH: Yes, Aunt.

CHANG: Ta-chun and Ta-so, because the landlord pressed them for rent, beat up Steward Mu. Ta-so was caught and put in jail, and Ta-chun ran away. . . .

HSI-ERH: Oh! [*She starts crying from the shock.*]

CHANG [*comforting her*]: It happened nearly a month ago; but I didn't tell you for fear it might upset you. . . .

HSI-ERH: Then . . . Aunt Wang?

CHANG: Don't worry, your Uncle Chao's looking after her. . . . That's how it is, and it's no use crying over spilt milk. We're all in the same boat; although life is so hard, we have to stick it out. . . .

[*HSI-ERH cries.*]

[*The third watch sounds.*]

CHANG: That's the third watch now. . . . The old lady is asleep, and the master should have gone to bed, too. When the broth is ready, Hung-hsi, come back to bed; don't run around. I'll wait for you. [*Exit.*]

HSI-ERH [*goes on watching the broth, and sings*]:

*It's after midnight now,
The more I think, the sadder I grow.
Poor Dad was hounded to death,
And Ta-chun forced to leave home.
Why must we poor folk suffer so?
Why are the rich so cruel?
How can we go on living like this?
Will these hard times never end?*

[*She dozes and the broth boils. She starts up to remove the pot from the fire, but lets it fall. The pot is broken and the broth spilled. Mrs. HUANG snores.*]

HSI-ERH [*sings*]:

*I'm dizzy and I feel so frightened;
I've broken the pot and spilt the broth!
Now I've done such a dreadful thing,
I'm afraid I shan't escape with my life!
Where can I hide myself?
Oh, Heaven, save me!*

[*As she runs out, the back curtain falls. HSI-ERH re-enters from the side of the curtain, and sings*]:

*At dead of night it's so dark,
The road is black and everywhere there are dogs.*

I can hear someone coming after me;
I can't escape this time!

[Enter HUANG with a lantern to confront her. HSI-ERH halts in dismay.]

HUANG [overjoyed]: Aha, what luck! What brought you here, Hung-hsi?

HSI-ERH [frightened]: I . . . I . . . [Wants to leave.]

HUANG [seizing her]: Ah! Hung-hsi, sew something on for me! I need it now. Come, come on over! [Pushes open the door. The back curtain opens. He pushes HSI-ERH in and bolts the door behind him. This is LANDLORD HUANG'S study. A painting of a big tiger hangs there. The tiger is crouching, ready to spring.]

HSI-ERH [terrified]: Oh! [She turns to fly, but is pushed aside by HUANG.]

HUANG [seizing HSI-ERH'S hand]: Come, Hung-hsi. [His eyes gleam with lust, as he pushes HSI-ERH.] Come on!

HSI-ERH: Oh! [Struggling.] Aunty! Aunty! [She starts running, but is pushed into the inner room.]

HUANG: You! Ha! Still shouting! You won't escape now! Come on! [Follows HSI-ERH inside.]

[The fifth watch is heard. Day gradually dawns.]

Curtain

SCENE 4

The next morning in Landlord Huang's study.

[CHANG enters hurriedly.]

CHANG: Hung-hsi! Hung-hsi! [Sings.]

Last night she was beaten and frightened,
So I stayed with her till it was late.
Only when all was quiet, at midnight,
And she had calmed down, I came back.
But this morning she's not to be found,
Though I've looked for her everywhere.
Hung-hsi! Hung-hsi! [Exit.]

[Enter HSI-ERH with dishevelled hair and crumpled clothes. Her face is tear-stained, and she walks with difficulty.]

HSI-ERH [comes to the door, but shrinks from opening it. Sings]:

Heaven!

You could kill me with a knife or axe,
But you shouldn't have shamed me!

I little thought of this

When I came to the Huang house. . . .

Mother bore me, Dad brought me up,

Was it all for nothing?

Now—how can I face people?

How can I live on?

Oh, Dad, Dad, I've let you down! Aunty Wang, Ta-chun, I can never face you again! [Having decided to commit suicide, she finds a rope in a corner of the room, and picks it up.] Oh, Dad, Dad, I'm coming. [Ties the rope to a rafter.]

[CHANG enters and sees her through a crack of the door.]

CHANG: Hung-hsi, let me in!

HSI-ERH [startled]: Oh! [The rope falls from her trembling hands.]

CHANG: Hung-hsi! Open the door for me, quickly!

HSI-ERH [opens the door, and runs to CHANG as she enters]: Aunty! [Cries.]

CHANG: Hung-hsi! You—

HSI-ERH: I . . . I

CHANG [seeing the rope, understands]: Hung-hsi, how could you think of such a thing? You must never . . . never

HSI-ERH: Aunty! [Cries.]

CHANG: Child, how could you be so foolish as to think of such a thing! You must on no account do that.

HSI-ERH: Aunty, I . . . I can't face people any more.

CHANG: I understand. It's my fault for not looking after you better.

HSI-ERH: Aunty, I can't go on living. . . .

CHANG: Don't talk nonsense, child. What's done is done, but you have to live anyway. You're young, child, and there is hope. I'll look after you, and later on we two will live together. The day will come when we shall avenge your father. . . . [Helps her up, wiping her eyes.]

[HSI-ERH remains silent.]

CHANG: Stop crying now, and come and rest.

[TA-SHENG enters.]

TA-SHENG: Hung-hsi, Hung-hsi! [Seeing them.] Oh, there you are,

Hung-hsi! Last night you made such trouble, the old lady is asking for you!

[HSI-ERH looks frightened.]

CHANG: Go now.

HSI-ERH: Aunty! [She clings to CHANG.]

CHANG: I'll go with you, Hung-hsi. [They go out together.]

Curtain

ACT III

SCENE 1

Time: Seven months after the second act.

Place: Mrs. HUANG's room.

[Enter HUANG and MU carrying wedding invitation cards. The servant TA-SHENG follows, holding a teapot; and after him come thugs dressed in military uniform. CHANG comes on carrying colored silk. Mrs. HUANG enters holding a teacup from which she is sipping. The atmosphere is lively.]

HUANG [sings]:

Cassia trees in autumn—

ALL [sing]:

Make the whole courtyard fragrant!

HUANG [sings]:

Preparing for the wedding—

ALL [sing]:

We all work with a will!

MU: Our young master is now promoted captain of the militia, and getting married. This is truly a double happiness!

HUANG and MRS. HUANG [sing]:

The masters are busy!

ALL [sing]:

The servants are busy!

All busy and happy together!

MU: The preparations for our master's wedding have made every member of the household happy, whether young or old, master or servant!

Mrs. HUANG [sings]:

New clothes and coverlets must be quickly made!

[CHANG and TA-SHENG tear up the silk, while HUANG, Mrs. HUANG and MU sing cheerfully.]

TOGETHER [sing]:

Red silk and green, like ten thousand flowers!

Mrs. HUANG [sings]:

Measure it quickly! Cut it straight!

ALL [sing]:

Some for our master and some for his bride!

And some for quilts and covers for the bed!

To deck the bride!

To spread the bed!

Let's all hurry to get them made!

Mrs. HUANG [sings]:

Send cards at once to our relatives!

MU [sings]:

I take my pen and quickly write!

HUANG: To Secretary-General Sun of Kuomintang County Headquarters, to Magistrate Liu and Captain Li. . . .

Mrs. HUANG: To the Seventh Aunt, and to Uncle. . . .

MU [sings]:

One card is written and then another. . . .

ALL [sing]:

When the time comes, guests will gather,

Men and women, old and young,

To feast here in our hall together!

Mrs. HUANG: Chang, go to the servants' quarters, and see how the sewing is getting on.

CHANG: Yes, mistress.

Mrs. HUANG: Ta-sheng, go and see how the preparations for the feast are going forward.

TA-SHENG: Yes, mistress.

ALL [sing]:

Cassia trees in autumn make the whole courtyard fragrant,

The whole household's busy preparing for the wedding!

We're just waiting for the happy day to come,

When with flutes and cymbals we welcome the bride home!

[MU, CHANG, and TA-SHENG leave.]

MRS. HUANG [in a low voice]: Son, has that procurer from the city arrived?

HUANG: Not yet. I'm so worried, yesterday I sent for him again.

MRS. HUANG: Better hurry. Her condition is more obvious every day, and your wedding is drawing near. If you don't make haste, and word gets out, our family reputation will be ruined.

HUANG: How about this, Mother—for the next day or two let Old Mu keep an eye on her, and stop her running around. Later we can find a quiet place, and lock her up.

MRS. HUANG [approvingly]: Good. [Exeunt.]

[Enter MU.]

MU [picking up the invitations and glancing round prior to going out again]: Ah, here comes Hung-hsi. Landlord Huang told me to keep an eye on her. Let's see what she's up to. . . . [Hides behind the door.]

[Enter HSI-ERH, carrying a wooden pail. She is seven months pregnant, looks haggard, and walks with difficulty.]

HSI-ERH [sings]:

Seven months have passed—
Like a twig crushed beneath a stone,
I bear the shame, swallowing my tears.
I can't say how ill I feel.
Things have gone so far, there's no help for me,
I'll just have to bear it and swallow my pride.

[Entering the room she sees the red silk and invitation cards on the table.]

HSI-ERH: Ah, there's going to be a wedding. Does it mean Landlord Huang? . . .

[MU coughs. HSI-ERH steps aside. Enter MU.]

MU: Oh, Hung-hsi, what are you doing here?

HSI-ERH: Fetching hot water for the old lady.

MU: You must be happy now. What do you think I'm doing?

HSI-ERH: How should I know?

MU: Well, look at this! [Picking up the invitation cards.] What are these?

HSI-ERH: Those?

MU: Wedding cards, for the wedding! Ah, these days we're all busy preparing, didn't you know? As for you . . . you ought to be pleased now! You ought to be laughing! The old lady says you mustn't run around these days. . . . Just wait! [Exit.]

HSI-ERH: What? Steward Mu said I

[Enter HUANG.]

HSI-ERH [seeing HUANG]: Oh, it's you.

HUANG: Ah, Hung-hsi! [Wants to turn back.]

HSI-ERH [stopping him]: You—wait! I want to ask you something. . . .

HUANG: Well, but I'm busy now, Hung-hsi. . . .

HSI-ERH: Let me ask you—

HUANG: All right. [Taking up an invitation card, and listening helplessly.]

HSI-ERH: I'm growing bigger every day, what can I do? People laugh at me and despise me. But I can't die, however much I want to. Tell me, how shall I live on? . . .

HUANG: Er [Wanting to make off.]

HSI-ERH [stopping him]: Sir, you [Weeps.]

HUANG: Now, Hung-hsi don't cry. Er, you know, Hung-hsi, the time has nearly come. Just keep calm. Keep quiet, Hung-hsi, and don't run about. I'm going now to make preparations. [Exit hastily.]

[Enter CHANG with silk.]

HSI-ERH [bewildered]: Auntie

CHANG: So you're here.

HSI-ERH: What's that you're carrying, Auntie?

CHANG: Clothes I made for the bride.

HSI-ERH: Is there going to be a wedding, Auntie?

CHANG: I was just going to talk to you, Hung-hsi. Come along to our room for a talk. . . .

[She leads HSI-ERH out of the door, to their own room. The back curtain falls.]

HSI-ERH: Auntie—

CHANG: You know, Hung-hsi, the time is getting near. . . .

HSI-ERH: I know.

CHANG: You ought to realize.

HSI-ERH: I do realize, Auntie: it's seven months now. But what can I do? At least now he's

CHANG [surprised]: What are you talking about, Hung-hsi?

HSI-ERH: Just now Landlord Huang said he was going to marry me. . . .

CHANG: What! You're dreaming, Hung-hsi! You've got it wrong, child!

HSI-ERH [greatly taken aback]: What do you mean, Auntie?

CHANG [sings]:

Oh, Hung-hsi, you foolish child,
He's not going to marry you,
But a girl called Chao from town;
Her family's rich and powerful. . . .
Child!

Just think, Hung-hsi, how could he dream of marrying a servant like you or me?

HSI-ERH: No need to go on, Aunty. I lost my head for a moment. Landlord Huang is my enemy; even if he married me, he would make me lead a wretched life. Oh, it's just because I'm getting bigger every day, and can't do anything about it. So I thought—

CHANG: Ah, I meant once the child was born you should give it to me to bring up for you; then one day when you left the Huang family you could marry someone else. I didn't think to tell you about the wedding. Who could imagine you would suppose . . .

HSI-ERH: I understand now, Aunty. Now he's going to be married, and he's cheating me, too. What a devil he is! I'm not a child. He's ruined me, so that I can't hold up my head again; but I'm not like my father! Even a chicken will struggle when it's killed, and I'm a human being! Even if it kills me, Aunty, I'm going to speak my mind!

CHANG [crying]: I never thought of you as a child, love. I like your spirit—

HSI-ERH: Aunty! [Too moved to speak she falls into CHANG's arms.]
[Voice offstage: "Aunty Chang, the mistress wants you."]

CHANG: Someone's calling me. Wait a little, Hung-hsi. I'll be back soon. [Crossing the threshold she turns back.] Don't go out again. [Exit, closing the door.]

[HSI-ERH watches CHANG go. Presently she can no longer contain herself for anger, and rushes out, just as HUANG enters from the other side.]

HSI-ERH [fiercely]: Sir!

HUANG [startled]: Hung-hsi, why are you here?

HSI-ERH [stepping forward]: Sir, you . . .

HUANG: Now, Hung-hsi, go back quickly. It doesn't look good if you're seen in the courtyard.

HSI-ERH [loudly]: Landlord Huang!

HUANG [startled]: What! You—

HSI-ERH: On New Year's Eve you forced my dad to commit suicide!

On New Year's Day you got me to your home. Since I came, you've never treated me as a human being, but as dirt beneath your feet! Your mother beats and curses me! [Coming nearer.] And you— you ruined me!

HUANG: You . . . why bring that up now?

HSI-ERH [coming nearer]: I'm seven months gone, but you're getting married and deceiving me! I ask you, what do you mean by it! [Bites and tears at him.]

HUANG [throwing HSI-ERH down]: You fool! Mad! [He shakes her off and hurries out.]

HSI-ERH [getting up]: I'll have it out with you! I'll have it out with you! [Runs out after him.]

Curtain

SCENE 2

Mrs. HUANG's room

HUANG [enters hastily.]

HUANG: Mother! Mother!

Mrs. HUANG [putting down her opium pipe]: What is it, son?

HUANG: Mother, I was too careless. I didn't have Hung-hsi watched, and now she's making trouble.

Mrs. HUANG [sitting on the bed]: What's she been doing?

HUANG: She's after me now! Look, Mother, she's coming here! The guests will be here directly. If this gets known, it will be too bad.

Mrs. HUANG: The fool! She must be mad! Well, you go. Send Old Mu here.

[Exit HUANG.]

[Mrs. HUANG picks up a broomstick and stands waiting angrily. HSI-ERH runs in.]

HSI-ERH: I'll have it out with you! . . . [Enters the room.]

Mrs. HUANG: Silly girl! You are mad! Kneel down!

HSI-ERH: You! [Refusing to kneel.]

Mrs. HUANG [fiercely]: Kneel down!

[HSI-ERH looks at her angrily, trembling with hate.]

Mrs. HUANG: Wretched girl! Do you admit your guilt? I ask you, who got you with child?

HSI-ERH: What!

Mrs. HUANG: Wretched girl! Carrying on with men, you've spoiled

our family's reputation. Speak! Who is your lover? Speak up, who is it?

[MU comes in behind HSI-ERH's back.]

HSI-ERH [loudly]: It's your son! [CHANG is listening from one corner and HUANG from another.]

MRS. HUANG [furiously]: What! You liar! You are accusing my son? You are asking for trouble! [Steps forward to strike her.]

HSI-ERH [starts to rush forward but is seized by MU. She shrieks]: It's your son! It's your son! You've ruined my whole family! There isn't one good person in your Huang family! Not a single man or woman in your family for generations has been any good! You're all bitches and . . .

MRS. HUANG: Old Mu! Stop her mouth, quickly!

[MU gags HSI-ERH with a handkerchief.]

MRS. HUANG: Quickly shut her in the inner room and whip her! [MU drags HSI-ERH to the inner room and whips her. The strokes of the lash and muffled cries are heard.]

MRS. HUANG [listening]: Good, good. Today she must be well beaten. [CHANG listens in distress outside the door.]
[There is a pause.]

MRS. HUANG [taking out a lock]: Old Mu, lock the door for me.

[As MU locks the door, HUANG enters hastily. CHANG hides herself and listens at the door.]

HUANG: Mother, it's time now. I think we'll have to find a way to get rid of her. The guests will soon be here. If outsiders hear of this, it will be too bad.

MRS. HUANG: You're right. The bride is coming. If the bride's family hears of it, we'll be in an awkward position. . . . Old Mu, is there anybody outside?

[As MU looks outside the door, CHANG hides herself. MU re-enters the room, closing the door, and CHANG listens again.]

MU: No one.

MRS. HUANG: Good. We mustn't lose any time. Tonight when they are all asleep, Old Mu, you get a horse and take her away.

HUANG: Yes, Old Mu. When you get to the city, take the girl to the procurer for him to get rid of quickly. On no account must people know.

MU: Very good, sir. I'll do that. [Exit.]

HUANG: Don't be angry, Mother. Let's go to inspect the preparation of the bridal chamber. [Takes his mother's arm to help her out.]

[CHANG hides herself as HUANG and MRS. HUANG leave. Then she runs into the room and tries to open the inner door, but finds it locked.]

CHANG: The key? [She looks for the key on Mrs. HUANG's bed, and finding it, opens the door. A voice is heard offstage: "Aunty Chang!" Enter TA-SHENG. CHANG hides the key, and pretends nothing is amiss.]

TA-SHENG: Aunty Chang! [He comes in.] Oh, there you are, Aunty Chang. The mistress wants you to go to supervise the sewing.

CHANG: All right, I'm coming. [TA-SHENG goes out, followed by a distracted CHANG.]

[Voices are heard offstage]:

MU: Old Kao, what a drunkard you are!

KAO: It's the young master's wedding. Why shouldn't I drink?

MU: Saddle a horse for me at once. Quickly!

KAO: Why do you want a horse so late?

MU: Never you mind. Just get it ready.

KAO: All right. All right.

[CHANG re-enters, carrying cakes, and hastily closes the door. She puts the cakes on the table, then opens the door of the inner room.]

CHANG: Hung-hsi! Hung-hsi! [After dragging HSI-ERH out, she locks the door and puts the key back on the bed.]

CHANG: Hung-hsi! [Undoing the rope binding HSI-ERH's arms.] Hung-hsi! Hung-hsi! [Removing the gag from her mouth.] Hung-hsi! Wake up, Hung-hsi!

HSI-ERH [coming to herself]: Who are you?

CHANG [softly]: It's Aunty.

HSI-ERH: Ah, Aunty! . . . [Falls on CHANG.]

CHANG: Hung-hsi, Hung-hsi, I know all that happened. [Helping her up.] You must go quickly. They want to ruin you.

HSI-ERH: Ah!

CHANG: They're murderers! They've sold you! They'll be coming to fetch you, you must go at once! If you fall into their hands, you'll never escape again.

HSI-ERH: Aunty, they . . . they . . . [She wants to rush out.]

CHANG [pulling her back]: Don't be foolish, Hung-hsi. You're no match for them. Go quickly. You must fly for your life.

[HSI-ERH says nothing.]

CHANG: Go by the back door. Along the gully. I've opened the door for you. Quick! *[They start out.]*

[Voice from offstage: "Aunty Chang! Aunty Chang!" Taking fright they hide. The voice grows fainter.]

CHANG *[urgently]*: Hung-hsi, soon you won't be with me any more. In the future you'll have to make up your own mind. I can't go with you. They're calling me.

HSI-ERH: Aunty!

CHANG *[giving HSI-ERH the cakes from the table]*: Here are some cakes to eat on the road. Mind you only drink running water. However hard life is, you have to go on living. Remember how they destroyed your family. A day will come when you can avenge yourself.

HSI-ERH: I shall remember, Aunty.

CHANG *[giving HSI-ERH money]*: Here's some money I've saved. You'll need it on your journey. Soon I'll be leaving their family. One day we shall meet again.

HSI-ERH *[takes the money and kneels down]*: Aunty—

CHANG: Ah, Hung-hsi, get up. Go quickly. *[Opens the door and runs out, leading HSI-ERH.]*

[Voice from offstage: "Aunty Chang! Aunty Chang!"]

[After a while CHANG comes back by the way she went out, walking calmly. The third watch sounds. Enter HUANG and MU.]

HUANG *[taking the key from his mother's bed, unlocks the inner room, goes in, and discovers HSI-ERH has gone. In surprise]*: What! Where's Hung-hsi? She's disappeared!

MU: What!

HUANG: Old Mu, Hung-hsi has escaped! The back window is open. She must have climbed out through the window. Go and catch her, Old Mu. When you've caught her, strangle her with a rope and throw her into the river, so we won't have any more trouble. *[They leave the room.]*

MU: She won't dare leave by the front gate, sir. Let's go by the back gate. *[Exeunt.]*

Curtain

SCENE 3

[HSI-ERH is escaping by the back gate. There are stars in the sky.]

HSI-ERH *[falls down and gets up again. Sings]*:

They want to kill me, to murder me,
But I've escaped from their tigers' den!
Mother bore me, Dad brought me up,
I want to live, I want to live!

[She runs off.]

[HUANG and MU enter in pursuit, carrying ropes.]

HUANG: Hurry up after her, Old Mu!

MU: Right.

HUANG: If she took this road, there's a big river in front, and she can't get away.

[They pursue. A mountain looms in front. On one side is a rushing river flanked by marshland. HSI-ERH hurries in.]

HSI-ERH *[sings]*:

I'm going on, I'll not turn back,
I've been wronged and I want revenge!
They killed my dad and ruined me,
I'll remember it in my grave!

[The sound of running water is heard.]

I can hear running water,
There's a river gleaming under the stars;
It's a great river flowing east,
I've lost my way—where shall I go?

[Suddenly the sound of heavy footsteps behind throws her into a panic.] Ah! I'm being followed! *[She stumbles and falls in the mud. When she extricates herself her shoes have fallen off; but her pursuers are near, and she has no time to pick up her shoes.]* There are some reeds. I'd better hide myself there. *[She crawls into the reeds.]*

[Enter HUANG and MU.]

HUANG: Can you see her, Old Mu?

MU: No. *[They search.]*

HUANG: The river's in front. Where could she have gone?

MU: The mountains on both sides are steep, and there's no path.

HUANG: A girl, and so near her time, where can she go?

MU: She won't get away, sir. *[They search again.]*

MU [suddenly discovering a shoe]: Ah, sir, isn't this Hung-hsi's shoe?

HUANG [taking the shoe]: Yes, it's hers allright.

MU: Then she must have jumped into the river.

HUANG: Ah, well, she brought it on herself. Well, that saves us trouble. Let's go back, Old Mu. If questions are asked, we'll just say she stole things and ran away. Don't let anyone know the truth.

MU: Right. [They leave by the way they came.]

HSI-ERH [emerges from the reeds and sings]:

They want to kill me, how blind they are!

I'm water that can't be drained dry!

I'm fire that can't be quenched!

I'm not dying, I'm going to live!

And live to be avenged!

[She hurries into the mountains.]

Curtain

ACT IV

SCENE I

Time: Three years later—the autumn of 1937.⁵

Place: On the hillside overlooking the river, not far from the Goddess' Temple. It is dusk. The sun is setting.

[Enter UNCLE CHAO with a long whip, leading his flock.]

CHAO [sings]:

Year after year passes,

And the road's overgrown with wild grass;

Houses crumble and the place is empty,

Some have died and some have gone.

When cold winds blow, the lonely grieve;

Water flows eastward never to return.

[He stands at the river's edge watching the water flow eastward, then speaks with feeling.] Ah, how quickly time passes. It's three years since that child Hsi-erh drowned herself in the river. . . .

[Sits on a boulder.]

[Enter LI from one side carrying incense.]

LI [seeing CHAO]: Ah, Uncle Chao, watching the flock?

CHAO: Well, Li, where are you off to?

LI: I'm going to burn incense before the White-haired Goddess.

CHAO: Burn incense before the White-haired Goddess? . . . Oh, yes, it's the fifteenth of the moon again today. . . .

LI [sitting down beside CHAO]: It's quite some time now since the White-haired Goddess appeared in these parts. . . .

CHAO: Well, we shall see. Something must be going to happen. . . . [Leans forward a little, as if he heard something.]

LI [suddenly standing up]: Listen, Uncle Chao!

CHAO [after a pause]: Oh, it's only the wind in the reeds.

LI [relaxing. Softly]: Tell me, Uncle, have you seen it?

CHAO: Seen what?

LI: The White-haired Goddess, Uncle. Old Liu met her once in Uncle Yang's land, and Chang Szu saw her when he was cutting wood in the North Mountain gully. They say she was all white, in the shape of a woman; but she was gone in a flash. . . . [Shivers.] [Pause.]

CHAO [thinking back]: Ah, if the White-haired Goddess were any good, then Hsi-erh's family should have been avenged.

LI: May the fairy help us; [Pauses.] Say, Uncle, wasn't it that autumn Aunty Chang sent Hsi-erh

[CHAO hastily stops him and looks around.]

LI [in a lowered voice]: Didn't you say Aunty Chang sent her away?

CHAO: Ah, how could a girl run far? She drowned herself in the river, poor thing. . . .

LI [sighs. They are silent. He looks at the sky]: Uncle, I must go to burn incense now. A storm is coming. [He moves toward the temple.]

CHAO [sighs sadly. Sings]:

Is there no good judge

To right the wrongs of old?

What we suffered in the past

No words can tell!

But if the goddess were any good at all,

She'd avenge the ghosts of those unjustly killed!

[AUNTY WANG, leaning on AUNTY CHANG's arm, enters from the direction of the temple.]

CHANG: Uncle Chao!

CHAO: Oh, Aunty Chang, Aunty Wang! You've been all that way to burn incense?

CHANG: Well, Aunty Wang insisted I come with her. Ah, when you're brooding over something, you can't forget it.

WANG [crying]: Uncle Chao . . . I want nothing else, great goddess, but let my child come back. . . . I've never done a bad deed in my life. Why should this have happened to me? All these years have passed, Uncle Chao, yet every day as soon as I close my eyes, I see Hsi-erh on one side and Ta-chun on the other. Oh, son, why have you forgotten your mother? Poor children! One drowned herself, and the other ran away. . . . [Cries bitterly.]

CHANG: Now don't cry, Aunty Wang. [Comforting her.] Don't take on so, Aunty Wang.

CHAO: Nothing can bring the dead to life. What's the use of crying? . . . Although Hsi-erh died, she died well. . . . As for Ta-chun, although there's been no news of him since he left, he'll come back some day. . . .

CHANG: That's right. Every day since I left the Huang family, I've reasoned with her, saying, "Wait, Aunty. Although Hsi-erh is dead, Ta-chun is sure to come back. Don't complain of fate. Our fate is the same. I'll help you, and you help me. Then we shall struggle along in spite of difficulties."

CHAO [nodding sadly]: Struggle along, struggle along. One day Heaven will stop being blind.

[Li enters hurriedly, in consternation. There is a gust of wind.]

LI [looking pale]: Uncle Chao! Uncle Chao!

CHAO: What is it?

LI: She's coming! She's coming!

THE OTHERS: What is it?

LI: Behind the temple! White! All white! The White-haired Goddess!

THE OTHERS [panic-stricken]: What, is it true? Let's go quickly!

[They run off. CHAO follows with his sheep. The sky grows dark, thunder rolls and the storm breaks.]

[A chorus sings offstage]:

The storm is coming,
The storm is coming,
THE STORM IS COMING!
Heaven and earth grow dark
With lightning and with thunder!

Heaven and earth grow dark
With lightning and with thunder!

God has grown angry,
And the world's in chaos!

A gale has sprung up, and from the mountain
The White-haired Goddess is coming down!

[A great clap of thunder and flash of lightning.]

[Enter the WHITE-HAIRED GODDESS—HSI-ERH—with dishevelled white hair, rushing through the storm.]

HSI-ERH [sings]:

I came down to gather fruit and berries,
When this sudden thunderstorm broke.
The mountain's steep and the path is slippery,
I can't get back to my cave, so I'll take shelter
In the Goddess' Temple nearby.

[She slips and falls and her fruit rolls to the ground. She hastily picks it up.] I've spent more than three years out of the sun. Today I came out to get some maize and potatoes and steal some food from the shrine for my winter store. . . .

[Thunder and a downpour. HSI-ERH sings]:

Lightning makes me close my eyes
Thunder makes me lower my head
Wind tries to sweep me off my feet,
And I'm drenched in the pouring rain!
But never mind the thunder and lightning,
The wind and the pouring rain!
I clench my teeth
And step by step
Push on—
The temple's close ahead!

[Exit in the direction of the temple.]

[Mu enters running through the storm with a lantern and umbrella.]

MU [sings]:

Thunder's crashing, lightning's flashing,
This storm broke out of the blue!
Master went to town on business,
What's keeping him so long?

[At a clap of thunder he crouches down.] Ah, what weather! . . . Really, what is the world coming to! Recently I heard the

Japanese fought their way across from Lukouchiao and have occupied Paoting.⁵ They may even be here in a few days. Landlord Huang went to town for news. He ought to be back by now. . . . [He is restless and anxious. Thunder rolls again. He stares ahead, not knowing what to do.] Ah, during the last few years the villagers have been talking about some white-haired goddess, and ghostly noises are heard at midnight. [Sighs.] What can I do? . . . [Shivers.]

[He suddenly sees a shadowy figure on the left, and gives a start.] Who is it?

[After a pause, LANDLORD HUANG'S voice is heard in the dark: "Oh. . . . Is it Old Mu?"]

MU [reassured]: You're back at last, sir!

[HUANG hurries in holding an umbrella, followed by TA-SHENG.]

MU: Are you all right, sir?

HUANG: Things look bad, Old Mu! [Sings]:

*I set out for the county town
The day before yesterday;
But I'd only reached the market town
When I heard some dreadful news!
The Japanese have taken the county town,
So I hurried right back,
Hurried back like mad today!*

MU [startled]: What! Is it true?

TA-SHENG: Yes.

HUANG: It's appalling! The Japanese kill people and set fire to houses! All my in-laws have fallen into their hands!

MU [more alarmed]: Heavens! Then what can we do, sir?

HUANG [reassuringly]: Don't worry, Old Mu. Whatever changes take place, we'll always be able to find a way out. Come on, let's go home first.

[There is a clap of thunder, and the rain pours down more heavily.]

MU: The storm's growing worse, sir. Let's take shelter first in the temple. [The three battle their way toward the temple. On the way they meet HSI-ERH. A flash of lightning lights up the WHITE-HAIRED GODDESS.]

HUANG [panic-stricken]: What!

[There is another flash of lightning, and HSI-ERH recognizes HUANG.]

HUANG: Ghosts! Ghosts!

[The three men hide in terror.]

HSI-ERH [in rising anger rushes at HUANG and the others, throwing the sacrificial fruit at HUANG and shrieking]: Ahh!

HUANG and MU [flying in terror]: Help! . . . Help! . . . Ghosts! Ghosts! [They rush off, followed by TA-SHENG.]

[A pause.]

HSI-ERH [halting in alarm and uncertainty]: Ghosts? Ghosts? [She looks round, then is silent for a moment.] Oh, you mean I'm a ghost? [She looks at her hair and clothes.] So, I don't look like a human being! [Her voice trembles with indignation and grief.] This is all your doing, Landlord Huang! You brought me to this! And you call me a ghost? . . .

[Wind, rain, and thunder are heard, and lightning flashes, as HSI-ERH sings.]

*I'm Hsi-erh whom you ruined,
I'm not a ghost!*

[Thunder crashes even closer.]

*. . . I've lived in a cave for more than three years,
Gritting my teeth for misery;
Hiding by day for fear folk see me,
While at night there are tigers and wolves;
I've only rags and leaves to wear,
Only temple offerings and berries to eat,
So my hair and skin have turned white!*

[Accusingly.]

*I was brought up by parents, too,
But now I've come to this pass!
It's all through you, Landlord Huang,
You brought me to this, yet now you call me
A ghost! All right—
I'm a ghost!
The ghost of someone cruelly killed!
The ghost of someone hounded to death!
I'm going to scratch and pinch you!
I'm going to bite you!*

[Shrieks.]

[She rushes headlong into the storm.]

[Lightning and sheets of rain.]

[The chorus sings "The Storm . . ." offstage, the sound gradually dies away in the distance.]

Curtain

SCENE 2

The following afternoon.

Under a big tree at one end of the village.

[OLD CHAO and two peasants enter. They are obviously upset.]

ALL [sing]:

A storm's sprung up. The world's
In a bad way, we can't live in peace.

FIRST PEASANT:

Landlord Huang has practically squeezed us dry!

SECOND PEASANT:

The White-haired Goddess is making trouble!

CHAO:

The Japanese are fighting their way over!

PEASANTS:

It's said they've taken Paoting city!

FIRST PEASANT:

Hu-tzu has gone to town for news.

SECOND PEASANT:

Why isn't he back yet?

ALL:

It's enough to distract one, such goings on!

CHAO: Ah, Hu-tzu went to town three days ago; how is it he's not back yet?

FIRST PEASANT: Could he have met the Japanese?

SECOND PEASANT: Surely they can't be there already? [Sighs.]

[As the three are waiting impatiently, AUNTY CHANG hurries in.]

CHANG: Oh, you're here. Have you heard the news?

ALL [startled]: What's happened?

CHANG: Yesterday evening when Landlord Huang was coming back from town and took shelter in the temple from the rain, he saw a ghost!

ALL [amazed]: Really?

CHANG: It's true. He's ill now from the shock.

CHAO: Well! Now the Huang family's sins are finding them out, if ghosts come out to confront him!

CHANG: And I heard those Japanese have occupied the county town!

ALL [startled]: No! Then what's to be done?

CHAO [stamping impatiently]: Why isn't Hu-tzu back yet?

FIRST PEASANT: Oh, look! Isn't that Hu-tzu coming?

ALL [shouting]: Hu-tzu! Hu-tzu!

[HU-TZU hurries in.]

HU-TZU [panting]: You're all here. Things are in a bad way! [Sings.]

The Japanese have taken the county town,
And smashed the Kuomintang troops!
The county head's fled, the commissioner too,
Leaving just the people, with nowhere to turn!

ALL: Ah! Only the people are left to bear the brunt!

HU-TZU [sings]:

When the Kuomintang troops fled from the market town,
There was cursing, conscripting, beating and looting!
And when the Japanese come, so they say,
There's always burning, raping, shooting!

ALL: Heavens! Only the people are left with no one to care for them!

HU-TZU [sings]:

But I heard some good news too—
Troops have come from the west, with banners flying.
They'll fight the Japanese and save us all!
They can march sixty miles in a single night,
They're super men and officers, they really fight!

ALL [astounded]: Really?

HU-TZU [sings]:

At Pinghsing Pass they won a great victory,
Killing several thousand Japanese,
Then fought their way north. . . .

ALL: What army is that?

HU-TZU [sings]:

They call it the eight—eight—
Eighth Route Army!

ALL [at a loss, echoing him]: What—the Eighth Route Army?

HU-TZU [emphatically]: Yes. They're called the Eighth Route Army.⁶

I heard they're very good to the people—

[LI rushes in before HU-TZU has finished, carrying a hoe.]

[The "Eighth Route Army March" is heard.]

LI [showing amazement]: Quick! Quick! I was just coming in from the fields, when I saw troops coming down the Southern Hill!

ALL [alarmed]: What! Troops?

FIRST PEASANT: Could it be the Japanese?

LI: No, they didn't look like Japanese. They're Chinese troops!
 SECOND PEASANT: Ah, they must be retreating.
 LI: They don't look like retreating either. You look! *[All stare in the direction he points.]* They're in good order, heading briskly due north.
 ALL *[looking]*: Ah, there are so many of them!
 LI: Ha! That's a funny army! They're all youngsters, wearing big straw hats, and with no puttees, only shoes. And there's a figure "eight" on their sleeves.
 ALL *[in unison]*: Oh, they must be the Eighth Route Army!
[The martial music grows louder.]
[They watch anxiously.]
 SECOND PEASANT *[suddenly catching sight of them]*: Ah! Here they come! Here they come!
[An armyman's voice offstage: "Hey! Countryman—countrymen!"]
[They all take cover in fright.]
[Enter TA-SO, ragged and unkempt, leading a soldier who proves to be TA-CHUN.]
 TA-SO: By calling out like that, Ta-chun, you frightened them all away! Say, Ta-chun, just now there was someone here who looked like Uncle Chao.
 TA-CHUN: Let's call him then.
 TA-SO: Uncle Chao! Uncle Chao!
 TA-CHUN *[calling too]*: Uncle Chao!
[After a pause, CHAO and others enter; but the sight of the soldier makes them fall back a few steps in fear.]
 TA-CHUN *[advancing]*: Uncle Chao, don't you know me? I'm Ta-chun!
 TA-SO: I'm Ta-so!
 ALL *[incredulously]*: What? Ta-chun! Ta-so! *[After a second they recognize them, and are overjoyed.]* Well! Well! Ta-chun! Ta-so! You've come back! *[Other peasants crowd in.]*
[They sing happily in unison]:
 A clap of thunder,
 And then a sunny sky!
 The stars in heaven
 Are falling from on high!
 Ta-chun! *[Some: Ta-so!]* You've been away so long,
 Who could tell you would come home today!
[Enter a peasant: "Ta-chun! Your mother's coming!"]
[TA-CHUN goes to meet her.]

ALL *[following TA-CHUN to meet her, sing]*:
 Now mother and son will meet,
 And be together from now on!
 All we country folk are happy, too;
 All we country folk are happy for you!
[AUNTY WANG runs in, calling "Ta-chun! Ta-chun!"]
 TA-CHUN *[shouts]*: Mother!
 WANG *[unable to believe her eyes, hesitates, then rushes forward, crying]*: Ta-chun! My boy!
 TA-CHUN: Mother! *[He breaks down, too.]*
 SOME PEASANTS *[comfortingly]*: Aunty Wang . . . *[Sing.]*
 Don't take on so!
 OTHERS *[sing]*:
 Don't be so upset, Ta-chun!
 CHANG: Don't make your mother sad, Ta-chun!
 CHAO *[wiping his eyes]*: Don't take on so, Aunty. Ta-chun's back, isn't he?
 WANG *[wiping her eyes]*: Oh . . . I'm not . . . not sad. *[Cries again.]*
 CHAO: Well! *[sings.]*
 You waited day after day so many years,
 Now Ta-chun's here, isn't he?
 ALL *[sing]*:
 Isn't it grand that he's back!
 CHANG: Your day of rejoicing has come, Aunty.
 CHAO: Tell us, Ta-chun, how did you come back?
 TA-CHUN and TA-SO: Right!
 TA-CHUN: Mother, Uncle—
 TA-SO: Aunty Chang, neighbors—
 TA-CHUN and TA-SO *[sing]*:
 When we left that year,
 Landlord Huang—
 TA-CHUN:
 Drove me out with nowhere to go!
 TA-SO:
 Threw me into the county jail!
 TA-CHUN:
 I fled to Shansi province,
 And joined the army there!
 TA-SO:
 Life was misery in that jail!

TA-CHUN:

Today our troops have come to the front,
Determined to fight the Japanese invaders!

TA-SO:

They stormed the county town and opened the jail doors,
Letting us out after all we'd suffered!

BOTH:

So we came back together,
Home to see our old neighbors!

ALL [to TA-CHUN]: What army do you belong to then?

TA-CHUN [sings]:

I'm in the Eighth Route Army.

TA-SO [simultaneously]:

He's in the Eighth Route Army!

ALL [delighted, crowding round him]: Oh, so you joined the Eighth Route Army then! [Sing]:

The Eighth Route Army! The Eighth Route Army!
You've come from the west!
It was you who won the battle of Pinghsing Pass,
You're the army with the super officers and men!

TA-CHUN: Yes, the Eighth Route Army, led by the Communist Party, is like one family with the common people. Do you remember, Uncle Chao, you used to talk about the Red Army? That Red Army is the present Eighth Route Army!

CHAO: Eh? What's that you say? The Eighth Route is the same as the Red Army? [Wildly happy, to all.] Ho! Have you all forgotten the Red Army that came to Chao Village on the thirteenth of the fifth moon that year, the day the War God sharpened his knife? . . . It's too good to be true; It's too good to be true! Everything will work out all right now. The Red Army's come back again!

TA-CHUN [correcting him]: The Eighth Route Army—the Eighth Route Army's come back!

ALL [in unison]: The Eighth Route Army—the Eighth Route Army's come back! Now there'll really be a change for the better!

[Laughter.]

[The "Eighth Route Army March" sounds loudly offstage.]

[All go to meet the troops.]

Curtain

ACT V

SCENE 1

Time: Spring, 1938.

Place: Under the big tree in front of the village. The tree has come into leaf. This village has become one of the Eighth Route Army's anti-Japanese bases behind the enemy's lines. The early morning sun lights up the sentry box of the Self Defense Corps. From a tree beside it hangs a reading board on which is written: "Resist Japan and Reduce Rents."

[HU-TZU, carrying a lance with a red silk tassel, is on sentry duty.]

HU-TZU [sings]:

The first clap of thunder in spring!
The first lamp lit in the valley!
The poor are going to be masters,
Now the Communist Party's come!
We mustn't be afraid, we must fight
To build up our new people's power.
Since the government's ordered rents reduced,
We must all rally round and work hard!

[Cheerfully.] Ah! At last the time has come for us poor folk to be masters! Last year when Ta-chun was transferred here from the army he became assistant officer of our district. When the village held an election for political officers in the first moon, Uncle Chao was elected village head and Ta-so chairman of the Peasants' Union. Now an order has come that rents be reduced, so we shall have to settle old scores with Landlord Huang. [Sighs.] Only the villagers don't all see eye to eye yet. Folk are still so afraid of Landlord Huang and that "White-haired Goddess" that nobody dares stick his neck out. There was to be a meeting today, but I'm sure they won't all come. [Walks to one side to look round.]

[Enter UNCLE CHAO and TA-SO.]

CHAO and TA-SO [sing]:

If everyone rallies round,
Our struggle is sure to succeed!

The government will back us up,
They're sending us cadres today.

TA-SO: Hu-tzu!

HU-TZU [turning round]: Oh, Ta-so! . . . Oh no—[Hastily correcting himself.] Peasant Union Chairman and Village Head. [Laughs.]

CHAO [laughing, too]: Have you seen anybody from the district, Hu-tzu?

HU-TZU [impatiently]: Not yet!

TA-SO: They said they'd come today; why aren't they here yet?
[Goes to one side to look.]

CHAO: Hu-tzu! This time we're going to demand rent reduction and settle old scores with Landlord Huang. How about it, youngster? Do you dare stand out and speak up?

HU-TZU: Need you ask, Village Head? Of course I want to attack Landlord Huang. [Raising his thumb.] I'll be the first! . . . But one person isn't enough. See here, this looks bad; a meeting was announced for today, but so far nobody's shown up! Bah! I think it'll be a washout.

CHAO [reassuringly]: Now, Hu-tzu, don't you worry. It's always darkest before dawn. Today cadres are coming from the district with Ta-chun; we've already thought out a good plan, and we're not afraid of Landlord Huang's tricks! . . . Keep cool, youngster, and wait and see. It won't be long now!

HU-TZU: All right. [Smiles contentedly.]

TA-SO [seeing figures on the road to the village]: Hey, Uncle Chao, is that Ta-chun and the district head there?

[CHAO and HU-TZU look.]

HU-TZU: Yes, it is. It's Ta-chun. And the district head!

[Two figures approach, and they go eagerly to meet them, calling "District Head!" "Ta-chun!"]

[The district head and TA-CHUN walk briskly in.]

HU-TZU: Hey! Ta-chun . . . Oh no, it's our Assistant Officer Wang who's come!

[TA-CHUN mops his head and smiles at HU-TZU.]

CHAO [to the district head]: We've been waiting a long time. Why are you so late?

DISTRICT HEAD [wiping his face]: Ta-chun and I came by way of Liu Village; otherwise we'd have been here much earlier.

CHAO: How about it? I suggest we go first to the village office.

TA-SO: Yes, let's go to the village office first.

[They start for the village.]

[Sound of villagers singing in unison offstage.]

DISTRICT HEAD [seeing the villagers approaching]: Hullo! What are these folk doing?

HU-TZU [stepping forward]: Bah! They're going again to sacrifice to the "White-haired Goddess," damn them! See there's that rogue Steward Mu, too!

TA-CHUN [to the district head]: Suppose we step out of sight for a second, District Head, and watch them?

CHAO: Yes, just come over here. [They hide on one side. HU-TZU takes cover, too.]

[Enter the villagers—an old man, an old woman, two peasants and two women, carrying incense and offerings. MU follows.]

ALL [sing]:

The world is out of joint,
And troubles never cease;
But the White-haired Goddess has power
To protect and give us peace!

MU [seeing there is no one about, addresses them craftily]: Ah, do you know? Another strange thing happened yesterday evening!

ALL [startled]: What?

MU: The White-haired Goddess appeared again! [Sings.]

Yesterday, at the dead of night,
The White-haired Goddess appeared again!
"You shan't reap what you've sown," she said.
"There's great trouble ahead!
Ruin will stalk the land,
Everywhere men will die,
Everywhere fires will break out,
The sound of weeping will reach the sky!"

ALL [aghast]: Oh! What can we do?

MU [sings]:

Then she warned men:
"To be safe and sound,
You must do good deeds!
Don't meddle in things that aren't your concern,
And offer more incense in the temple.
If you do this you'll be safe!"

ALL [pray]: Oh, Goddess, help us!

MU: And the goddess said, too—[Sings.]
*The Eighth Route Army won't last long,
 It'll vanish like dew in the sun!
 When the sun comes out the dew disappears,
 And the Eighth Route Army will soon be gone!*

[HU-TZU has already appeared behind MU. Now he rushes forward, snatches MU's incense and candles, and dashes them to the ground.]

HU-TZU: You bastard, what rumors are you spreading?

MU [taken by surprise, is at a loss for words]: I . . . I [Stoops to pick up his incense and candles.]

HU-TZU: Get out! [Kicks him off, stamping on the candles and incense.]

[Exit MU in alarm.]

[The others make as if to leave, but HU-TZU stops them.]

HU-TZU [angrily]: Stop! No one must pass! Well! When you are summoned to a meeting, you won't come, but you have plenty of time for burning incense.

CROWD [protestingly]:

What are you doing, Hu-tzu?
 What if you offend the goddess?
 This concerns us all, not just you.

HU-TZU [not yielding]: The goddess, indeed! Where is the goddess?
 No, I won't let you go! [He is spoiling for a fight.]
 [The district head, TA-CHUN, CHAO, and TA-SO come in hastily.
 CHAO pulls HU-TZU aside and restrains him.]

CHAO: Hu-tzu

TA-SO: Don't be angry. No need to get excited.

DISTRICT HEAD: That's right, friends. Don't get heated
 [The crowd quiets down.]

OLD MAN: Now the district head is here.

CROWD: Ah, District Head, Ta-chun

DISTRICT HEAD: Friends, weren't you talking about the White-haired Goddess? Let's hear what miracles the goddess has worked.

TA-CHUN: That's right. Just what?

OLD MAN: District Head, Ta-chun [Sings.]

*The White-haired Goddess often shows herself,
 It's three whole years now we've seen her.*

FIRST PEASANT [Sings]:

*We've all seen her,
 She comes and goes without a trace. . . .*

SECOND PEASANT: She's all in white! A flash—and she's gone! [Sings.]
*She's often in the Goddess' Temple,
 Where she comes out at dead of night!*

THIRD PEASANT [sings]:

*The sacrifice set out one day
 Will be gone by the next!*

FOURTH PEASANT [sings]:

*She declares truths in the temple,
 Every word can be heard distinctly!*

FIFTH PEASANT: It's true. She said—[Sings.]

*Men are wicked, sinful creatures,
 That's why we can't have peace!*

SIXTH PEASANT: And Steward MU told us—[Sings.]

*The White-haired Goddess is so powerful,
 We must all mend our ways!*

ALL [sing]:

Otherwise we'll offend her, and that'll be the end of us!

HU-TZU [impatiently]: That's a pack of lies! Where is the White-haired Goddess? Why haven't I seen her?
 [The crowd shows fresh indignation.]

FIRST: How can you say that, Hu-tzu?

SECOND: Everybody knows how powerful the goddess is.

THIRD: Who will bear her anger if you offend her?

DISTRICT HEAD [intervening persuasively]: Friends, don't lose your heads. Let's look into the business of the goddess. We must get to the bottom of it. . . . If you want to burn incense, we won't stop you. But I hope you'll give some thought, too, to the matter of reducing rents. Our government will always work for the people.

TA-CHUN: Just think what we've suffered all these years. Now the communists are here, leading us to become our own masters. We must stand up and act!

OLD MAN: Well, yes, District Head, Ta-chun. . . . We'll leave you now.

DISTRICT HEAD: All right. In a few days we'll get together and have a talk. [The villagers leave.]

DISTRICT HEAD [to CHAO and TA-SO]: Village Head, Ta-so, it's clear

what's happening. We've studied the relevant materials in our office, too. [*In a low voice.*] This is no simple matter . . .

TA-CHUN [*following him up*]: That's right. Landlord Huang is involved. The district office has decided to get to the bottom of the mystery of the "White-haired Goddess." . . . Tonight there'll be a full moon. I think Ta-so and I should go to the Goddess' Temple . . .

[*They confer in whispers.*]

DISTRICT HEAD [*to CHAO and TA-SO*]: What do you think? Do you agree?

CHAO: Yes. A good idea.

TA-SO: Right, let's see what happens tonight.

DISTRICT HEAD: Better be on your guard, Village Head.

CHAO [*eagerly*]: That goes without saying. . . . [*Turns to HU-TZU.*]

Hu-tzu, you keep a sharp watch in that direction tonight. Our day of vengeance is coming, youngster.

TA-CHUN: Then let's go quickly and prepare.

[*They walk briskly out.*]

[*HU-TZU, holding his red-tasseled lance, climbs onto a mound to stand guard.*]

Curtain

SCENE 2

Evening.

The Goddess' Temple. There are offerings on the shrine. It is dark and eerie.

[*Enter TA-CHUN carrying a pistol, and TA-SO with an unlighted torch and a big knife. Approaching the door, they look around, then whisper together and enter the temple. TA-CHUN points out a corner to TA-SO, and both hide themselves. The wind roars. The temple lamp sheds an eerie light. Pause.*]

[*TA-CHUN peers out from the gloom, then shrinks back into the shadows. There is musical accompaniment throughout.*]

TA-SO [*nervously*]: Ta-chun! Ta-chun!

TA-CHUN [*stopping him*]: Quiet! [*Makes a gesture, and they keep silent again.*]

[*Enter the "White-haired Goddess" from outside. She darts behind the shrine. After a while, seeing there is nobody there, she comes out to collect the sacrifices on the shrine.*]

[*TA-CHUN and TA-SO leap out from the darkness.*]

TA-CHUN [*shouting*]: Who are you?

HSI-ERH [*taken by surprise, is bewildered. She shrieks and rushes at TA-CHUN*]: Ah!

[*TA-CHUN fires. HSI-ERH is hit in the arm and falls, but she gets up and runs out in fright.*]

TA-CHUN: Ta-so! After her, quick!

[*The scene changes. On the mountain path.*]

[*HSI-ERH, clutching her wounded arm, runs with difficulty, and jumps over a ditch and runs off.*]

[*TA-CHUN and TA-SO follow.*]

TA-SO: Which way? She's vanished again!

TA-CHUN [*looks around and down at the ground*]: The trail of blood has disappeared, too.

TA-SO [*looking down*]: There's a valley beneath us. We have come a long way.

TA-CHUN [*making a discovery*]: Look, Ta-so! There's a gleam of light!

TA-SO: Ah, it must be a cave!

[*The crying of a child is heard.*]

TA-CHUN [*listening hard*]: There seems to be a child crying. . . . Let's go after her, Ta-so.

[*The two jump across the ditch.*]

TA-CHUN: Ta-so, light the torch! [*Exeunt.*]

[*The music continues. There is a gust of wind.*]

[*The scene changes again. Inside the cave. An oil lamp gleams on a ledge of the rock, its flickering light revealing the gloom and horror of the cave. On one side are piled firewood, wild fruit, maize, and temple offerings. The child is struggling and crying on the firewood as HSI-ERH, panic-stricken, crawls into the cave, and blocks the entrance with a rock. Seeing its mother the child crawls over, crying "Ma!" Outside the cave TA-CHUN's voice is heard "Ta-so! Here! Here!" They push at the rock, which crashes down. They enter the cave, TA-SO holding the torch. HSI-ERH hastily steps to one side to shield her child with her body.*]

TA-CHUN [covering HSI-ERH with his pistol]: Are you man or spirit?
Speak!

TA-SO: Quickly! Man or spirit?

TA-CHUN: Speak or I'll fire!

HSI-ERH [with hatred, fiercely]: I

TA-CHUN: Speak! Speak and I'll let you go.

HSI-ERH: I . . . I . . . [Explosively.] I'm human, human, human!
[Sings.]

*I'm flesh and blood! I've a heart like you!
Why do you say I'm not human?*

TA-CHUN: Where did you come from?

HSI-ERH [sings]:

*Under the mountain a stream flows by,
From Yangko Village my family!*

TA-CHUN and TA-SO [startled]: Then how did you come here?

HSI-ERH: All because of your Huang family! [Sings.]

*You hounded my dad to death!
You forced Ta-chun to leave home! [TA-CHUN and TA-SO
stand dumbfounded.]
You want to kill me, but I won't die!
I came and lived in this cave,
Each day I traced a line on the stone,
But they're not enough to express my hate!
Such hate, such burning for revenge
Is cut in my bones and engraved on my heart!
Ah! [Cries.]
Did you think I was dead?
You were wrong, wrong! [Laughs loudly.]
I'm a fire you'll never put out!
I'm a tree you'll never uproot!*

TA-CHUN and TA-SO: What is your name?

HSI-ERH [sings]:

*I'm the fire in the waste, I'm the tree on the hill!
And I am Hsi-erh—who is living still!*

[TA-CHUN and TA-SO exclaim in amazement.]

HSI-ERH: Well, now you've come again, I'll have it out with you!
I'll have it out with you! [Rushes wildly at them. TA-CHUN and
TA-SO stand there at a loss. The torch in TA-SO's hand is still

burning, and by its light she sees TA-CHUN's face.] Ah, you, you!
[To her amazement she recognizes TA-CHUN.] Are you Ta-chun?
[Faints.]

[The child cries over her.]

[TA-CHUN and TA-SO step forward hastily and look at her.]

TA-CHUN [speaking as if in a dream]: Yes It is Hsi-erh. [He
pauses, not knowing what to do, then sees the wound on her
arm.] Ah! [Taking a towel, he binds it up very sadly, calling
softly.] Hsi-erh!

TA-SO: Hsi-erh!

[The pain of her wound brings HSI-ERH to herself. She sighs and
opens her eyes. When she sees TA-CHUN, she knows all is well, and
listlessly closes her eyes again.]

[Musical accompaniment.]

TA-CHUN [looks from HSI-ERH to the cave. He remembers all the past,
and his tears flow. Then he grows angry]: Now I understand every-
thing! Ta-so! Go back quickly to tell the district head. Have Land-
lord Huang arrested! Tell Old Chen to report to the district!

TA-SO: Right!

TA-CHUN: Hold on! And tell my mother and Auntie Chang to bring
some clothes to fetch Hsi-erh back!

TA-SO: Right! [Hurries off.]

TA-CHUN [to HSI-ERH]: Hsi-erh! Hsi-erh! [HSI-ERH comes to herself.]
We've come to ask you to go back.

HSI-ERH: Eh? To go back? [Shakes her head.]

TA-CHUN [vehemently]: You don't realize, Hsi-erh, how things have
changed outside. Do you remember the Red Army Uncle Chao
spoke about that year? Well, now the Red Army's come—it's
called the Eighth Route Army now. They've come, and we poor
folks have become masters! You must go out; we must take re-
venge!

HSI-ERH [after a pause, in a low voice]: Ah . . . changed . . . changed!
Revenge! [She nods.] Revenge!

[TA-CHUN takes off his jacket and puts it over HSI-ERH's shoulders,
then picks up the child and leads HSI-ERH out of the cave. Dawn
is breaking and birds can be heard. There is sunlight outside the
cave.]

[Singing offstage.]

*The sun's come out! The sun's come out!
The sun so bright—a blaze of light!
For generations till today
We suffered pain and grief;*

But today we've seen the sun rise
 To drive away the gloom of night!
 Where did our Hsi-erh disappear to?
 She's left us many a year.
 But today—
 We'll trample down the hill,
 We'll tear open the mountain cave,
 To rescue Hsi-erh!
 To rescue her!

[TA-SO leads the district head, AUNTY WANG, AUNTY CHANG, OLD CHAO, and others up the mountain path. They enter singing.]

ALL [sing]:

Where is Hsi-erh?
 Where is Hsi-erh?

TA-SO: Over there—ah, look!

ALL [sing]:

Hsi-erh has come! She's coming home!

[They advance in welcome.]

[HSI-ERH's appearance dumbfounds them. After a moment AUNTY WANG goes up to her.]

WANG: Hsi-erh!

CHANG [going to her]: Hsi-erh!

CHAO: Hsi-erh!

[Seeing these familiar faces, HSI-ERH is at first unable to speak. Presently she calls: "Uncle Chao! Aunty Chang! Aunty Wang!" Finally she falls into AUNTY WANG's arms and sobs bitterly. All are moved to tears. AUNTY WANG and AUNTY CHANG straighten HSI-ERH's hair.]

DISTRICT HEAD: Don't be sad, friends! Today we've rescued Hsi-erh! That's good! Tomorrow we'll hold a mass meeting to accuse Landlord Huang, avenge Hsi-erh, and vent our anger. Let's go back now.

ALL [sing]:

Country folk, comrades, don't shed tears!
 The old life forced men to turn into ghosts,
 But the new life changes ghosts back into men,
 It's saved our unhappy sister here!
 The new life changes ghosts into men,
 She's been restored to us again!

[While singing they help HSI-ERH off.]

Curtain

SCENE 3

The following morning at sunrise.

At the gate of the HUANG family ancestral hall, chosen as the meeting place for the peasants' mass meeting.

[Gongs sound offstage. Shouts are heard: "Come to the meeting!" "The meeting's at the gate of the Huang family ancestral hall."]

[Singing offstage]:

Age-old injustice must be avenged,
 And a thousand years' wrong be set right!
 Hsi-erh, who was forced to become a ghost,
 Becomes human again today!
 Crushing rents must be reduced,
 The grain extorted must be restored!
 Those who suffered their whole lives long,
 Will stand up and become the masters today!

How much of our blood have you sucked?
 How much have you drunk of our sweat?
 How much of our grain did you steal?
 How much of our gold did you get?
 How long have you tricked and oppressed us?
 How many deaths lie at your door?
 Today we shall settle scores with you,
 Settle every old score!

[The curtain parts.]

[Innumerable peasants have stood up to accuse LANDLORD HUANG.]
 [The district head, TA-CHUN, UNCLE CHAO, and others are standing on the platform. Self Defence Corps guards, armed with red-tasseled lances and swords, surround the meeting place. LANDLORD HUANG, in mourning for his mother, stands with bent head below the platform, while STEWARD MU has hidden under the table.]

[HUANG has just spoken, and now it is the turn of the masses to question him. Feeling is running high.]

FIRST PEASANT [sings]:

You pretend to reduce the rent, but it's all a lie!

ALL [in chorus]:

You pretend to reduce the rent, but it's all a lie!

SECOND PEASANT [sings]:
 You take the land back on the sly!

ALL [in chorus]:
 You take the land back on the sly!

THIRD PEASANT [sings]:
 When you've rumors to spread, you rattle away!

ALL [in chorus]:
 When you've rumors to spread, you rattle away!

FOURTH PEASANT [sings]:
 When you hound folk to death, you've nothing to say!

ALL [in chorus]:
 Then you've nothing to say!
 Then you've nothing to say!
 So much rent you squeezed, so much money too,
 There's no counting the tragedies caused by you!
 Speak, Landlord Huang! Speak up, you!
 [HUANG mumbles and wants to justify himself. The crowd grows angry.]

CHAO [sings]:
 Landlord Huang, do you argue still?
 To pretend to be crazy will serve you ill!

ALL [in chorus]:
 Serve you ill!

TA-CHUN: Landlord Huang, I tell you— [Sings.]
 The bad old times have got to stop!
 We common folk are up on top!

ALL [in chorus]:
 Today the world is ours instead!
 Murderers must atone for the dead!
 Pay what you owe to the folk you've bled!
 We'll have your blood for the blood you've shed!

[Two peasant women rush forward.]

FIRST WOMAN [sings]:
 That year—in the ninth moon,

SECOND WOMAN [simultaneously]:
 That year—in the twelfth moon,

FIRST WOMAN [sings]:
 You came to our door for the rent!

SECOND WOMAN [simultaneously]:
 You came to our door for the debt!

FIRST WOMAN [sings]:
 You beat my boy till he nearly died!

SECOND WOMAN [simultaneously]:
 You beat my dad till you broke his legs!

TOGETHER [sing]:
 We'll have your blood for the blood you've shed!

ALL [sing]:
 Murderers must atone for the dead!
 Pay what you owe to the folk you've bled!
 We'll have your blood for the blood you've shed!

[THIRD and FOURTH PEASANTS rush forward.]

THIRD PEASANT [sings]:
 The wrong you did me I'll never forget!

FOURTH PEASANT [simultaneously]:
 The hatred I bear you I'll never forget!

THIRD PEASANT [sings]:
 My son must repair the dike, you said!

FOURTH PEASANT [simultaneously]:
 My brother must build you a tower, you said!
 My brother fell to his death from the tower!

THIRD PEASANT [sings]:
 My son was swept off and drowned in the flood!

TOGETHER [sing]:
 Your crimes will be visited on your head!

ALL [sing]:
 Murderers must atone for the dead!
 Pay what you owe to the folk you've bled!
 We'll have your blood for the blood you've shed!

[The crowd roars]:
 Make Landlord Huang speak!
 Landlord Huang! Answer us!

[HUANG continues to mutter.]

CHAO [loudly]: Neighbors! Since he won't confess, let's not waste our breath on him! Hu-tzu! You fetch Hsi-erh here!

ALL [echoing him]: Right! Fetch Hsi-erh!

[HU-TZU runs off. HUANG and MU stand aghast.]

PEASANT WOMAN [tearfully, sing]:
 Hsi-erh! . . .

ANOTHER GROUP OF WOMEN [sing]:
 Hsi-erh! . . .

PEASANTS [sing]:

Hsi-erh! . . .

Hsi-erh! . . .

PEASANT WOMEN [sing]:

The poor child suffered bitterly,

But a new life starts for us poor folk today!

ALL [sing]:

A new life starts! A new life starts today!

[HU-TZU'S voice offstage: "Hsi-erh is coming!"]

[All turn to see HSI-ERH. Sing]:

Today the world belongs to us,

We'll take revenge for past wrongs!

Past wrongs!

We'll accuse!

We'll accuse!

And avenge Hsi-erh for all past wrongs!

[Enter AUNTY WANG and AUNTY CHANG supporting HSI-ERH, who is wearing a new dress.]

THE CROWD [shouts]: We want vengeance for Hsi-erh!

[Seeing HUANG, HSI-ERH rushes across like a mad thing to scratch him, but her thirst for vengeance overcomes her, so that she falls fainting into the arms of AUNTY WANG and AUNTY CHANG.]

[Pause.]

CHAO [moved to tears]: Child, don't be upset! The time has come for you to speak!

TA-CHUN: Hsi-erh! Did you hear? The time has come for you to speak!

HSI-ERH [as if in a dream]: What? The time . . . has come . . . for us to speak?

ALL [thunderously]: Yes! Hsi-erh, the time has come to speak!

WANG and CHANG: Speak, child!

HSI-ERH: I'll speak, I'll speak, I—will—speak! [Sings.]

I want vengeance for all that happened,

My wrongs are too many to tell!

They're a mountain that can't be leveled,

A sea that can't be drained!

But what's caused such a great change

That I can beard my enemy today?

Landlord Huang—

To be cut into pieces is too good for you!

ALL [sing]:

To be cut into pieces is too good for you!

To be cut into pieces is too good for you!

To be cut into pieces is too good for you!

HSI-ERH [sings]:

That year—[Her voice falters.]

WANG [sings]:

That year on New Year's Eve,

HSI-ERH [sings]:

In storm and snow—

WANG [sings]:

Mu came and pressed for rent!

HSI-ERH [sings]:

And hounded my dad to death!

WANG [sings]:

Our good Old Yang was hounded to death!

ALL [sing]:

Those hounded to death

Are too many to count!

Too many to count!

HSI-ERH [sings]:

On New Year's Day—

CHANG [sings]:

They took her to the Huangs' house that day—

HSI-ERH [sings]:

I led a wretched life there—

CHANG [sings]:

She was raped by Landlord Huang!

PEASANT WOMEN [shocked, sing]:

Ah! Ah!

HSI-ERH [cries and sings]:

Ah! . . .

CHANG [sings]:

Then they wanted to sell her—

HSI-ERH [sings]:

As a prostitute!

Landlord Huang! Landlord Huang!

Murderous brute!

ALL [sing]:
 You man-devouring beast!
 The day of reckoning has come!
 [Unable to control their anger, the villagers rush forward to beat HUANG.]
 [The district head and others stop them.]
 DISTRICT HEAD: Friends, don't beat him yet! Let Hsi-erh finish.
 HSI-ERH [sings]:
 But Auntie Chang, she saved me,
 So I could leave the tiger's den.
 It was pitch black!

ALL [sing]:
 It was pitch black!

HSI-ERH [sings]:
 And the way was dark!

ALL [sing]:
 And the way was dark!

HSI-ERH [sings]:
 I didn't know where to turn!

ALL [sing]:
 Where did you go?

HSI-ERH [sings]:
 I stayed in a cave in the mountain,
 Far from people and out of the sun,
 Eating raw fruit and offerings,
 Till I seemed neither ghost nor man!
 But I refused to die,
 Though stones rot or streams run dry!
 I bore my hardships till today,
 And today they have vanished away!

WANG, CHANG and PEASANT WOMEN [sing]:
 In the light of the sun

HSI-ERH [sings]:
 Let vengeance be done!

PEASANT WOMEN [sing]:
 She'll be avenged in the light of the sun!

ALL [sing]:
 Now our time has come,
 We must be revenged!

We want justice done,
 Hsi-erh must be avenged!

[No longer to be stopped they rush forward and beat HUANG and MU.] [The district head and other cadres try to stop the crowd. The district head stands on a table.]

DISTRICT HEAD [shouts]: Friends! I represent the government. I support your charges against Landlord Huang. We will certainly avenge Hsi-erh. First, let us arrest Huang and Mu for public trial according to proper legal procedure.
 [All cheer excitedly.]
 [Members of the Self Defense Corps tie up HUANG and MU.]

ALL [sing]:
 Landlord Huang, you have bowed your head!
 You quake with dread!
 You have bowed your head!
 You quake with dread!
 Age-old feudal bonds
 Today are cut away!
 Crushing iron chains
 Will be smashed to bits today!

[The song is repeated.]
 [The sun rises. It shines brightly on HSI-ERH and the surging crowd, who shout for joy and sing]:

We, who suffered in days bygone,
 Shall be our own masters from now on!
 Shall be our own masters from now on!
 Our—own—masters—from—now—on!

[LANDLORD HUANG crouches before the crowd like a felled tree.]
 [The peasants stand proudly under the sun, countless arms raised high.]

Curtain