

「鍾鐵民短篇小說選輯翻譯研究」結案報告

**A Report on A *Translation of Chung Tie-min's Short Stories***

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## 論鍾鐵民的短篇小說

### 1. 生平簡述

鍾鐵民 (1941–2011)，生於瀋陽，當時日軍佔據東北，稱為滿州國奉天府，其父為台灣文學前輩作家鍾理和。1946 年鍾鐵民隨父母回台，次年移居美濃的尖山(笠山)，終其一生都在此長居。1949 年患脊椎結核，兩年後出現背駝現象，雖能正常走路，但疾病並未完全根除。此後不斷復發，成為日後一再糾纏的宿疾，直到 1965 年開刀手術後才痊癒。

由於父親的疾病，鍾鐵民的就學與教育頗見坎坷。小學在美濃的廣興國小進出兩次才畢業，歷經美濃中學初中部，內埔高中，1961 年畢業於旗美高中，同年發表他的第一篇短篇小說。1963 年考入台灣師範大學國文系夜間部，但因駝背不為該校接納，經過訴訟才於次年獲教育部准許入學就讀。1969 年畢業返鄉任教於旗美高中，五年後結婚，生活方趨於穩定。1997 年從旗美高中退休，奉獻教育作育英才凡 38 年。遠在他退休之前，由於反對美濃水庫的興建而走上街頭，此後鍾鐵民參與美農社區各種活動，協助農民提升生活素質，打造優質客家社區環境。鍾鐵民費半生心血積力爭取設立「鍾理和紀念館」，終於在 1983 年得償宿願，並於 1997 年編著《鍾理和全集》(共五冊，由高雄縣立文化中心出版)。如今該館除了展示鍾理和的草稿、手札、信件、作品，敘說鍾理和的寫作理念與歷程之外，還開設文學營，聘請各界專家來館開課，傳承台灣文學之魂，打造環保與文學之間的互動，為年輕人開創另一種思維與理想。

鍾鐵民共出版過八本短篇小說集，一本長篇小說，三冊散文集。小說集分別為《石罅中的小花》(1965，幼獅文化出版社)、《菸田》、(1968，大江出版社，中山文藝基金獎助)、《余忠雄的春天》(1980，東大出版社)、《約克夏的黃昏》(1993，高雄縣立文化中心)、《鍾鐵民集》(1993，前衛出版社)、《四眼和我》(1998，高雄百盛文化出版社)、《月光下的小鎮》(1983，台中台灣省教育廳出版，後再版於 1999，高雄百盛文化出版社)、《三伯公傳奇》(2001，桂冠圖書公司)。長篇小說《雨後》(1972，台灣省政府新聞處)。三冊散文集為《山城棲地》(2001，高雄串門企業公司出版)、《山居散記》(2001，高雄百盛文化出版社)、《鄉居手記》(2002，未來書城)。但是鍾鐵民

所有作品，無論是完稿或未完稿，結集或尚未結集，還是以鍾怡雯 2013 年編撰的《鍾鐵民全集》(共八冊，高雄文化局、台灣文學館、高雄市客家事務委員會共同出版)。其中小說卷四冊，前三冊包括了前面八本短篇小說集內所收集的所有短篇加上《雨後》，共 58 篇。第四冊則為未結集作品 25 篇，未完稿 4 篇，含部分已發表但尚未寫成的長篇小說《家園》在內。這些作品奠定了鍾鐵民作為一位台灣小說家的地位。

鍾鐵民得過台灣文學獎(1964)、吳濁流文學獎 (1984)、賴和文學獎(1994)、高雄縣文學獎(1996)、客家傑出貢獻獎(2007)，並擔任過吳濁流文學獎評審、賴和文學獎評審、鳳邑文學獎評審、台灣文學獎評審委員、客家委員會委員等等各種不同性質的職務。然而終其一生，始終還是後輩人人敬稱的「鍾老師」這個頭銜，最足以讓鍾鐵民感到泰然自在。鍾老師給人的印象是謙謙君子，講話不急不徐，語調與聲調柔和、親切，自然流露了對人性尊嚴的敬重。即使走上街頭，在陣陣戰鼓與人吼聲呼嘯的喧囂憤怒中，他站上講台，還是不卑不亢，緩慢而有節奏地宣揚個人理念。遠遠望去，他弱小的身影籠罩在巨大的急躁氛圍中，卻更顯得那份剛毅、淡定、沉穩、堅持。

鍾鐵民熱愛生命，關懷土地，雖鮮少躬耕下田，卻日日與農民為伍，深刻了解農作實務，故作品中能詳實地記下種稻、種菸、種菇、種香蕉、種木瓜、種甘蔗等各種農耕運作的時機、要訣、流程、以及應該注意的可能蟲害或災害。農耕一向是看天吃飯的行業，除了自然災損外，最令農民感到心寒的就是產銷間的重重剝削，這或許與朝令夕改的政策有關，或許與市場封閉的機制有關。農民眼看心血結晶在銷售無門、供給過剩下，變成沉重的負擔，不僅荷包失血，生活困頓，還得費心清理田裡作物的陳跡，為下一個無法預測的農作繼續努力。總之，關懷土地、同情農民成為鍾鐵民小說的主調。

## 2. 鍾鐵民的小說

鍾鐵民的小說創作可分為三個階段。1961-1965 是為第一階段，這是寫作摸索期，這一時期大部分的作品停留在講故事的層次。1965 年他的短篇小說結集出版後，開始邁向另一個層次。1966-1972 為第二階段，是他作品日趨成熟的階段。然而鍾鐵民在短篇小說的技巧、情節鋪排、氛圍營造、人物心理的描寫等等構成小說藝術的各個元素中，取得藝術境界的轉折點出現在他 1972 出

版的《雨後》。《雨後》是鍾鐵民唯一的長篇小說創作，展現了他有創作長篇的潛能，也隱隱透露他試圖走出父親寫作上的「負擔」，至少在標題《雨後》的抉擇上，明顯地想與鍾理和的《雨》有所不同，畢竟雨後天晴，人間又是另一番氣象。雖然鍾鐵民後來並沒有朝長篇創作發展，但《雨後》的書寫去讓他對於小說的經營技巧有了新的認知。此後的短篇小說，產量雖不多，但篇篇精彩。2002年鍾鐵民開始在《文學台灣》發表另一個長篇《家園》，可惜全書並沒有完稿。

1961年，鍾鐵民在「中國晚報」發表處女作品「蒔田」，描寫自己下海蒔田的初體驗。蒔田是客家用語，就是插秧之意。早期的插秧，不僅要彎腰、抓禾苗、捻土、推秧盆，四種動作幾乎同時進行，還要講求前後整齊，左右劃一，更重要的是要和隔鄰的同伴保持同一速度，共同進退。頂上烈陽正中，腳下的水也被曬得熱烘烘。蒔田並不是容易的事。這篇處女作後來並沒有收到鍾鐵民的任何文集之中，顯示他並不很滿意。當時他還剛從高中畢業，仍然處於摸索的階段，但「蒔田」的發表，卻有兩個意義。首先，他的作品有人欣賞，能獲得刊登，「寫作」並不是遙不可及的「不可能的任務」。至少，不像父親的叮嚀或憂慮那般。他覺得自己能繼續寫作。其次，原來創作的題材就在自己的周遭，只要更用心地觀察，題材不虞匱乏。有很多作家的確就出於這樣的偶然，如型塑 *New Yorker* 雜誌風格的美國散文名家 **E.B. White (1899-1985)** 就是很好的範例。他在 **Poison and Meat (各有所愛)** 的序言中，說他的處女作僅僅寫下個人在小學時期發生的糗事，沒想到卻能發表，又有稿費收入，於是不知不覺中他就走上了寫作的道路。鍾鐵民的「蒔田」，與其說是篇小說，毋寧說是篇散文。雖說兩者的差別有時不易劃分，但是虛構、故事、情節畢竟是小說的靈魂，而這三者「蒔田」一文中所佔的比例薄弱。全文直敘、白描多，情境、人物、故事反而不多。這是十足的散文風貌。

「蒔田」發表之後，鍾鐵民受到相當程度的激勵，此後作品不斷，兩年之間，即有 16 篇作品產生，數量堪稱可觀，約每三個月有兩篇問世，但他這時期的作品多介於小說與散文之間，白描多於鋪陳，故事多從「我」的第一人稱觀點書寫，雖則「我」化身為各種腳色，卻不難看出作者在寫作技巧上的侷限。到 1965 年他的短篇小說結集為《石罅中的小花》一書正式出版之時，這

個時期的文章僅有兩篇入選，可見他個人並不滿意這時期的寫作成果。入選的兩篇為「新生」與「山谷」，前者象徵意義大於實質意義，因為那是寫他本人的親身經歷，由於身罹脊椎結核，又苦於沒錢動手術，恨不能一走了之，但看過醫生後，受到極大的安慰與鼓勵，於是鍾鐵民認為那是個人新生命的開始。

「山谷」則寫一對貧困夫妻上山工作，女子正好臨盆的故事，情節簡單，但夫妻的鶼鶼情深在他筆下還是令人感動。

第一本小說集共收錄了 15 篇小說，除了前面的兩篇外，其餘都是 1962—1965 年的產品。這四年之間，鍾鐵民的人生相當曲折，包括養病、重考、錄取、被拒入學、訴訟、再獲入學、手術等。如此人生下，他寫了 25 篇小說，其中 13 篇輯入了《石罅中的小花》。第一篇「父親，我們」其實也是篇散文，追述父親鍾理和對於子女的關切與為人處世方面的叮嚀，無非是家庭生活中的餽丁瑣事，建構的無非是鍾理和在讀者所能了解的另一面—慈父的形象。其中有一篇「土牆」，描寫隨母親移入新父親家中的孤獨與對於父親與老家的回憶，從小女孩的眼中，看出成人世界的難以捉摸，以及父母之愛的飄渺虛幻，自己只能對者土牆外表一直剝土，期望能剝出一些真相。由於「土牆」兼具寫實與象徵，而獲得 1964 年的台灣文學獎。「土牆」理處理的主題是小女孩的孤寂，頗能反映鍾鐵民兒時的孤寂童年。小時候，鍾理和由於肺結核之病，數度來回醫院，後來還隔離療養。鍾鐵民是長子，常常必須單獨生活，對於父親的疾病懵懵懂懂，但小孩的不安與焦慮可想而知。因此同樣題材數度出現在鍾鐵民的小說中，後面還會談到的「大姨」這篇小說也有同樣的主題。

整體而言，《石罅中的小花》中的作品已經頗能展現青年小說家的潛力，小說的主題固然還是鄉下農人的形形色色，如友情、親情、兄弟之愛、朋友之關懷，鄰居之間的意氣之爭等鄉間如家常便飯的故事或事件上演，角色與角色之間彼此的衝突不大，人物的個性並不特別突出。不過作者試圖朝美好的一面解讀人性，從人際之間對於面對生活的不同面向，剖析純樸鄉下人的簡單世界。在今天看來，他小說敘寫的格局或許還可以更開放，視野還能再拓廣，可是技巧上已透露了他極力與傳統掙扎的痕跡。至於小說寫作的觀點(**point of view**)逐漸從第一人稱到了第三人稱，從單一的觀點轉向全知(**omni-**

present)。根據毛姆(S. Mougham, 1874-1965)個人的寫作經驗，這種自覺是小說家從初始邁向成熟的一個必然經歷的過程。

三年之後，鍾鐵民於 1968 出版了《菸田》，共選錄 15 篇短篇小說，其中「門外豔陽」寫自己入院手術出來之後，感到門內好友親戚的溫暖及看見門外光亮的艷陽，象徵他揮別疾病的疼痛後的未來日子，一片燦爛。集裡另一篇「菸田」是鍾鐵民小作技巧更向前邁進的優質小說。「菸田」以第一人稱我(阿壬)的觀點，描寫阿壬猶豫的性格，在離家闖天下與留在鄉下做長工之間的搖擺不定。他心愛的順妹雖然沒有明講，但顯然希望阿壬能帶她到外地尋夢。可是阿壬的母親乞食度日，哥哥又揮霍無度，他似乎別無選擇，只能留下來照顧媽媽。沒想到，在哥哥拿了他給媽媽的 500 元後，阿壬痛揍老哥一頓，喚醒了哥哥的良知，無奈這時順妹已經離他而去，阿壬此時才決定要離鄉。「菸田」的敘事明快，語言與情節的節奏若合符節，對白簡潔，全文張力夠，心理衝突在內，所有的事件發生在外，裡外之間的對比能與內心的思考相呼應，能使故事的主線明確。是鍾鐵民這個時期對於小說技巧之經營最堪代表之作。

1972 年，鍾鐵民出版了他唯一的長篇小說《雨後》，寫鄉間一對戀人李雲英與祁天星的故事。這對戀人的雙方家長原本互為好友，因瑣事爭執，彼此成了冤家。雲英他嫁，生了兩兒後，喪夫。天星退伍後，想留鄉下耕種，主要原因還是想親近雲英。當時民風保守，價值觀念守舊，雲英與天星的行為引起許多閒話，但他們不管外面的眼光或風雨，只信守內心的呼喚，堅持對彼此的信心。相信風雨之後，必然晴朗，因此《雨後》的筆調清朗、氣氛樂觀，遠景更多雨後天晴的明亮、可期。與鍾理和的成名作《雨》做比較，《雨後》在故事轉折、人物個性的描寫、場景與象徵等等都有較良好的表現，特別是文字婉約簡潔，節奏明快，對於各種農務時序的描寫尤其細膩，頗能細緻的描寫耕種時期農村的人文景觀。

從短篇小說到長篇小說，創作者可能會面對的幾個問題。第一，故事主軸是多線的發展，彼此要有關聯，卻不可糾纏、矛盾。第二，人物較多，而人物的個性塑造有些必須顯明，有些內斂隱晦，彼此有相對性，以利故事主軸的呈現。第三，人際之間的互動、爭執、協助都須納入整體的平衡。第四，寫景寫情，必須講究表裡之別，內外之襯。若從這幾個點回顧《雨後》，我們發現鍾

鐵民在小說中都有很好的表現，情節故事的布局架構相當縝密，人物性格的描寫都能兼顧語言與心理的發展，雲英的穩健與自持，天星的執著與堅定，祁雙發的灰心退縮與何五妹的積極支配慾都能在作者的掌控之中。也許長篇小說需要多面的思考，使《雨後》成為鍾鐵民小說創作的分水嶺，其後的短篇小說，雖則數量不再像以前那麼豐碩，但無論在形式、內容、技巧、鋪陳與整體結構上都趨於成熟。

在這些為數不特別多的作品之中，以描寫台灣農村與農地變化為背景的「約克夏的黃昏」、「女人與甘蔗」、「三伯公傳奇」、「丁有傳最後的一個願望」的主題最為集中，技巧最為純熟。「約克夏的黃昏」是從一隻約克夏種豬(豬哥)的視角冷眼旁觀鄉下農民的一窩蜂現象，同時點出市場的封閉機制與政府決策對於農民的損害。當大家都覺得養豬能增加獲利之時，家家戶戶莫不增加豢養的豬量，結果在飼料漲價，成本大大增加的時候，正好碰到政府開放豬肉進口，導致豬價大跌，讓投資豬寮擴建的農民血本無歸，甚至負債纍纍。昔日民風純樸的小農村，由於養豬的商業化、市場化、企業化影響所及，資本額越來越大，小農僅能在創傷後，搖頭、感嘆、抱怨，在孤獨無人的路旁、或在頹廢的豬寮邊。同樣的循環：甘蔗價格好時，大家爭相種植，下場一樣帶來甘蔗價格崩跌的現象，也出現在「女人與甘蔗」中。作家能做的似乎也僅僅限於陳述事件，提供當局參考。撇開農人經濟方面的主題，「約克夏的黃昏」的寫作技巧細膩，故事不僅呈非線性的前後交叉，語調在諷刺中帶有一絲憐憫，但字裡行間卻處處透露著面對農村經濟的起落與農民心態中的蒼涼。維吉尼亞·烏爾夫(Virginia Woolf, 1882-1941) 曾在一篇演講後改寫而成的散文 **Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown** 中質疑與討論「小說人物的真實性」問題，像「約克夏的黃昏」那樣透過不同場景、人物、對話等編織而成的片段段，庶幾乎已經道盡了農民對於生存的無奈了。

至於「三伯公傳奇」與「丁有傳最後的一個願望」，這兩篇的焦點都在於老農民的心路歷程。銀喜與丁有傳都出身佃農，小時候口糧都送到前線給日本兵吃，光復後，跟著家人努力打拼，收成卻大都落入了地主口袋，家中的米缸往往僅有微少的粗米，三餐只能番薯就者飯粒吃。三七五減租及耕者有其田政策實施後，他們才擁有自己的水田。無數的風霜歲月，早起晚歸，胼手胝足，年



老時略有所成，稍感滿足，但是煩惱在於年輕人只顧往都市移居，無心承繼家業。銀喜認為與其讓子弟賣田不如自己賣，還能過過三伯公的體面日子。丁有傳則心中一直無法忘懷昔日爭水灌溉的怨恚，想在張家有難時買下水圳源頭的那塊水田，可惜廉頗已老，舉家反對，終至放棄。這兩篇小說雖然結尾不同，但透過人物背景的今昔對照，作者似乎頗為肯定農民對於三七五減租及耕者有其田政策的感激，至少這兩個政策使許多佃農出身的老農民擁有自己田地的身分。

除了描述農民與土地的演變，鍾鐵民還試圖嘗試心理的描寫，場景依舊是農家，在時空上卻刻意地模糊，因為心理與記憶之間的互動才是主要的焦點所在。就這點而言，有兩篇作品值得討論。「夜歸人」側寫有關入贅男子的心理歷程。台灣(客家或閩南)的入贅大多數是因為女方家中無丁，因此男方入贅後，必須住在女方家，承繼香火，所生的下一代中若男丁稍多通常僅有一位壯丁姓父親的姓，其餘均與母親同姓，表示下一代都是母家的人。當然也有少數男女由於深陷熱戀，男方為了愛而捐棄傳統束縛，出贅女方，但多數情況則源於男方經濟窘困，付不起聘金，被迫入贅。因此，入贅的男方恰如出嫁的女方，多少免不了捲入婆媳問題。「夜歸人」中的男方，正起於岳母對他的猜疑而離家出走，經老婆傳訊息之後才趕回來。回家之行還特別選在夜晚，顯示著還有許多事無法攤在陽光下明說。男子的心理起伏、轉折、怨嘆、不滿都透過夫妻的對話表達出柴，時而捲入過去，時而回到現實，透過場景交疊，呈現故事的前因後果。鍾鐵民在「夜歸人」的寫作技巧經營與琢磨，頗有契科夫(1860-1904)的影子，故事是從中間切入，把讀者帶入立即的跌宕疑雲之中，其餘由對話來填補。此外，文字簡明凝鍊，敘事角度也多變換，故事結構留下許多空白，讀後彷彿餘音裊繞，全憑讀者揣摩或解讀。

另一篇心理書寫的精緻表現在於「大姨」這篇小說。背景是日據時代的後期。被日本人欺凌、壓榨的台灣人，尤其是年輕智識份子，在二戰末期，戰事膠著的苦悶與恐懼氣氛中，往往聚在一起喝喝酒、讀讀書、聊聊理想、談談國事。更激進的，可能捲入重要資料訊息的流通。在統治者的眼中，這種訊息流通現象可能涉及洩密、叛國，必須禁止。故事敘述受難者呂永政從小一直到大姨往生時的心理轉折與變化，從滿身的恚恨到完全的寬恕。呂永政小時親眼目

睹父親被日本警察槍殺(理由正好是叛國洩密)，同夜母親自殺身亡，爾後呂入住大姨家。故事一開始，呂聽到大姨往生的消息而趕回家鄉奔喪，看到了大姨臉上雍容自然的安詳時，他放心了，這就是他從小最最盼望的容顏。然而，現實中呂從小看到的大姨都是臭著一張臉。大姨家人口眾多，姨丈是泥水工，大姨在田裡家裡忙進忙出，對於孩子，不是謾罵就是斥責，臉上絕無笑容。呂書讀得好，考取初中，當時是一件極不容易的事，全莊雀躍，唯有大姨滿臉不高興。所幸姨丈拿出整個月的薪水幫他註冊入學，初中畢業後他進入師範學校，當了老師，再靠自己的用功，通過檢定，最後進了高中任教。可是呂的心中永遠揮不去大姨的臭臉，他總認為她忌妒、偏心、量窄。他對於大姨的這些負面情緒，每每盤據心中，偶想起來總憤憤不平。後來，隨著呂的結婚生子，社會歷練，與同事周旋，他慢慢地從人情世故中，體認了大姨的心境。她有太多的壓力，家境貧困，開銷過大，撫養人口眾多，所以她的精神總繃得緊緊的，自然不可能有笑容。如今，大姨往生了，放下一切擔憂，臉上終於有了安詳、有了和平。

「大姨」宛如一卷短片，精簡、短小、集中，畫面看似平靜，角色的內心卻始終洶湧澎湃，所有過去的夢魘、怨恨、憤怒，在小小的心靈中生根，成長、茁壯，慢慢烙印在心底深處，唯有目擊往生者遺體那一剎那，才想到內心也有許多歉疚、遺憾、以及感恩，卻再也沒有機會開口表達了。這篇小說的筆調與結構、內容幾近毛姆膾炙人口的《人性的枷鎖》(Of Human Bondage)。毛姆十歲父母雙亡後，被送到擔任牧師的叔叔家居住，孀母為德國人，本想當個好媽媽，但是居住環境、家庭用度、外加上先生的慳吝個性，始終無法全如己意。德意志民族性一向自律、嚴謹、克制，正好與從小在法國受到慈母百般呵護下的毛姆所熟悉的記憶全然不同，使毛姆在叔叔家中備感孤寂。而且毛姆天生口吃，在校屢遭霸凌，苦無訴說對象，升學意見又與叔叔相左(後來遵從叔叔意見進了醫校，做了醫生，但寫作順利後，他立即專職寫作)，以致於積憤成恨，在心中形成無法磨滅的創傷。這種怨恨情懷變成毛姆一生的為夢魘，直到他寫完《人性的枷鎖》，擲筆之後才一掃陰霾，可是叔父孀母皆已往生，只能抱憾於心了。鍾鐵民小說用過「枷鎖」(見《石罅中的小花》)，若說他的寫作受到毛姆某種程度的影響並非不可能。

現實中的鍾鐵民以教書為職業，鍾老師免不了從老師的角度去解讀學生的苦悶與憂慮。這個系列有「祈福」、「秋意」、「河鯉」、「余忠雄的春天」等四篇，圍繞著升學門檻外的學生的各種情境與想法。其中「河鯉」使用了釣魚觀念作為某種隱喻，「余忠雄的春天」以外在聯考的壓力終結了余忠雄的交女朋友的「春天」，雖然故事張力不大，但結構與敘事非常平穩，可說是鍾鐵民農民關懷之外的另類作品。

迄今我們對於鍾鐵民的小說做了輪廓性的回顧，認為他的所有小說創作可以時間點劃分為三個階段，1961-1971 為創作最多的階段，又可粗分為兩期，前期為 1968 年《菸田》出版之前，多為見習之作，但已綻露了作家的潛力。

《菸田》之內的作品，漸趨成熟，不乏佳作。1972 年《雨後》的出版，凝聚了鍾鐵民小說創作的視野與內涵，終於使其後的短篇小說在技巧、語言、結構上建構了自己的敘事風格。

## Preface

### A brief introduction to Chung Tie-min and his short stories

This writing comprises of two parts, the first presenting a sketch of Chung Tie-min's life, while the second commenting on his short stories.

#### 1. A sketch of his life

Chung, Tie-min (1941-2011) was born in Shenyang, which was then under Japanese occupation and known as Fengtianfu, Manchuria. Chung's father was the famous writer, Chung Li-he, who wrote stories about farmer's life in early Taiwan. In 1946, he returned to Taiwan with his parents, and after a while moved to Lishan, where he spent the rest of his life. In 1949, he was diagnosed with spinal tuberculosis, resulting in his humpback. It was not entirely cured until he underwent surgery in 1965.

Due to his father's illness, Chung had a very difficult childhood. In 1961, he graduated from Qimei high school, and the same year he wrote his first short story. In 1963, he was admitted to National Taiwan Normal University, majoring in Chinese literature. In 1969, he received his bachelor degree and began teaching at Qimei high school. He taught for 38 years before retiring in 1997. Long before his retirement however, Chung had participated in the protest against the construction of the Meinong Dam, and thereafter devoted himself to improving and enhancing the community he lived in. Despite his involvement in the dam protest, Chung's main ideal in his life was to build a museum for his father, and after great pains, he succeeded in building the Chung Li-he Literary Museum in 1983. Since then, there had been in the museum summer camps, workshops, lectures on the issues about Taiwanese literature and about the interaction between environment protection and literature, which gave way to the young generation for their dream-seeking.

Chung Tie-min had published 8 volumes of short stories, one novel, and three volumes of essays throughout his life. The entirety of his writings, whether collected (published) or not (incomplete, not published), appeared in *The Complete Works of Chung Tie-min* (8 volumes in total), which was edited by his daughter Chung Yi-wen and published in 2013. It was based on the writings in this collection that he was considered to be one of the important Taiwanese novelists.

In his lifetime, Chung was awarded with laureates of Taiwan Literature (1984), Wu Zhuoliu (1984), Laihe (1994), Kaohsiung County (1996), and Outstanding in Hakka Contribution (2007). He was also invited to be one of committee members for the selection of laureates (winners) of Wu Zhuoliu, Laihe, Gengyi, Taiwan Literature, etc. In spite of his many titles, I believe the only title what made him feel most relaxed was Sir Chung or Teacher Chung, for he was in keeping with the spirit most gentlemanly. He was humble, gentle in voice, and enthusiastic in action, and he respected human beings. Even when he delivered a talk against the dam building, surrounded with crowds in shouting and crying, he spoke in a smooth tone, but it came out with a firm, consistent, and persistent manner. He was of the sort that did not give up easily.

Chung loved the farm lands, and he enjoyed the country life. Although he seldom farmed by himself, he observed and learned a lot from the farmers. He obtained the knowledge of when to plant, how to keep plants from insects, and how to fertilize. In his writing, each step for planning rice, tobacco, mushroom, banana, sugarcane, etc. could be found. He was greatly sympathetic towards farmers, and was intimately concerned with their happiness, sadness, and/or complaints. It occurred to him that farmers, to some extent, depended on the vicissitudes of Fate. Whether they could have good harvest or not depended upon the weather and the marketing, which went far beyond their control. Farmers and their farms remained the main theme of his writing.

## 2. His writings

The writing of Chung Tie-min can be divided into three stages, chronologically. From 1961 to 1965 was the first stage. Most of the short stories completed at this stage are either tales based on his own experience, or tales of his neighbors. There were strong traces of emulation extant in works of this period. It was not 1965 when his first collection of short stories was published that he began to pay more attention to plot and psychological descriptions. The years 1966 to 1972 marked his second stage in terms of writing skills. However, most of his short stories were written at these two stages (1961-1971), accounting for two thirds of all of his products. In 1972, his first – and only – book-length novel, *After the Rain*, was published. In this novel, it was apparent that he attempted to rid his writing of his father's influence and tried to formulate his own style, concrete in diction, precise in plot structure, and brief

in description. *After the Rain* allowed him to achieve greater understanding on how to build a novel, and while he had turned out very few pieces thereafter, most of them were elegantly written. His death in 2011 left the world an uncompleted novel, serialized in *Literature Taiwan* since 2002, which attempted to cope with the conflict between environmental protection and modernized agriculture.

In 1961, Chung's first story *Rice Planting* appeared in *Chinese Evening Post*, which described his own experiences in seedling on the farm. For a student, who knew nothing but books, seedling was very hard in that farmers had to work under the sun, in warm or hot water, while bending for the plant, grabbing the earth, pushing the tub at the same time. In terms of genre, it was more like an essay than a fiction because of the shortage of plot, conflicts, and imagination. What was shown was apparently based on what we could see, no more and no less. However, this piece held two implications for him. The first, was the confidence gained via the publication of his short story. Writing was no longer a distant dream out of his grasp. To the best of his recollection, his father's work was refused quite often. In his mind, he wanted to show that he could do this for the sake of his father. Secondly, he realized that all he needed to do was to be observant, and his surroundings would ply him with stories and material. When his first story was published, he confined most of his time to the country life. He knew nothing beyond what appeared to him as far as he could see. To amuse himself, he was accustomed to making up stories.

Encouraged by the publication of his first work, he kept on writing. In two years, there were 16 stories appearing in different newspapers or magazines. Nevertheless, most of his writings fell between essays and fictions. He was far from satisfied with what he wrote, which could be reflected from the fact that when he published his first anthologized volume, merely two stories, *New Life* and *Valley*, respectively, were selected. The former was chosen simply because it documented his own experience when he suffered from spinal tuberculosis. The condition frustrated him and made him depressed. His doctor, however, comforted him by saying that everywhere there must be a path for him to take. When he departed from the clinic, he considered it a new chapter in a new life, and he would keep on fighting against his illness. The *Valley* depicted the story about the hard life of a poor couple in poverty, which, to a certain extent, reminiscent of what he had at childhood.

Save for these two, the other 13 collected in his first volume were written between 1962 and 1965, a sobering time in which Chun experienced fully the vicissitudes of life; his illness plagued him to no end; he failed in the examination; he passed the entrance examination but was rejected due to his humpback; he sued the college for discrimination and was finally admitted to the college, and he underwent surgery for his spinal tuberculosis. Under such difficult circumstances, he wrote 25 short stories, 13 of which appeared in his first volume of anthology *The Cockscomb in the Cleft*. In this volume, the story *Wall* won him the honor of receiving the Taiwan Literature Award in 1964. The theme of *Wall* was focused on the lonely feelings of a little girl who was forced to live with her stepfather when her mother divorced his father and married again. The writing was quite touching due in part to a vivid memory of his childhood. The theme of lonely feeling accompanied with anxiety had appeared many times in Chung's stories.

Overall, the stories in *The Cockscomb in the Cleft* revealed Chung's potential as a writer. The general topics were, as it was, concerned with lives of country farmers, including their friendship, relatives, brotherhood, and the events of daily life, which in these stories became intriguing. There was no great conflict in characters. It seemed that the author viewed the world with perpetual optimism. In terms of writing skills, Chung tried very hard to distinguish himself from other traditional writers, though he had not entirely been successful. His eventual progression from the first person narrative to omnipresent narrations was, as S. Maugham (1874-1965) put it based on his own experiences as a writer, a necessary process for any maturing writer.

In 1968, Chung had his second volume of anthology, *Tobacco Farming*, published. Again he put *The Bright Sun Outside* in this publication to encourage himself, for that story narrated his experience of surgery. After the surgery, he got a glimpse of sunlight when he was pushed out of the operating room. It occurred to him that he would have an entire different life henceforth. Another story worth mentioning for this anthology was *Tobacco Farming*, which became the title of the volume. This story was told from the point of view of the first person, A Ren. He was son of a beggar, and he worked for his boss, who claimed to be his relative. His boss relied on him everything on farm, but he got a poor pay. He fell in love with a smart girl, bright, diligent, and honest. She would like to marry him on the condition that he took her away from the village. He hesitated, simply because he had to take care of his

poor mother. She finally left him, for she could not wait any longer. He woke up and decided to leave the village, but the girl was determined to marry another man. The story in itself was rather simple, but each event was strung into a clear plot in a very brief style. The writing *Tobacco Farming* was in general a great success.

Chung had his only book-length novel published in 1972, about the struggle for the love between a boy and a girl. Due to family pressure, they were separated and the girl got married. From a girl to a woman, Yun-ying was still the only love of Qi Tian-xing. The theme of this novel indicated the change, unconsciously to everybody in the village, in customs, ways of farming, relationship among villagers, came into being. The change therefore lent a very strong support for the love between Yun-ying and Qi Tian-xing, who went together for their future as a couple. The title *After the Rain* was significant, for his father's best novel was *The Rain*. In his father's work, the lot of farmers was tied to poverty, dismay, and restlessness. In contrast, *After the Rain* attempted to show that there was hope, and offered a path into a brave new world.

Making the transition from short stories to a book-length novel means that the author must sketch in detail the characters, plots, events, and, if possible, symbolism in his mind before putting pen to paper. A successful novel could not do without those significant elements, although style was also strongly in focus. After the publication of *After the Rain*, Chung crossed into a new level of writing, even though he was less productive. To further enforce such a claim as it is made here, we would like to discuss his short stories from the following two perspectives: change in farms and change in terms of psychological developments.

Chung's concern in the change on farms can be witnessed by the four stories, *Yorkshire Twilight*, *Of Women and Sugarcanes*, *The Legend of Sam-bak-gung*, and *The Final Wish of Ting Yu-chuan*. The point of view from *Yorkshire Twilight* was particularly interesting in that it was narrated by a Yorkshire boar instead of a man. In the view of the Yorkshire, while most country farmers were greedy, foolish, and innocent on the one hand, they were helpless victims of marketing change and governmental policies on the other. Foolish were the country farmers who began building pens to raise pigs when the price was high. Raising swine was the common topic for people of all walk in life, and it seemed that the people did naught else but keeping pigs. However, as predicted, greater supply resulted in competitive pricing, leading to a general slump in value. Meanwhile, the government made a crucial policy



that pork would be imported. The end result was great harm dealt to the farmers, most of whom became helpless, debt-ridden, and was entirely clueless on their next step of investment. For the frustrated farmers, the Yorkshire had much sympathy.

It was a great pity that farmers never learned the lesson. Sugarcanes became the go-to cash-crop when the price soared high, and it was an endless sea of sugarcane stalks in almost every corner of the village. It was everywhere. The result was that the price fell sharply. A lot of sugarcane was left on the farm, for it was worthless now. What happened was described in detail in *Of Women and Sugarcanes*, a story of great ironical humor. The author in these two stories intended to portray the harsh realities of life was for the farmers in the small village. Just like the arguments, for and against, the idea of how characters in novels reflected reality, in Virginia Woolf's *Bennett and Mrs. Brown*, Chung tried to put together what he saw in very scene in the country. The composition of each fragment might shed some light on what a real farmer's life was.

Different from the preceding two, the themes of *The Legend of Sam-bak-gung* and *The Final Wish of Ting Yu-chuan* were focused on the changes to farm land and its impact over farmers. Inxi was born in a poor family, with no land of their own. The family came to own a slip of land because of the two government policies, the so-called 375 rent reduction and tillers have their own lands. The former required that the rent paid to the landlords was reduced to 37.5 % of the total products. The latter required that the tiller (the tenant) should have the right to own the land s/he was tilling (farming). Inxi began to work even harder when he owned a land. After 50 years' hard working, now he was over 60 and he thought he was quite content in that he had what he wanted to have. The only worry of his for the time being was the excuses their sons found for not coming home. As an old man, he wanted to have meals surrounded by his grandsons/daughters. The chance came that someone wanted to purchase his land. He would rather sell out his land than let his sons sell it. If he had money, he would live a good life, just like what happened to Sam-bak-gung, who, after getting wealth, was honored as the third grand uncle everywhere he went.

The protagonist of *The Final Wish of Ting Yu-chuan* went through the same experiences of Inxi's. He came from an impoverished family, and now he got a land of his own due to government policies. His land was located at the end of the water channel. Whenever he wanted to water his land, he had to wait until all the

landowners finished watering. He was in particular jealous of Mr. Chang, who owned the land nearest to the water source. It was Ting's dream to purchase that piece of land if he was wealthy enough. Now Mr. Chang was in the hospital, his sons, unwilling to work as farmers, wanted to sell the land. Ting had no sooner paid 100,000 for the down payment than he found himself short of cash. He summoned home all of his sons for the money to buy Mr. Chang's land. To his surprise, none of his sons wanted to buy the land, due in great part to their unwillingness to return home as farmers. Ting called his wife abroad for support, which was turned down. Finally, Ting came to the realization that the age for farmers was gone. He faced the music, trying to tell the broker that he gave up the down payment. To his astonishment, he was told that the land had been sold out, who paid a higher price. So Ting was given 200,000, half of it being his down payment, while the other half his compensation. The story was written between a melodrama and a farce, but it was quite successful as a whole.

In addition to the concern with farmers and farm lands, Chung Tie-min paid immense attention to psychological description. The two stories that exhibit this tendency are *Returning at Night* and *Aunty*. Of particular interest was the former, which was written on the basis of Hakka custom matrilocal marriage. Save for a few cases in which the male fell in love with a female so that he promised out of his will to have a matrilocal marriage, most of men were forced, either by financial pressure or by poverty in life, to do so. The sons of a matrilocal couple normally belonged to the female family unless some compromise had been made. In the story, the man left for work outside simply because he could not bear his mother-in-law's suspicions. She sought, both through explicit or implicit means, to let him know that she expected a son from him. If he had a son, then he would lose his position in the family, for his son would formally inherit the property. A large tract was dedicated to the description of what occurred to the man, complaints, discomfort, and frustration. What could be suggested here in Chung's *Returning at Night* were influences imposed from Anton Chekhov. The story began *in medias res*, with all preceding or following events unveiled step by step through dialogues between the man and the woman. It counted on the readers to connect each scene described into the whole event. The decoding process of reading in between the lines required no small imagination on the reader's part..

The other story was *Aunty*, set in the later years of Japanese colonization of Taiwan. When Taiwan was controlled by Japan, educated youths would meet to talk about what they could do for the country and they might exchange some information. This was strictly forbidden by the Japanese Governor of Taiwan. The main character of the story was Lu Yung-cheng, who witnessed his father killed by Japanese policemen, precisely for attending an underground meeting. On the same evening of his father's death, his mother committed suicide. Lu was forced to live with his Aunt, who had to support a big family of nine children. Due to financial pressure, Aunty never smiled. To the best of Lu's knowledge, she was mean and cruel. Her husband was a cement worker and she had no formal job, being busy with household chores or on the farm. When Lu passed the test and was admitted to a junior high school, which was of great honor at that time, she was the only one that felt worried and discontent in the village. Upon graduating high school, Lu was able to attend a Normal School (where teachers-to-be were trained) after his uncle gave him an entire month's salary for the tuition. Lu was successful in his teaching jobs, first as an elementary school teacher, then teaching at a high school. Nevertheless, his aunt's disapproving and angry features were a recurring nightmare for him. Long after his exposure to the society, he came to the realization that his aunt's terseness was due to the immense pressure she was under. He began to feel sorry for her, but had never spoken of his new found feelings. Now his beloved Aunty passed away, he was bereft of the chance to pay his debt to her. When he faced his aunt's corpse, he found her with a peaceful expression, an expression that he had longed to see when she was yet living.

The story of Chung's Aunty read much like that of *Of Human Bondage* by Maugham. When S. Maugham was ten, his parents passed away, leaving him to his uncle, a vicar. His uncle was quite conservative and he worked hard barely to make his soul and body meet together. With his background, Maugham found himself deserted, both at home and at school. He wrote his story in an ironical tone, full of sarcasm. While Chung's Aunty went much like the story in *Of Human Bondage*, the general tone was instead full of sympathy and forgiveness.

We have thus far outlined some of Chung Tie-min's most important stories. Three periods were divided, the first (1961-1971) being the most productive one, while work written after 1972 considered better in terms of structure, plot, and characters. The publication of *After the Rain*, his only book-length novel, was considered his peak

achievement in writing, which allowed succeeding works to enjoy greater success. In conclusion, Chung had his own style in writing, his language simple but elegant, his structure strictly organized, and the plot narrated in a natural way. In the field of Taiwanese literature, Chung was one of the great writers of the picturesque country, writing on behalf of farmers.

## 「石罅中的小花」導讀

「石罅中的小花」屬於鍾鐵民創作過程中第一階段(1961-1965)作品，處處可以到見習的痕跡。故事描寫一位年輕人受不了自己與繼母的衝突，憤而離家出走到外面工作，打拼六年後回到故鄉與故家的心情。

再度回來，庄頭的古樹蓊鬱依舊，只是樹下的孩童換了另一代人。他先去破廟找廟公阿財伯，乃是他祖父的同年好友。他在破廟裡，覺得遠比在家裡還要自在。他母親過世後，他即與祖父相依為伴，直到祖父去世。父親娶了繼母，但繼母總嫌父親懦弱、嫌他無能，每天家裡都有大大小小的風暴，暴風圈卻是他的繼母。他只能恨，只能怪，凡事都無解。於是他遠走他鄉，先從粗工做起，而後幸運地他以英文翻譯能力獲得一家廣告公司的重用，如今才能光鮮回故鄉。回到家，父親仍然酒氣薰天，繼母則變得和藹許多，不再挑剔，反而先承認自己過去的無知，所作所為或稍有過分，但她卻認為還是應該歸咎於他。他不願再起事端，眼看著逐漸衰老的父親，他選擇諒解。

當他繞到祖父墓前，但見雜草叢叢野花處處，偶然回首，見到一朵小小的雞冠花，雖石頭堅硬，小花卻能破石而出，綻放著美麗的花朵。這就是小說取名「石罅中的小花」的主因，隱含的啟示非常地明顯，他只要能振作，能努力，必然能衝破各種難關，取得屬於他未來的一席之地。這是初學習寫作的痕跡，把小說置於傳道之下。

初見習的另一個痕跡在於人物與時間的掌握。論人物，全文的他、阿財伯、祖父、父親、繼母等等主要人物，都沒有長相、沒有表情、沒有任何有關人物敘述的敘寫，似乎這些人物都僅僅是過場用的，他們的出現與存在僅在於呼應情節，在於顯示作者想要套用或傳達的「道」。關於人物與情節，最脆弱的在於心理衝突的處理手法。他與繼母的衝突要等到他從外面回到家裡時，才由繼母口中透露，在此之前並沒有任何徵兆，沒有伏筆。論時間，六年過於簡短，對於一個從鄉下去到城裡找工作的人，要在六年之內有所成就，也嫌急躁。因

此，從人物與時間兩個層面來看小說的總體營造，都足以顯示作者過於缺乏人生歷練。至於敘述觀點，也似乎有些破碎突兀，頗有剪貼拼湊的痕跡。

但從頭檢視鍾鐵民這一時期的小說作品，我們還是會發現鍾鐵民作為小說家所展現的潛力。首先文字的駕馭，精簡而通暢，老練而不浮華，不愧是國文系出身的底子(雖然寫此文之前一年，他才剛剛獲准進入師大國文系夜間部就讀)。其次，作者的良好組織能力，能藉這各種場景片段呈現前後一致的故事，這是寫作者最重要的一個稟賦。其三，能化想像為文字，舒緩地敘述所觀察到的人際互動。不過，對於人物的雕塑與敘寫似乎是作者的弱點，無論是描寫心理或外表，都呈現初學者的猶豫與躊躇，無法放手揮灑。

## A Guide to The Cockscomb in the Cleft

*The Cockscomb in the Cleft* is one of the Chung's early-period writings, between 1961-1965, and still bears strong signs of emulation. The story, in short summary, is the description of a young man's emotions upon home-coming, six years after he left due to constant conflict with his step-mother at home.

The old tree in the temple remained the same, though the children playing under its shade were of a different generation. He visited A Cai, his grand-father's friend, where he felt more relaxed than he did at his own home. He had lived with his grandfather since his mother passed away, up until his grandfather's death. His father wedded his step-mother, who detested his father for his weakness, and detested him for his disobedience. His step-mother, therefore, became the source of all disputes within the family, great or small. He could do nothing but hate and lay blame on others and so he left.

In a foreign environment, he began work as a manual laborer, and had fortunately been employed by a advert company due to his proficiency in English, allowing him to return home with success and fame. His father was still the drunk he remembered, and although his step-mother had mellowed, and even acknowledged she went too far due to her ignorance, she still firmly believed he was to blame. He looked at his aging father and did not wish further turmoil within the family, choosing forgiveness instead. When he tried to find his grandfather's grave, he saw a small Cockscomb flower, poking out bravely from the hard stone. This very image contributes the short story's name and the connotation can easily be seen -- If one worked hard and persevered, they could overcome anything and became what he wanted to be. The direct link between the title and its pedantic connotation is one of many signs that Chung's writing is still heavily influenced by others.

Chung's characters and the chronological events indicated another sign that he was new to the realm of writing. All the main characters in the short story -- the protagonist; his grandfather; A Cai; his father and his step-mother -- were given neither expression of feelings nor description of how they looked. None of the characters were given in-depth description, as if they were simply there for the sake of

the story. Their appearance, and indeed their entire existence, was simply so the author could express his one core idea.

The weakest point in Chung's narrative of character and setting was his choice of portrayal in the characters' psychological conflict -- it had simply come into being, with no foreshadowing or plot suggesting that the protagonist's stepmother would reveal the source of conflict when he returned home. In terms of time, six years was too short a period of time for a person from the rural countryside seeking a job in the city, to have any meaningful sort of success. From the perspectives of characters or time setting, obvious was the shortage of the author's experiences in life. Tracks were left there that the author tried to take something he had read into his own writing.

However, revealed from an overall review of Chung's writings were his potential to be a good writer. In particular, he was skillful in language, concise, precise, and smooth. This might result from his education background, his major being Chinese literature at college, although this story was completed one year before his admission to the night department of National Taiwan Normal University.

Secondly, it was observed that the author was excellent in organization, a critical element for a writer, as he told the same story from various different perspectives and timelines. Lastly, Chung demonstrated his potential as a writer for being able to express his imagination, as well as his observed interactions between individuals, into words. His narration and creation of characters seems to be his Achilles Heel, and his writing was bound by inexperience and hesitation of a new writer, preventing him from a more relaxed narrative of the characters' psychology and exterior descriptions.



## 石罅中的小花

廟前那棵老榕樹又開滿花了，淡淡的花香不時隨著輕風飄過來。巨大的樹身，扶疏的枝葉，從懂事以來就沒有發現過它有什麼不同。花開了，他們在樹底下打玻璃珠，小果子熟了，他們騎在樹枝上盡情地吃著。老廟祝阿財伯的吆喝，小伙伴們的歡笑，一切猶在耳邊，二十年時光卻真的流過去了。

一切都沒有變動，全是自己所熟悉的！誰能真正忘掉這些童年的夢呢？

再過二十年三十年，自己仍能一眼就認出它來。

他已經忘記這樣站了有多久。浴著暖洋洋的太陽，瞧著牆上掛葫蘆的老神仙，石柱上斷了一枝角的石龍，真有說不出的恬靜和歡愉的感覺。只有這時候他才能回到無憂無慮的生活中去，才能真正地想起母親的形像來。看那樹底下孩子在打混戰；遠遠母親背後藏著小竹枝偷偷走近來，模樣是那樣的真切清晰！他幾乎想叫起來了。稍一定神，一切又都消失。陽光照在身上，那些斑斑剝剝的小面孔全是陌生的。

這些夢境已經好久有再遊歷了，它們像是好幾個世紀以前的故事，像是他從書中看來的，他熟悉它們，卻跟它們全無關係，夢終歸是夢，它跟現實是多麼不相同啊！他不願意回想，不是嗎？他曾憤憤地立誓要忘掉過去的一切，包括著酸、甜、苦、辣。

六年了，離開了這夢的家園，他從來沒有打算回來，也不願意回來，他是懷著滿腔仇恨時離去的。多時飄蕩的生活磨淡了他的心志，長期的寂寞令他心靈感到空虛，他有時也會覺得厭倦了。想看看他的舊巢，他想見見他所不願意見的人們，他大大方方地回來了。六年來的辛苦沒有白費，他到處遇到敬重的眼光，有他熟識的也有他陌生的。這些不就是多少年來發誓要爭取的嗎？是的，他要得到的都得到了，可是這究竟還存有多少意義呢？他不明白了。

如今，他站在家鄉的泥土上，聽著鄉音，看著鄉人，反而覺得連方向也迷失了。大榕樹只是他童年夢裡的一景，現在它已屬於那群花面孔的小孩子們了；父親，是屬於那個家庭的；貞，那個唯一愛護他照顧他的女孩子，已經是掛著

孩子的媽媽了。他還有什麼呢？只有遠在天邊的工作才是他的，現在想起來，那不也顯得那麼渺小嗎？

他忘不了多年來心中所存的怨恨和報復的心情。恨使他堅強，他拼命折磨身心，用苦痛來忘記自己的悲憤。然而又有什麼值得這樣仇恨呢？可是他卻一直便生活在這強烈的恨中。是的，他恨那女魔王——他孀娘，恨他毒辣；他恨父親，恨他的懦弱；他也恨母親，恨她狠心。

那年他八歲，母親一病去世。接著他也病了，發著高燒，他迷迷糊糊地飄上了天空，他看見母親滿臉笑容來接他了。正當他高高興興奔向母親去的時候。她卻恨心將他推入了黑暗的深淵。

「阿英哪！妳把他留下來吧！」夜靜了，院井外父親和祖父的聲音交替地呼著，一遍又一遍，聽起來那麼的淒厲可怕，陰森森地令他毛髮都豎起來。他沒有死，母親畢竟撒下了他。

「媽——，看看妳的孩子！他在受著苦呀！」當他感到孤苦的時辰；當他流浪在外面，躺在公園的長椅上望著星星流淚的時候，他不知道在心裡呼喚了幾千百遍。他怨母親，恨母親，然而母親知道嗎？如果真的她在地下有知，就不應該留下他受苦呀！哦！媽媽好狠心。

「你媽媽不放心你，怕你被別人欺侮，她多慮了。」祖父時常對他說：「我要看著我家小流涕長大成人，有我一口氣在，誰也不能欺侮你。」

母親真的借仙姑說話嗎？祖父深信著，他也深信著，母親的過慮不是真的成了事實嗎？

「娶不娶在我。」父親也憤憤地對別人說：「我決心不娶，那來什麼後娘欺侮他？」

他不知道父親當時是不是說的氣憤話。只四年光景，他的磨難就來了，從祖父一氣去世之後，他更加痛苦寂寞，他懂得真正的苦了。父親在變，變得怯懦柔弱，只有躲在桌角喝悶酒的份，一句話也不敢多說。他感到家裡天天有暴風雨在形成，隨時都爆發，他始終提心吊膽，這些都是那女魔——孀娘進門後的成績啊！

「你早就該滾，滾出去死在外頭！」

六年了，這句話一直在他耳邊響，聲音尖銳惡毒，深深地鑽入他的心底。這就是離家時那女人說的。

痛苦的日子特別長，他一天一天無望地挨著。冬天缺水，他清早起來要擔滿水缸然後上學；夏天蔗園甘蔗長大，他又得先剝完一擔蔗葉才得吃早飯。細細的蔗毛扎在皮膚像火在燒著，在葉面上築巢的小藤蜂，叮得他在地上打滾。他一聲不哼，他滿不在乎。恨意在他心中成長，他恨他看見的每一個人，他反抗。他打架、偷東西，用最惡毒的話罵人，他計劃著要殺死孀娘生的那兩個小雜種。他要對整個世界宣戰，他有這個蠻勁。

然後貞出現了，她是鄰人順昌買來的養女。他天天在蔗園碰見她。他對她百般侮罵，把蟻窩強塞入她衣服裡，把草蛇偷在她笠子下。她默默的忍著，似乎能忍盡天底下的一切痛苦。那次他將沙撒進她眼裡去，她伏在地上哭，他終於後悔了。她沒有父母，卻有大量的母愛，他還記得她稱他「可憐的孩子」時的神情。

兩個孤獨寂寞的孩子，很快就結成朋友，他們彼此相戀著。有了她，他把一切都看開了。她祇大他幾歲，卻像母親一樣地照顧他，衣服破了替他補好，扣子掉了替他釘上，有委屈可以向她傾吐，他將依附在祖父身上的情感，全部轉移給她了。他們一同笑、一同哭。

「忍耐！到你畢業就好了。」她一次又一次告訴他。

多天真的想法！一心等著初中畢業，夢想考上高中遠離家庭，有這麼容易的事嗎？

畢業典禮完畢，他高高興興的回到家裡，犁耙鋤頭擋在門口，牛綁在石米白上。孀娘兩手抱。

冷冰冰的聲響，這也是一個人說的話嗎？一雙球鞋一個包袱，出去討飯也走大馬路，這已不是他的家。當天他就從極南滾到極北，一點也不後悔。廟公阿財伯從屋裡出來，站在簷底用手遮著日光朝外看，有意無意地對著樹底孩子們吆喝兩句。

「不准爬上樹去。嗨！又打架了！」

阿財伯步子已顯得蹣跚，那年他扳斷了柱上的龍角，阿財伯能從莊尾追到莊頭把他捉住。十幾年的歲月，阿財伯已被促成了這麼一個糟老頭！而且自己不完全成了大人了嗎？他感慨地上前招呼著當年祖父的老伙伴。

「是小流涕呀？昨天我就聽到你回來了。」阿財伯眯著眼，上上下下地朝他打量，他祥和地裂著嘴笑，聲音有些激動：「還想得到回家來，很好。人不能忘記家啊！忘家的人沒有用，你阿公從前也常常這樣說。你沒有忘記你阿公吧？我還記得他那樣疼你，什麼東西都留給你吃哪！」

老人嘮嘮叨叨地像在自語，他的神情那麼莊穆，像已沉醉在回憶裡了。他突然想起了祖父，當他在向他說話時，不也是這種神情嗎？他感到眼眶癢癢，阿財伯的容貌也模糊起來了。……

× × ×

樹葉依舊青翠，小徑蜿蜒於亂墳間，一切是熟識的，他可以憑著意識指出那處有草莓叢，那個轉彎有岩石。可是祖父的墳墓再也找不到了，那個地方換了一個新墳，一個他所不知道的人，他悵然地走動著，懷戀著這個一度曾成為他躲避苦惱的樂園。傍著祖父的墓塚，他可以感到恬靜和安全，就如同祖父仍在身旁保護他一樣，天上白雲飄動著，眼底田園遠遠在山底下，偌大的山丘，再沒有誰來打擾他和祖父談話。他也不辭辛苦地經營了一個小花圃，繞著祖父的墓曾開出許多美麗的花朵。一別數年，荒草早將花圃湮沒了，只剩石坎底下一點紅影晃動。踢開雜草，竟是一朵小小的雞冠花，短小的花莖羞怯地半藏在石縫中，也只有這種花能有這樣生命力了，環顧四周，已是最後一株。

多堅強哪！這種小小的花朵。他感動得坐在石上，注視著面前神奇的生命：那麼長的時間，跟周圍頑強的敵人相持，不知道它已經過幾個世代了，春天生長開花，年終萎去，可是它早已孕育下它的下一代，等著第二年春天的到來，只要給它一個稍好的環境，它們不是又將繁衍開來，長得跟以前一樣茂盛嗎？看！它花冠下端，一點點鼓起的花瓣中，育滿了花籽。堅強的小東西！

他輕輕地彈下花籽，小心地包好了放進胸口。

得給它們一個好的園圃，它們將再開出燦爛的花朵，是的，它們不久將要有好的環境了。

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「進去喝杯燒茶吧！」阿財伯拍拍他的肩膀，他順從地跟他走進他那黑暗的小房間。這原是孩子們の禁地。每一個孩子都曾渴望著去探險的地方。真沒有想到它竟如此地雜亂和骯髒，更有一股刺鼻的霉氣，使他想起當年敲石子時睡的閣樓，六七個男人身上和腳上發出的惡臭。他幾想退出去。但是看著阿財伯龍鍾的背影，他高高興興地在烏黑的長板凳上坐下了。比起自己的家，這裡到底溫馨多了。家，對他真是陌生得可怕！

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「你還認得路嗎？」父親一見到他就粗暴地吼起來。從他顛顛的噪音裡，他分不出父親到底是激動或是生氣。

「你是個不肖子。」他瞪著他罵。

父親蒼老多了，眼球佈滿血絲，酒氣撲鼻。他感到很對不起父親，他是個大大的不肖子！是的，長長六個年頭，他就只寫過一封信。那是到台北第二天寫的，寥寥幾個字。他不是忘記了父親，只是他在困苦中不願意表露出來讓別人知道，有幾次他含著眼淚給父親寫信，告訴他他是如此的寂寞，每次都在投入郵筒前狠心撕碎了。父親罵得對！大不肖。

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「斟剩的神茶，喝了王爺佑你平安。」阿財伯說。

粗瓷茶杯內濃濁的茶葉冒著白煙，他喝了一大口，苦澀得教他皺眉。神茶！還記得那年的大病，祖父也是從這裡抓了大把的仙丹回去，泡在開水裡要他喝下去，那是什麼味道已經忘記了，祖父含著淚水的臉孔卻仍清清楚楚地印在腦海上。

「你阿公從小跟我同穿一條褲子。」阿財伯慨嘆地說：「今天你們當子孫的能出頭，我也代他歡喜。兩手空空出去，排排場場回來，真不容易哪！」

是的，不容易！整天握著大槌在河床上打石子，手掌磨厚了，流著黃色的血漿，槌柄粘住了手掌，一時還剝不下來；深夜裡，整個城市靜悄悄地像個死城，而這正是最忙的時刻，伙伴們踏著笨重的貨車，徹夜做廣告牌，四周都是些粗魯的談話與動作，言語隔閡和個子矮小，開頭不知受了多少的欺負與戲弄。一年又一年，他咬緊牙關堅忍著。工作使他忘記往事，疲勞會帶他入夢；手掌磨破了會重新長起更厚的皮來，環境使他長得更加壯大碩健。要想出人頭

地必須要努力，必須要有特出的技能，離家的目的不是要打石子。憑著他幹勁，他學習已有點基礎的洋文。

人生的際遇還真是神奇的。採石廠將他介紹入廣告公司，他所學的一點東西竟然用上了。天天翻著洋文雜誌，參考西洋廣告術。前面的道路漸漸平坦了。

一年前，他接洽一筆生意，主人正忙著，他隨手拿起一本洋文，等到主人注意到他時，他已看得入神了。身穿工裝，滿身油漆味，他和主人談了兩個鐘頭，他第一次跟別人談到自己的身世。

「我們正要用人，你想試試嗎？」最後主人很滿意的問他。誰說不願意呢？憑著這一句話，他改變了整個的生活方式。

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「你在外面做過許多工作是嗎？現在在做什麼？」阿財伯又替他斟滿茶杯。

「做過採石工、夥計、學徒。」他心不在焉地回答著，「現在做外銷宣傳工作和律師的翻譯官。」

「宣傳工作——？翻譯官？哈！那是很好的工作！」阿財伯說：「家裡你習慣嗎？」

「是吧？」他遲疑地點點頭。

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他始終沒有感覺到那是他的家，從一進大門就覺得自己像個客人，家人比外人更顯得陌生隔閡。

「你的弟妹，順全、順德你還認得嗎？再下去是順蘭、順安。」父親指著牆邊幾個大小蘿蔔頭對他說，接著朝孩子們瞪一眼：「叫大哥。」

「大哥！」四張嘴一起張動。他心都給叫慌了。我的弟妹？這連想都沒有想到過的！

那邊，他看到孀娘正站在廚旁門口對他呆望著。衣衫仍然那麼硬挺，髮髻仍然紮得那麼結實。歲月並沒有替他留下多少的痕跡，跟父親對比起來，父親顯得多麼衰老呀！他平靜的心開始激動起來，他難以抑制渾身烈血的沸騰。這是恨，他清楚的知道，一股生根久積的厭惡。

「你回來了！」她努力地堆起了笑容。

他咬咬牙想翻身衝出屋子，但是當他觸及父親那雙充滿企望的眼神時，他苦笑笑了笑忍住了。

「是的，我回來了！」他說：「嬌嬌。」

時間會沖淡痛苦的回憶，經過這許多年來的流浪，原有的仇恨和報復的願望，已經顯得那麼渺茫不可即，一時激動過後，感到長久的鬥氣是幼稚和可笑了。值得費那麼大的代價嗎？父親老了，需要平靜的生活。

「我知道你恨死我了。」嬌娘背著父親對他說：「我也知道自己做得太過份。我欺負過你，因為我恨你，你對我不好，是不是？從我到你們家來之後，你不是處處跟我作對嗎？我們相鬥，是我錯，我比你大。」

嬌娘哭了，他不作聲地聽著。

「那時我比你現在大不了多少，我沒唸書，也不懂做人。我也是不得已才跟了你父親的。」她擦了擦眼睛又說：「現在你也長大了，懂得多了，我不敢希望你能原諒這個不會做人的後娘……。」

「嬌嬌！過去的事情不要再提它了。」他打斷她的話，很平靜地說：「讓它過去吧！」

眼淚又從她眼裡冒出。他們算是初步諒解了。

父親很高興，他和四個小蘿蔔頭大聲鬧笑，嬌娘在旁邊也笑瞇瞇的。在父親，這是很少有的現象啊！他們對他說話都很客氣，絕口不談過去的事，怕再引起心中的陰影。他像是家中的貴賓而非一份子。不是嗎？這個家庭中他是多餘的了。他不能長時間夾在那裡，那樣他會破壞一個家庭的氣氛。父親同時是那些小蘿蔔頭們的父親呀！

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只要父親快樂！而他確信自己能替那個家庭製造新的愉快的氣份。是的，他要補償自己的過失，父親是那麼地疼過他。

阿財伯仍不住地在問著，他一一地回答他。望著老人滿面高興滿足的神色，他覺得有種說不出的親切感。

「對啦！你也該成家了，你阿公若在，早就替你想到了。」阿財伯說：「家鄉可有看得合意的？還是家鄉的姑娘好啊！」

不錯，貞就是好姑娘，該稱貞姊嘍！可敬的姊姊。

在村道上遇見她，他幾乎不敢認。她帶著一個小女孩子，剛剛能跨步走路。

「聽見你回來，我高興死啦！」她說：「我不敢去找你。我……我結婚了。」

「恭喜妳，貞」他說：「——姊。」

「你終於出頭了。吃了很多苦是嗎？」她愛憐地問。

他苦笑著展開手掌，十根手指又粗又大；捋起袖子，臂膀上的肌肉一股股地怒奮著。它們全盡了力了！

「辛苦了，辛苦了！」她紅著眼睛喃喃的說：「我一直在替你擔心，五六年沒有你一點消息。我還當是見不到你啦！天有靈，讓你平安回來。順弟！你真有本事！」

「沒有什麼！貞姊。」他抱起她懷裡的小女孩，一面逗著她一面問：「妳們過得好嗎？」

「還可以。她爸爸就是德貴，石崗上的，你還記得嗎？」她笑笑說：「你來玩好嗎？我們常常談起你哩！」

「謝謝！我明天就走，看見妳，也就好啦！」

「什麼時候再回來？」

「我也不知道。離得那麼遠。不過總得會回來看看的。」

小女孩在他身上左右地扭動著，還好奇地抓他的耳朵。

「她很像妳。很像！」他說。

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她像她，她也會是個好姑娘。他對著阿財伯笑了。

走出黃爺壇，迎面一個小女孩跑過來，是——順娣，他的妹妹。

「大哥，你到那裡去啦？我找你半天了。」她氣吁吁地說：「媽要你回去吃了晚飯再走，還宰了雞呢！」

「走吧！我們回去！」

太陽已靠近西面的山頭，但是趕末班車出去，時間仍然充裕的，回家吃晚飯去吧！



## Cockscomb in the Cleft

The soft fragrance of grass and wood wafting over the light breeze was a sign that the banyan tree in front of the temple was laden with fruit once more. With a large trunk and rich crown, the tree appeared no different from what it looked in my childhood. In the summer, they would shoot glass beads under the tree, scaling the branches for the small fruits. The admonishments of A Cai, the temple attendant, and the laughter of my playmates, still rang in the ears, as if the scene were unfolding before me.

Yet, two decades had already passed. Nothing had changed, and everything was as it had been. After all, who could truly forget their childhood years? He would recognize everything, even if another twenty or thirty years pass.

Time held no meaning for him as he stood there, warmed by the sun, looking at the picture of the god with a gourd on his back on the temple wall, and the dragon curled around the stone column with a broken horn. Only now, only here, suffused with a sense of tranquility and happiness, could he reminisce a life undisturbed by the world. Only then could he truly recall his mother's image: Regard! The children played amongst themselves, and in the distance, their mothers approached stealthily, hiding a stem of bamboo behind their backs! Oh, they seemed so clear. He almost cried out, but just then the vision shuddered, and he was back to the present. The sun still warm, yet the faces he saw were foreign.

He had gone so long without having these dreams, and they felt as if they were from a time millennia ago. They felt familiar, but he was completely detached; a familiarity of a well-remembered story he had read many times. In the end they were just dreams, for how different they were from reality! He didn't want to remember, did he? Had he not sworn that he would forget everything of the past, be it bitter or sweet, foul or fair.

For six years, he had been away from this home of his dreams. He had never intended -- and certainly didn't want to -- return. He had left brimming with vitriol and hate. Yet, years of travel had worn down his determination and the long years of loneliness injected vast emptiness in his soul. As time wore on, he grew tired, wishing to see his old home again, to again lay eyes upon the faces of the people he had sworn never to see again. So he came back, waltzing into town as if he had never left. His

six-year travels had not been in vain, and everywhere he went, whether he knew them or not, he was greeted with respect. Had this not been what he vowed to obtain all these years? And yes, he obtained all that he had wished for. But what meaning it held for him now, he himself did not know.

Standing upon the land of his birth, hearing the dialect of his home town, seeing his kin and kith, he instead felt he had lost his sense of direction. The great banyan tree was a staple of his childhood, but it now belonged to the children with mud-streaked faces, playing under its shade. Father belonged to *that* family. Zhen, the only girl who had loved and cared for him, was now a mother, with her own child. What else was left for him? Only his job, far away, was left to him. Now it all seemed insignificant to him.

Though he tried to forget by pushing himself -- physically and mentally -- to the limit, he could not forget the hate, the wish for revenge, for it was hate that made him strong. But what was worth such hatred? And yet, he had lived his life under the influence of hate. Oh yes, he hated that diabolic witch, his stepmother; he hated his father, for his weakness; and he hated his mother, for her ruthlessness.

He was only eight years old when his mother passed away from disease. He had also caught the same disease and ran a high fever. He was rising through the sky and saw his mother, smiling, coming to take him away. Just as he dashed happily towards her, she had instead ruthlessly pushed him back into the dark abyss.

“A Ying! You should keep him!” In the dead of night, the repeated cries of father and grandfather twined together, forming a haunting, terrible sound, one that made the hairs on his body stand on end. He had not died; after all, his mother had abandoned him.

“Mother---- Look at your child, and see how he suffers!” Such cries, emitted silently many a time when he was wandering away from home, when he cried silent tears staring at the stars whilst lying on the park benches. Yes, he blamed -- hated -- his mother; but did she know? If she truly knew, she shouldn't have abandoned him for suffering! Oh, mother, how cruel you were!

Grandfather often told him, “Your mother is worried about you; afraid that you'll be picked on or bullied. She frets too much. I'll see my 'Little Runny-nose' grow up, and no one shall pick on you while I still draw breath!”

Has mother truly conveyed a message through a spirit medium? Grandfather believed in it. He believed it too; did not mother's worries turn true?

"Whether I re-marry or not is my affair." Father said, "If I'm determined to remain single, how can he be picked on by a stepmother?"

He didn't know if father had been rambling out of anger, but in just four years, his trials came due. His life grew increasingly difficult and lonesome, and since his grandfather passed away he had tasted the true meaning of pain.

His father also changed, becoming weaker and cowardly, drowning himself at a corner of the table, afraid of speaking out. Day by day, he felt that a storm was forming in the house, waiting to break out in full force, and he felt that he was walking on a tightrope. All of this was grace to that woman -- Oh! What wonders she had wrought after coming to live with them!

"You should have left long ago! Get away, and die out there!"

For six years, that phrase -- spoken upon the eve of his leaving with such malice -- had festered in his heart.

Times of suffering and pain seemed to be extra long, but he endured, day after day. He was the one to wake, early in the morning, to fill up the water tank before going to school, as the house usually ran short of water in winter. He was the one who had to shuck a bushel of sugarcane leaves in summer, when the sugarcanes grew tall, before he could eat breakfast. The thin, prickly sugarcane hair burned as he shucked the leaves, and the occasional carpenter bee hive in the leaves made him roll to and fro on the ground when they stung him. He made no sound, and affected unconcern. Hate however flourished in him, causing him to detest everyone he saw, and hate made him rebel. He fought against others, committed larceny, cursed others profusely, and even planned to kill the two bastards his step-mother gave birth to. He was filled with animalistic rage, and prepared to declare war against the world.

Then Zhen appeared. She had been bought as an adopted daughter by Shun Chang, a neighbor. He met her daily in the sugarcane fields, but despite his every move -- cursing at her, shoving ant hives down her shirt, or hiding snakes in her bamboo hat -- she took everything silently, as if she could shoulder all the pain under the heavens. The time he had thrown sand in her eyes and saw her crying, he finally felt guilty about his actions. She had no parents, but had great love for others; he still remembered her expression when she called him, "you poor child."

As they were both lonely, they became friends in no time, and even came to love each other. With her by his side, he had set aside everything. She was only older by a few years, but cared for him like a mother. She would help patch up his clothes when they were worn, and would sew on the buttons when they fell off. She offered a shoulder to cry on, no matter what. Together they laughed, together they cried. He had transplanted all his feelings for his grandfather onto her.

“Be patient! Everything will be fine once you graduate!” she told him, time and time again.

How naive they were! Had it been so simple, they would have left everything behind. The moment the graduation ceremony was complete, he returned home. However, he saw his step-mother in the yard, her hands crossed in front of her. A hoe leaned against the door, with the cow tied to the stone mortar. “Now, your studies are finished. Go plow the field in the afternoon.”

Her voice was cold, almost inhumanly cold. He hit the road with just a satchel and the shoes on his feet. He vowed that even if he had to beg, he would walk on the paved roads. This was no longer his home. That night he left, going from the very south to the very north, with no regrets.

A Cai came out of the building, stood under the eaves and squinted out with a hand over his eyes and halfheartedly raised his voice against the children under the tree.

“No climbing on the trees! Oy! What did I say about fighting?”

A Cai’s gait has slowed to a shamble, compared to the fleet-footed A Cai in his memory. That year, when he broke off the horn of the dragon on the pillar, A Cai had chased him across the entire village and finally caught him. Just a decade and more, and A Cai now became withered by age. He too felt worn out with age, though just grown into an adult. Such thoughts crossed his mind as he went over to greet his grandfather’s best friend.

“It’s Little Runny-nose! I heard you came back yesterday,” A Cai said as he eyed him from head to foot. He smiled warmly, and was a little emotional.

“It’s very good that you still remember your home. Men can’t forget their roots! Those who do are useless, and your grand-dad was of this opinion too, back in the day! You haven’t forgotten about your grand-dad, have you? I still remember how much he loved you when he saved a little bit of everything for you!”

The old man continued speaking, almost as if he was speaking to himself. He looked, as if completely immersed in his recollections. He suddenly remembered, did not his grandfather wear the very same expression, when talking to him? He felt a slight burn in his eyes, while A Cai's features blurred...

The leaves were green as ever, and the path winding through the gravestones was still familiar. He could point out with no conscious effort where there would be bushes, and where there would be rocks. And yet, he could not locate grandfather's grave. In its place was a new grave, a person with whom he was unfamiliar. He walked about with a sense of loss, reminiscing about the place that had once been his haven of sorrows and worries. Sitting by grandfather's grave, he felt safety and peace, as if his grandfather were still by him to protect him. In this place, the white clouds floated serenely in the blue sky, and the fields were far away at the foot of the mountain. On the entire hill, no one could disturb his conversation with grandfather. He had labored to keep a small garden around grandfather's grave, and it was once ringed with beautiful flowers. But he had left, and in the few years he was gone, weeds had swarmed over his simple garden, leaving only a small red cockscomb flower, its thin stalk shyly hiding under the crevices of the rock. Only the cockscomb had such vitality, and looking around, it was the last.

Oh, how tenacious this little flower was! Overcome with emotion, he sat down on the rocks and stared at the miracle of Life before him. For so long, it stubbornly fought against weeds around. By way of spring blossoms and winter withering, it survived, with flowers flourishing only if suitable soils were provided. The blossoms were as beautiful as their predecessors. Behold! Just under its corolla, amidst the budding petals, it was brimming with seeds. Oh, the tenacious little thing!

Lightly flicking the seed pouch, he carefully wrapped it up and placed it in his breast pocket. He must find it a good garden, for they shall blossom into magnificent flowers. Oh yes! They shall soon have a better future.

"Come in and have a cup of tea," A Cai said, patting his shoulder. He demurely followed A Cai into his dark room, a room that every child in the village dreamed of exploring. He had not thought that it would be so filthy and messy, accompanied with a rank smell of mold. It made him remember that job when he was mining stone, and the room in which six or seven men, all giving off foul smells, slept together. He almost backed out of the room, but he looked at A Cai's frail form, and happily sat

down on the blackened bench. Compared with his home, it was far more cozy here. Home was a strange alien place to him.

“So you still remembered the way back home, eh!” It was the first words from his father, delivered in a brash shout. From his trembling tones, he couldn’t tell if his father was actually angry, or if he was simply excited.

“You are an ingrate of a son!” his father told him with another glare. Age had not treated father well. In addition to his aged looks, father’s breath smelled of alcohol and he had bloodshot eyes. He was truly apologetic towards father, he WAS an ingrate. Over the past six years, he had only written one letter. And that letter, containing only few words, was written on the second day he arrived in Taipei. It was not that he forgot about father, it was simply that he didn’t wish to make known his hardships to others. Several times he tried to tell father that he was lonely. But once letters were complete, he hesitated before putting them into the mailbox. Father was right! He was ungrateful.

A Cai poured thick steaming tea into the cup and said, “It’s left over from the tea offered to the divine. The Wangyeh will protect you if you drink it.”<sup>1</sup>

He took a sip and frowned at the bitterness. Divine tea! He remembered when he was sick, his grandfather obtained some *divine* medicine from the temple, mixed it with water, and made him take it. He had forgotten what the medication tasted like, but his grandfather’s expression of teary-eyed worry would forever be there in his mind.

“I grew up with your grandfather, and we were very close,” A Cai said. “I am happy to see, as I’m sure he is too, that the younger generation has succeeded. It’s not easy going out into the world with nothing and returning decked in the splendor and glory of your triumphs. Not easy at all!”

Yes, not easy at all! He smashed rocks by the riverbed all day, working until his hands blistered, then split open as he still worked. By the end of the day, often it was

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<sup>1</sup> Wangye refers to no specific god, literally, Wang=king, ye=grandfather. Usually, in the Hakka area, a Wangye is of the three Wangyes, Jinshang, Dushang, and Minshang. They are worshipped in almost every corner of the island, not only in the Hakka area. The tea used to worship Wangye is called divine tea, just like holy water in the Christian tradition, which is believed to be of great help to health.

difficult to pry the hammer out from his hands, gummed to the handles from dried pus and blood as they were. At night, the whole city was so deathly quiet, but it was the busiest moment for them. The men would ride on their clumsy cargo trucks, setting billboards up throughout the night. Amongst workers, the language was rough, and the actions uncouth; the difference in language and his short stature had been the butt of many jokes. He endured the jokes and the hard work through the years; the labor took his mind off the memories of the past, and the exhaustion put him to sleep. The blisters grew into calluses, and the work made him bigger, more muscular. If you wanted to make something of life, you needed to work hard and possess a unique and outstanding skillset. He did not leave home for the sake of smashing rocks. With his determination, he chose to learn English, of which he had some background knowledge.

Life was always full of unexpected events. He was introduced to an advertising company, where his modest English was in need. He was exposed to English magazines, getting some knowledge of advertising. On a job he was sent to do a year ago, while he was waiting for the assignment of an errand, he picked up and started reading a book in English. By the time the boss noticed him, he was engrossed in the book. There he was, in his working clothes and smelling of paint, but reading a book - - not just any book, like a comic, but a book in English. The boss was interested and talked with him for over two hours. It was the first time that he told others about his life.

“Our company is hiring someone one who reads English. Do you want to give it a try?” the boss had asked him at last with sincerity. Who could say no? With that word, he had changed his life.

A Cai filled his cup again. “Have you had many jobs outside? What are you doing now?”

“Oh, I’ve been a rock miner, a waiter and an apprentice. Now, I’m working as a translator for a lawyer and working in marketing and advertising,” he said nonchalantly.

“Advertising----? Translator? Hah! That’s a very good job!” A Cai said, and then asked, “How are you doing at home? Are you used to things?”

“I guess?” he said, nodding hesitantly.

Never did he feel that it was his home. From the moment he stepped in the door, he felt like a visitor. His family was even more foreign to him than outsiders.

“Your younger brother and sister, Shun-chuan and Shun-te. Do you still remember them? That’s Shun-lan and Shun-an,” father said as he pointed out each of the little ones standing by the wall.

He glared at the four younger children by the wall and said, “Greet your eldest brother.”

“Eldest brother!” they said in unison. The greetings made him panic slightly. They were *my* younger brothers and sisters? He had never considered such things before.

Over there by the kitchen door, he saw his step-mother looking at him. Her clothes were still straight and starched, her hair still done tightly in a bun. Compared to father, who seemed so very ancient, age seemed to have passed her by.

His calm emotions began to stir and he was hard pressed to control his roiling blood. He knew clearly that it was hate, a deeply rooted and long-standing hatred.

“You’ve come back,” she said, trying her hardest to smile.

He gritted his teeth and wanted nothing more than to turn his back and rush out of the house, but then he saw his father’s eyes -- hopeful, pleading -- and he held back the urge with a bitter smile.

“Yes, I’ve come back,” he said, and then he added with a slight pause, “auntie.”

Time could dull all painful memories. After wandering outside these many years, his hatred and wish for vengeance seemed so brittle and untenable. Once the emotion passed, he felt that his holding a grudge for so long was not only childish, but it was funny. Was it worth so much? Father was old, and he needed a peaceful life.

“I know you must hate me so,” she said with her back towards father. “I know that I crossed the line. I bullied you, because I hated you. You didn’t treat me well, did you? Ever since I came to your family, you fought against me all the way. But it’s my fault that we fought. I was older than you.”

Step-mother was crying, but he continued to listen, wordlessly.

“I wasn’t that much older than you, then. I wasn’t educated, and I wasn’t blessed with social graces. I had no other choice but to marry your father,” she said and wiped her eyes. “You’re grown up now, and are wise in the affairs of the world. I daren’t hope that you could ever forgive your stepmother---”

“Aunty! Let bygones be bygones.” he interrupted, and then said quietly, “Let it go.”



Tears seeped out of her eyes again. They took the first steps towards forgiving each other. Father was very happy and loudly expressed his joy as he played with the four children, and auntie was smiling on the side. This was a rare experience, with father!

They were all very polite with him, and never once mentioned the past, afraid of bringing up bad memories. He was like an honored guest, instead of part of the family. Well, wasn't he? He was an appendix member, to this family. He could not stay there long before he cast a cloud over the family. Father was also their father, too!

As long as Father was happy! He believed he could create an atmosphere of happiness for that family. Yes, he must make up for his mistakes, for father had loved him so!

A Cai continued to ask questions. As he answered each of A Cai's questions, he felt a sense of intimacy as he saw the old man's happy and satisfied expression.

"Ah! You should be starting your own family. Were your grandfather still alive, he would plan it out for you already!" A Cai said. "Are you interested in anyone? Women of your home town are still the best!"

Without a doubt, Zhen was a good woman. Ah, he should call her Sister Zhen now<sup>2</sup>! A sister she was unto him, and she well deserved the praise.

He had almost been afraid of calling out to her when he met her on the road in the village. By her side was a small girl that had only recently learned how to stand and walk on her own two feet.

"I heard you had come back, I was absolutely happy!" she said hesitantly, "I was afraid of going to see you. I... I'm married now."

"Congratulations, Zhen," he said, then realized his mistake. "Sister Zhen"

"Well, you finally made something of yourself. Have you been through many hardships?" she asked with tender affection.

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<sup>2</sup> From Zhen to Sister Zhen shows a change between the relationship between *him* and *Zhen*. When they were playing together and fell in love, he wanted to be independent. However, when he knew that Zhen had been married, in the Hakka tradition, he would call her Sister Zhen, indicating his respect to an elder, due to the fact that Zhen was one year older than he.

He gave a faintly bitter smile and spread his hands, showing ten large and rough fingers. He rolled up his sleeve and flexed his muscles. All of his muscles jumped and quivered with tension.

“You did very well. Very well you did,” she said with red puffy eyes. “These five or six years you’ve gone, I’ve been worried about you. I thought I would never see you again!! Oh, the heavens were merciful to bring you back to us. You have always been a resourceful man, Shun-ti.”

“It was nothing, Sister Zhen,” he said and picked up the little girl, teasing her for a while.

“Have both of you been well?”

“We get by. Her father is Te-gui, living on Stone Hill, you remember him? Would you like to come over for a visit? We speak of you quite often!”

“Thanks for the invitation, but I’m leaving tomorrow. All I needed to see was you.”

“When will you be back next time?”

“I don’t know. It is rather far away. I suppose that I have to return sometime, though.”

During their conversation the little girl was twisting around in his arms restlessly, and even scratched his ears curiously.

“She’s really like you, so very like you,” he told Sister Zhen.

She was like Sister Zhen, and the little girl will be a good woman, one day. He smiled at A Cai at the thought.

As he retired from the temple, a young girl ran directly towards him. It was --- Shun-ti, his younger sister. “Where have you been, eldest brother? I’ve been looking all over for you!” she said, panting heavily. “Mother wants you to have dinner with us before you leave! We’ve even killed a chicken!”

“Well! Let’s go back!”

The sun was close to setting, but he still had ample time to catch the last bus out of the village. Time to go home and have dinner!

## 「帳內人」導讀

回顧文壇，過去有許多作家書寫自己從來沒有經驗過的故事，卻栩栩如生，非常地寫實、逼真，例如史蒂夫克蘭(Steve Crane, 1871-1900)的第二部作品，即為有名的經典小說「鐵血雄獅」(The Red Badge of Courage)。這部小說描述美國南北戰爭的情景。史蒂夫克蘭顯然不在現場，因為他出生時，南北戰爭已經結束，更何況他其實從沒有參加過任何戰爭。但作為新聞記者，他完全憑閱讀相關文獻與自己豐富的想像力，終於完成了這部被認為是寫實經典之作的小說。「鐵」書之所以令人特別印象深刻，是因為他寫實的風格與不斷使用不同顏色的象徵與反諷。鍾鐵民的「帳內人」寫於 1962 年，他當時還是埋首孤燈下為了重考而苦讀的「苦悶的二十一歲」青年，可能都沒有戀愛經驗，卻已經寫了這部以夫妻冷戰為本的「閨內小說」，值得細讀。

鍾鐵民的敘述小說手法，倒敘多過平鋪直敘，他較擅長於時空的變換與心理不同層次的象徵寓意。「帳內人」以「他」發生小車禍必須躺在床上養病，枯寂無聊中，不見有人來寒暄、講話。這時門輕輕一開，來人正是那個已經分床多時的老婆，她為他帶來一杯水。他已經厭倦了與她的冷戰。可是，畢竟渴了，喝一杯水，不算妥協吧？於是他喝了水。續而一想，不能這麼輕易讓步，於是再試著去想她所有的缺點，好強，好鬥，固執。想著想著，門又開了，這次她送來了幾道新鮮的蔬菜，還有冒著煙的稀飯，不理她吧！實在太餓了，反正吃一口並沒有什麼特別的意思。飯後，他想叫她，但是她翩翩然走了。許久之後，開門進來的是兩個弟媳婦，很用心地噓寒問暖，說起今天田裡的工作，唯一缺席的是「她」。他們講了一堆閒話，可是午後一點多了，沒有任何人想到他還沒吃飯，只有她想到。他回想以前村里四十多歲的阿六嫂再嫁的故事，許多人都勸阿六嫂已兒孫滿堂，何必如此？她說兒孫都是帳外人，只有丈夫才是帳內人。年老的公公要她守節，田地可以任她選，她說村頭村尾都是田，沒有丈夫不值錢。於是她堅持再嫁。這麼一想，又過了一陣，弟媳才送麵來，他只好說已吃過了。弟媳很驚訝。這時他又想到身體已經幾天沒擦洗，膩了，誰會幫他呢？只有她。這麼一動念，腦中想到的她，都是好的一面，體貼、風趣、

親密。到了傍晚，門一開，她進來了，帶了水桶，果然只有她才會想到這些。結尾很明顯，冷戰結束，一切回復正常。

這是個十分精簡的小品，卻是很深刻的心理描述，即使是今日的讀者，仍舊可以見到作者的細膩觀察與想像。

鍾鐵民早期的作品，書寫的方式偏重於故事的講述，而非小說的鋪排，但在十幾篇初作之中，「帳內人」是很值得再三玩味，再三咀嚼的小說。

## **A Guide to *Bedmates***

It has been taken for granted that a novel, or a fiction, is written on the basis of the author's own experiences, as reflected in Hemingway's *A Farewell to Arms*. What is of greater interest, however, is a creation resulting purely from the author's extensive reading and imagination. For instance, when Steve Crane was born in 1871, the Civil War in the United States was over, but his masterpiece *The Red Badge of Courage* was mainly concerned with events during that war. The novel was particularly interesting in use of colors as symbolism and the deft changes in a variety of writing styles. Chung Tie-min's *Bedmates* was written in 1962, far before he became married. When he undertook the writing, he was merely 21 year-old, still studying to pass the dreaded college entrance examination. He knew very little about life, and even less about marriage. However, the story resulted from his observation and imagination. The theme was a cold war between husband and wife.

As was the case, the events of the story were not in chronological order, but was instead a narrative alternating between the present and the past. This may reflect the author's intention to show the fluctuation of thought and the psychoses of the character. The story began with an accident which confined the protagonist to bed due to leg injuries. He was left alone, with nobody else to talk with. Suddenly, the door opened and in came his wife, with whom he had been separated for a while. He had been tired of the cold war against her. He did not want to say anything to her. But with her she brought a cup of water. Since he was quite thirsty, he thought it did not really matter if he drank the water. Then he kept on thinking of what he consider her faults - strong-willed, persistent, and stubborn. When he was thinking, the door opened again. This time she brought in some varieties of cooked vegetables and a hot bowl of porridge. She left as soon as the food was set on the table. The food reminded him of hunger. No food had been offered since he was put in bed. He was starving, and thought that by eating the meal, it would not mean capitulation, so he ate it. After a long while, the door was opened again, and into the room came his sisters-in-law. They spoke naught but ill of his wife. It was past one o'clock in the afternoon, but it seemed nobody would think that he had nothing to eat. His wife, despised as she was, seemed to be the only exception. He remembered the story of a widow, now over 40,

trying to marry again. The decision astonished the whole village. They advised her not to marry again because she had sons and grandsons. She claimed that sons and grandsons were people who did not share her bed, and only a husband slept beside her. Her father-in-law offered her the choice of any piece of land if only she gave up the notion to re-marry. She replied that land, be it located near or far, was merely land, but a land without a husband meant nothing to her. She insisted on re-marrying. Upon thinking of the story, he was inclined to remember what his wife had done for him. She was indeed considerate, lovely, witty, and intimate. After all, she was not without advantages. Now he felt uneasy for he had not bathed himself for quite a few days. At this moment, the door was opened, and into the room came his wife with a hot bucket of water. True was it that nobody in the world except his wife would know what he felt about. Obviously, the story had a happy ending - the cold war ended, and he and his wife went back to their normal life.

Most of Chung's early work was more about storytelling than a piece of art, usually weak in character description and dealt less with psychological development of characters. However, the story of *Bedmates* is still interesting to contemporary readers, due in part to its depth in observation and the author's specific humor.

## 帳內人

從窗隔間射進來的陽光，已經移得快跟窗櫺平行了；隔壁廳堂裏的掛鐘清脆地敲了十一下。偌大的一個家怎麼沉寂得那麼怕人呢？就只有時鐘的嘀嗒聲，偶而馬路上也響過牛車的隆隆聲或路人的一二句閒談；但是，這些聽起來卻又是那麼的遙遠，那麼的神秘。

他眼睜睜地躺在床上，嘴裏又乾又澀，叫過幾次水都沒有人理他，幾個小鬼不知道又野到那兒去了。他提高了聲音再叫了一次，火雞從豬欄那邊回答了他一連串的嚶咯嚶咯……。

他嘆了口氣，懊惱地移了移身子，一陣痛苦的表情爬上他的臉，他咬緊牙關，一面心裏恨恨的。都是那該死的野狗，為了避開牠，把自己的卡車往邊上靠，結果那大樹……。

唉！他又嘆氣了。從懂事以來，連稍大一點的病都沒有害過，沒想到終於有在床上受困的日子。平日裏事事稱心，受著父母疼愛，受著弟弟弟媳的尊敬，但是現在口渴卻得不到一口水潤喉嚨，有什麼用處呢？太太？唉！還是少提的好，還不是有等於無？真是冤孽。

他閉上眼聆聽著外面的聲音生氣。忽然他感到房子一亮，像是有人輕輕地走過來。他趕忙地向門口看去，很快地又別開了臉。

是她！竟然是她！這個時候她回家來幹什麼？回來看這冤仇人的狼狽相？這一下她可以高興了！

但是她——他的妻子——卻一聲不響地把一個玻璃杯擱在他床頭的小茶几上，帶上門，又悄悄出去了。

嚇！原來是想借這個機會賣殷勤。他感到一陣噁心。閉緊了嘴巴，心中恨恨的。

偏不喝妳的，別想這樣籠絡我。他坦然地躺著，故意地不看向小桌。但是隨即他又想：喝下去也不見就算妥協，怕她什麼？於是他端起茶杯，大口大口喝了一個痛快，然後舒適地嘆嘆氣躺了回去。

他有點為自己的誤會感到難為情。人家不過順手給你一杯茶，你卻小氣的不能接受。甚至還誤解人家的好意呢！是順手，當然不會特地來看我的。不過，即使是順手，也虧她想得到。他想著想著，對她也就有一種感激的心情。

其實她不是可以大大為我的受傷而高興嗎？我是那樣地對付她，甚至用扁擔把她打個半死。但昨天出院回來，似乎她眼睛有點腫腫的，真不敢相信她還會為我難過，我死掉她不更好嗎？至少她少了一個糟蹋她的人，而且她有兒子可倚靠，也沒有什麼站不住的。可是她顯然流過淚，只是自己硬著心腸不去看她。想起來也真可憐……

慢著！他忽然對自己暗叫：啊！你已經上當了。只不過順手的一杯茶，你就對她感到慚愧，感到歉疚，這不是正上了她的當嗎？全都是躺著太寂寞的關係！他告訴自己。

於是他開始想她的壞處，以加強對她的憎恨，想打消心頭剛萌芽的感情。這樣太不夠男子氣了！他想。

她被父母所厭惡，她跟妯娌結下冤仇，孩子們也不喜歡她；還有……還有我，她常常跟我吵架。他一件件地數著，卻又覺得這些理由並不足使他感到十分憎恨。唔！她有狐臭。但這也不足構成理由呀！當初他跟她認識時，每次聞到她的體味都感到莫名的興奮，使他想入非非。怎麼會想到這點呢？他對自己苦笑了。那該是她的母親——他的丈母娘使然的。

他的丈母娘曾在一間雜貨店當著十多個人的面，數說他和他的家虐待她女兒，更強調說：「我的女兒是瞎了眼睛，才會撿上你。」

是的，就這樣他一恨便跟妻子分房。除開一個兒子外她完全孤立，算來已經兩年了。

是她瞎了眼呢？還是我瞎了眼？他想：當年並不時興戀愛，當他提出結婚的事時，家裏長輩都反對，說她太精明，太強硬，也太愛說話，此外還有一股舉村皆知的狐臭。但是那時什麼蒙住我的心呢？我竟然認為精明強硬才能給我開導，遺傳給孩子優良的因質；喜歡說話更好，婚後卿卿我我何等情愛？至於狐臭，這是另一種的風韻，豈容他人分享？



唉！誰想到會在這上頭吃足了苦頭呢？先跟妯娌不和，又使父母厭恨，最後連我也不賣帳，逼得我跟父母弟媳們站在同一條陣線上，想盡了辦法對付她，一心想趕走她，甚至磨死她。可是她強硬，抵死也不走，更沒有妥協的意思。想起他給過她的許多折磨，心裏不無歉意。

門又開了，她端著一個鋁盤進來，鋁盤上擺著幾樣新鮮的菜和一大碗冒著煙的稀飯。看來她確然不是順手替他做的了。奇怪的是自己並沒有不領情的意思。他默默地對著她凝望著，她走近他床前，也看他一眼，那眼光是冷冷淡淡的，連一點表情也看不出來。把托盤放在茶几上，又輕輕地走了出去。

他感到有些悵然，又有如釋重負似的吁口氣。捧起碗來才發覺自己非常饑餓了。

她進來，把一個小茶壺放在茶几上，收拾起餐具轉身又要離去，他驚奇地聽到自己的聲音在問她：

「喂！妳怎麼會想到回家看我的呢？」

她回頭朝他望了一眼，嘴唇蠕動了一下，翻頭卻又走了。

這女人！這臭女人！他又悔又恨，感到自尊心被撕得粉碎了。她一定會以為我在向她求和呢！多可惡！

老實說，當家人合起來為難她的時候，他常感到不忍，有時想試著開導她；但是她理也不理，就好像下定了決心不妥協一樣。逼得他非使出男子氣揍她一頓不可。

門呀然一聲，進來的是二弟媳與三弟媳。

「阿哥，今天好一點沒有？」兩個人渾身出汗濕透，不住地搥著草笠，一面關切地問。

「今天爽快多了，田裏做得怎麼啦？」他愉快地問。

「番薯全部犁完，整整五牛車哩！」三弟媳說：「再兩天番豆可以拔完，只等二哥開犁。你放心養病吧！」

「呼！熱死人啦！」二弟媳拼命搖著草笠，兩個人說著也就走出去了。人影閃動，又走進母親和大弟媳。

「還那麼痛嗎？」母親坐在床沿關心地輕問。

「右腿還有點痛，其他的倒感覺不出來了。」

「那就很好。他們說車子不太壞，要幾千元修理。你弟弟早上去察看了。」母親說著提了提几上的茶壺又放了回去：「姓邱的助手傷很輕，今天已經出來走動了。」

他莫可奈何地苦笑了聲。然後淡淡的問：

「今天犁番薯嗎？」

「唉！還說呢！我不知道你前生作過什麼孽，偏偏看上她。」母親憤憤地說：「真要氣死我啦！」

「番薯犁完了，但她只揀了半個早上，就不知道跑到那裏去。」大弟媳補充地說。

這個「她」字說得很重，他知道是指他的妻子。他笑笑沒說什麼，心裏想：如果她們知道她是回來看他，而且他居然會找她說話，她們不知道會多麼驚奇呢！想著想著禁不住咯咯笑出聲來。

「笑什麼？」母親莫名其妙地也跟著笑了起來。

「沒有！沒什麼！」他仍笑個不停。

外面牛車輪響，接著傳來趕牛聲。

「你阿爸回來啦！」母親說完伴著大弟媳匆匆迎了出去。

他止住笑翻身起來坐著，眼望著房門發呆，心裏感到異常的空虛與紛亂。

母親很疼我，弟媳也很親切，可是沒有誰想到我會口渴需要人照應吧！他想：如果這是她們自己的丈夫，她們難道也任由他們去嗎？終究還要帳裏的人哪！

於是他想起老一輩的傳聞：莊尾阿六嫂丈夫死後要改嫁，那時她已四十多歲，孫子都有兩個了。村人勸她不如享兒孫福，她說：

「唉！兒孫再孝順終究是蚊帳外面的，只有丈夫才跟我同蚊帳啊！」

年老的公公也勸她守節，莊頭莊尾良田多少任她選，她說：

「莊頭的是田，莊尾的也是田，沒丈夫終不值錢。」

公公又告訴她，她有很好的兒子。她說：

「半斤黃麻不當四兩苧，半斤兒子不當四兩夫。」

大家都沒有話說了。為了帳內人，她真拋去了已有的一切。這事像笑話一般地被傳講著，她是不是真的很可笑？此刻他可一點也不覺得不平常。

門又被推開來，大弟媳捧著一只大碗進來。

「一點多了，肚子餓嗎？」她歉然地微笑著。

「剛吃過了，不餓！」

「哦？誰送來的呢？怎麼沒聽說。」

望著她走出去，他這才發現廳堂上鬧鬧，小孩子呼菜要湯和大人們的喝叱織成一片，一家二十多口人聚攏了起來可真夠熱鬧。

他厭厭地轉了一個身，感到身子膩膩的非常難受，誰能為他洗擦呢？只知道她肯不肯理我！他想：這時候果然就要自己帳裏的人了，雖然他們分房已經很久。

只有她真正想到我會渴壞餓壞，也只有她能替我做那別人不能做的事情。他想：我們——我和她真就這樣仇視下去嗎？好多年了，那真不像生活。將來兄弟分家之後，還能再跟父母弟媳站在一起跟自己屋裏人作對？

唉！如果她不是那麼頑強！如果她也順著我一點兒，不再對我太冷淡。為什麼不能像以前一樣過得那麼親蜜愉快呢？她有很多不討厭的地方：她很體貼，她很風趣……只是……只是有時頂撞得人家走頭無路！

這樣，他開始想她的種種好處，他們的戀愛和他們新婚後的日子。他心中漸漸已作了決定了。這場意外的災禍如果能夠讓他找回過去的生活，痛痛也值得。

傍晚，她進來的時候，果然提著水桶夾著衣服。他歡欣地迎著她笑著，她低著頭小心地閃避他直視著她的眼光。

她絞乾一條毛巾遞給他，手微微地發顫，他知道她這時也正在惶恐，是讓他的目光嚇著了。

他仍然注視著她的臉，並未伸手去接毛巾，終於她抬頭看了他一眼，但很快又轉向窗外，同時她的手輕輕被握住，她掙扎了一下也就靜靜地讓他握著。

「妳怎麼會想到要來照料我呢？」他溫柔地問。

她沒有回答。

「妳說話呀！」他催促地搖搖她的手。

「我不知道！」她淡淡地說，仍然望著窗外出神，他看得出她臉上含有無限的哀怨。一陣自疚的感情襲向他心頭，他握緊她的手低低地問：

「恨我嗎？」

「恨死了！」她突然轉臉對著他，恨恨的說；兩顆晶瑩的淚珠在她眼眶下閃動，終於一顆一顆往下滴落下來。

「從今以後再也不會教妳恨我了。」他激動地把她拉到身旁坐下，一面喃喃的說。他們靜靜地相偎著，一切都在靜默中得到諒解。

水桶不再冒煙，窗外陽光也漸漸變黃。

「搬到我房裏來吧！」他說。

「不。」

「那麼只好我搬回妳房裏去囉！」

「也不行。」

「怎麼？妳還恨我嗎？」

「是的。」她咬著牙說：「以後我要更恨你了。」

他哈哈大笑著，忽然哎喲一聲臉色變得蒼白，是大笑震動了腿部傷口。看見她焦急的神色，他更加深了表情逗她，一面哀求地說：

「痛死我啦！妳就替我擦擦身體吧！」

於是她替他解開襯衫……。

天黑後母親回來，見了他就生氣的說：

「你那個好妻子呀，得好好的教訓一番啦。人家忙得要死，她差不多整個下午都不見人影……。」

「可不是嗎？這女人真是壞極了。」他高興地叫著。一面望著母親驚愕的面容，一面想像她在廚房裏聽到這話的神情：

「等我病好以後，一定好好修理她！」

## Bedmates

The ray of sunlight stabbing through the windows was almost parallel to the windowsill, and the clock in the center room next to him chimed eleven musical notes. How could such a large house be so quiet? Only the clock's ticking, and the occasional ox-driven cart passing by on the road, or even the brief snippets of conversations from passengers filtered in. Yet, these sounds seemed to be so far away, so mysterious.

He lay awake on the bed with a dry mouth. He had called for water several times, but the children had evidently gallivanted off somewhere. He raised his voice and called out again, only to hear the response of the turkey's trilling from the direction of the pig sty.

He gave a troubled sigh and tried to shift his body a little. An expression of pain crept over his face, but he grit his teeth and endured it. If it weren't for that damned stray! He had angled his truck to the side of the road to avoid running the dog over, then that tree...

"Oy!", he sighed again. To think that one day he, who had never been sick in his life, would finally be trapped in bed. He'd enjoyed a good life, loved by his parents, respected by his younger brother and his younger sister-in-law, and yet, what use was this when he could not have some water to wet his lips in his thirst?

His wife? Oh, best not mention her; there was no difference now from when he was single. Oh, what a troubled fate!

He closed his eyes and slowly fumed angrily at the sounds outside. Without warning, he suddenly felt a brightening of the room, as if someone were tip-toeing over to his bed. He took a quick glance at the door, but then he just as quickly turned his sight away.

It was she! It was actually her! What was she doing here, at this time? Did she return solely to see him suffer and to laugh at him? We'll, she'd get her wish, now!!

But she -- his wife -- just silently placed a glass cup on the high stand next to the bed, closed the door, and softly walked away.

Well. She was using this as a way to butter him up! He felt a sense of disgust move through him and pressed his lips together tightly.

“Well, I wouldn’t be drinking what you put down. Don’t think you could bribe me so easily,” he thought with no little spite. He made himself comfortable and pointedly looked away from the table. Then he thought: Drinking what she put down did not mean really compromising. What was I scared of? And so he took up the glass cup and gulped down the water with gusto before lying back down with a sigh of comfort.

He was slightly embarrassed for misunderstanding her intentions. After all, she had simply come by and left him a glass of water, probably because his room was on the way, and he wasn’t gracious enough to accept even that. Furthermore, he even misconstrued her good intentions! At least she remembered his predicament, even if it were just along the way. The longer he dwelled on it, the greater his gratitude towards her actions grew.

In fact, she could have expressed joy upon seeing him injured, especially after the way he treated her -- beating her half-dead with a stick. But were her eyes not a little red and puffy after he left the hospital yesterday? He could not believe that she would still be sad over me. Would it not be better for her if he died? There would be one less person to mistreat her, and she had her son to rely on; she would have solid claims. Yet, she had evidently wept, and it was he who forced himself to be hard of heart and not to look at her. The more he thought about it, the more he pitied her.

Now, wait just one minute! He suddenly told himself. You’d been duped! It was just a cup of tea, and here you were feeling sorry for her and regretting your actions. That was exactly what she wanted!

He blamed his feelings on being too lonely from lying about and doing nothing. And then he began to think about her faults so that he could better enforce his hate towards her. It was an effort to smother the burgeoning feelings for her. Yet he could not shake the feeling that this was not very manly.

She was hated by his parents, and was at odds with her in-laws. The children did not like her, and... and there’s me. She would often fight with me.

He slowly went down a mental list, but could not help the feeling that these were reasons to hate her. Oh! She also had a case of body odors. But even this didn’t really count! After all, when he first met her, he would always be inexplicably excited when he smelled her distinct odor.

Well. How did I come up with that! He thought with a bitter smile. It must be because of her mother -- his mother-in-law -- that had caused such a state of affairs.

His mother-in-law had -- in the common goods store in front of more than ten individuals -- enumerated how he and his family mistreated her daughter. She couldn't put enough stress that "My daughter must have been blind to have married you."

Yes, and so he had started sleeping separate from her. Aside from her son, she was completely isolated in this household. Come to think of it, it has been two years.

Was she the blind one, or was I? He wondered. At the time, romantic love was frowned upon, and when he had raised the issue of marriage all of his elders had been opposed, stating that she was too smart, too strong-willed, loved to talk and most of all, it was known village-wide that she had body odor.

What had come over me, then? I actually thought that being smart and strong-willed would help broaden my sights and pass on good traits to my children; a love to talk was even better, for what better than to cuddle together in post-marital bliss? As for her odor, that was another one of her charms, and what reason to let others share it?

Ah! Who knew that such traits would act against her so? First she had estranged the other sister-in-laws, then made both mother and father hate her, and finally, forced me to take their side, wishing nothing more than to drive her away, or wear her down. But she was strong, showed no signs of compromise and would rather die than leave. Thinking back on the many torments he had brought upon her, he was not entirely unapologetic.

The door opened once more, and she came in bearing an aluminum tray, on which were several platters of freshly-cooked delicacies and a steaming bowl of porridge. It was certain, then, that she had made the meal after a second thought. Strange though it may be, he wasn't inclined to reject her. He silently watched her, and as she approached the bed, she returned the stare. The look was cold, passionless, and he was unable to discern any feelings. She put the tray on the small table then left the room quietly.

He felt slightly lost, but then exhaled, as if relieved from some burden. He only realized how famished he was after he picked up the bowl.

She came in again and placed a small teapot on the table. She gathered up the utensils and plates and was about to leave when he was surprised by his own voice ringing out in the room.

"Hey! Why did you think of coming back home and checking on me?"

She turned back and looked at him, her lips quivering as if about to say something, then she flung her head about and left.

Women! This stinky woman! He felt a pang of regret and anger as his dignity was trampled to fine powder. She must think I was trying to make up with her! How detestable!

To be frank, when his family members had closed ranks against her, he had often felt sorry for her, and tried to turn her around. She had, however, flat out ignored him, as if she were determined to never give in. Her attitude had forced him to beat her, showing her who was the man.

The door creaked open again, this time admitting his second and third sisters-in-law.

“Feeling better today, big brother?” they said while fanning themselves with their hats; their shirts were completely soaked with sweat.

“It’s much cooler today. How about the fields?” he said happily.

“We’ve finished harvesting the yam, and we have 5 ox-carts full!” the third sister-in-law said, adding, “In another two days we will be able to harvest all the peanuts, and we have to wait for our second brother to plow the field. Just rest easy and get well soon!”

“Whew! It’s boiling!” the second sister-in-law said and both of them left chatting with each other. As soon as they left, mother and the sister-in-law wed to the eldest of his younger brothers, walked in.

“Does it still hurt much?” mother asked in concern

“The right leg still hurts a bit, but I’m fine everywhere else.”

“That’s good. They said the vehicle isn’t too bad. It would cost several thousand to fix up. Your younger brother went out this morning to take a look at it.” Mother said. She lifted the teapot on the table then put it back. “Your assistant, Chiu, wasn’t hurt bad. He was walking around this morning.”

He chuckled mirthlessly, he then asked, “Did we harvest yams today?”

“Ah! Don’t even get me started! I don’t know what you’ve done in your previous life to become attracted to her! It’s truly maddening!” Mother said with anger.

“We’ve finished extracting the yams, but she only stayed half the morning for picking, then vanished off somewhere,” the eldest sister-in-law said in explanation.



The “she” was emphasized; he knew it referred to his wife. He smiled and didn’t reply, thinking to himself, if only they knew that she had come back to check up on him, and that he had talked to her! Oh, how surprised they will be!

He broke out into a chuckle as he imagined the incident. His mother laughed along with him, asking, “What’s so funny?”

“Nothing. Oh, nothing at all!” he said, still laughing.

The creak of oxcart wheels sounded outside, soon followed by the sounds of driving the oxen. “Your father is home!” Mother said, and she hastened out, accompanied by the eldest sister-in-law.

He stopped laughing, rolled up and sat looking at the door vacantly. He felt disturbed by an odd emptiness within him.

Mother loved me very much, and the sisters-in-law were cordial; but none of them thought that he would be thirsty, or needed someone to look after him! If I were their own husbands, would they let me be as they did me? In the end, only the one inside the veil could be counted on!

He then thought of a story. A Liou’s husband passed away, and she decided to marry again. At that time, she was over 40, and she had two grand-sons. A lot of people tried to stop her from re-marrying. She said, “Ah! No matter how respectful they are, they are still outside the veil. Only my husband can sleep beside me, within the same veil.”

Her father-in-law also asked her not to re-marry and he offered her any land she liked. Replied she, “Whether at the head, or the end, of the village, land is just land. It is never worth a husband.”

Her father-in-law told her that her sons were good, to which she said, “One won’t take half a kilo of jute for 4 ounces of cloth, so two sons will not make a husband.”

Everyone was at a loss for words. She gave away everything she owned, for what? She wanted someone that she could sleep with inside the same veil. The story had been told and retold like a joke, but was it truly laughable? At the moment, he felt that it was nothing unusual.

The door opened again, and the eldest sister-in-law came in with a big bowl. “It’s past one o’clock. Are you hungry?” she said, with an apologetic smile.

“Nah, I just ate.”

“Oh? Who brought the food over? I haven’t heard about it.”

He watched as she walked out, and discovered then that the living room was quite lively, with the children's clamoring about for food and the adults' sternly berating them for unruliness. The whole family -- numbering 20 people and more -- made quite a racket.

He turned about on the bed lazily and felt grimy and uncomfortable. Who could help him with a sponge bath? He wondered if she would notice him.

Well, now you need someone who shares a bed with you, he thought, even though they have been separated for quite a while.

Only she would consider whether I was thirsty, or hungry, and only she could help me with intimate matters that others could not do. We -- She and I -- were we to continue being enemies, he thought. It had been so many years. It was a life indeed. When the brothers eventually moved out for independent life, will he be able to continue to stand on the side of his mother against his own wife?

Ah! If only she were not so stubborn! If only she would bend to his will a little, not so cold to me. Why couldn't they be as close and happy as they were before? There were many things about her that weren't bad: she was considerate, she was funny... but... but sometimes she was rude to the point that others found it difficult.

Thinking of her many strong suits of the days when they were in love, and the days when they were newly-weds, he gradually came to a decision. If this accident provided the catalyst to return things to what they were before, then the attendant pain was well worth it.

When she entered his room in the evening, she was, of course, carrying a bucket of water along with some clothes under the arms. He greeted her with a joyful smile, but she timidly avoided his stare with lowered head. She wrung dry a towel and handed the towel to him with slightly trembling hands. He knew that she was feeling panicked; it was how he looked at her.

He didn't reach out to take the towel and continued to stare at her. Finally, she looked up and glanced at him - only once -- then quickly turned to look outside. The moment she looked outside, her hand was taken lightly, and though she tried to jerk her hands away, it was only a brief jerk before she let him hold her hand.

"What made you think of coming to take care of me?" he asked gently. She answered with silence.

"Well, speak up!" he said, shaking her hand to and fro.

“I don’t know!” she said lightly, still looking out the window, but even as she spoke he could see the plaintive sadness heavily upon her brows. A strong sense of guilt came over him, and he held her hands tightly.

“Do you hate me?” he asked in a low voice.

“Absolutely!” she said roughly, suddenly turning to face him. Two drops of tears rolling in her eyes finally fell,

He grabbed her roughly and pressed her down beside him. He mumbled passionately, “Never again will I give you cause to hate me.”

They sat there, leaning against one another, and in silence they agreed to understand and let go of the past. The steam from the bucket ceased, while the sun’s light darkened.

“Move back into my room with me,” he said.

“No.”

“Well, then I just have to move into your room, then!”

“That wouldn’t do, either.”

“What? Do you still hate me?”

“Yes, and I shall redouble my efforts in the future,” she said through gritted teeth.

He laughed happily. All of a sudden, he groaned due to the pain of the foot. Seeing her expression of worry, he exaggerated his pain and said pleadingly, “It hurts! Why don’t you help clean my body?”

So she started to unbutton his shirt...

Mother returned after dark, and told him angrily when she saw him, “Oh that wife of yours! You should teach her a lesson! We’ve been busy with work, but no one’s seen her for most of the afternoon...”

“Oh, you don’t say? She’s quite terrible!” he cried out happily. He continued, looking at her mother on the one hand, and on the other he imagined how it would look on her face, when he said, “I will teach her a lesson when I recover from my injury.”

## 「夜歸人」導讀

「夜歸人」寫的是有關入贅男的故事。「招贅」或「入贅」指的都是同一件事，前者為女方的講法，後者為南方的講法。在台灣(閩南或客家)的習俗文化中，男性為唯一合法的家族繼承人，能承續一家的香火或香煙。若家中未出丁(尚未生男的)，則必須要從女兒中，選一個招贅，讓男人住進女方家。這種文化也反映在女兒的命名之上，如果連續生了兩個女兒，家人就開始緊張，要把第二個女兒名字取為「招弟」(招娣)，以祈求好兆頭。如果第三胎還是女兒，就名為「菊弟」(菊娣)(也是招來之意)，或稱「滿妹」(不要再有女兒之意)。通常男人接受入贅的原因，大都是家中清寒毫無耕種田地，或為了家中急需一筆錢而入贅者。總之入贅的男人，必須面臨很大的壓力。

鍾鐵民的故事起自一個冷寂安靜的夜晚，寧靜中的敲門聲帶來一股神祕的氣氛，門呀然一開，伴著親密的髒話，原來是離家出外工作的丈夫。簡單幾句對話，他就發現她媽不在，於是鬆了一口氣，還是忍不住罵了一聲「老狐狸」。原來她媽沒有男兒，只生了她和姐姐兩人，姐姐狡猾躲開了招贅，她只好把心愛的人招進門。原本她也想嫁出去，不用招贅，但媽媽以死相逼，她只好妥協。他家雖不富裕，卻不至於窮到要入贅，在種種無解的因素之下，她招他入贅。他們連生了兩個女兒，媽媽因此還要他埋在生一個男孩。他知道，有了男孩繼承香火，他在這個家就沒有任何地位了。於是在岳母與女婿開始明爭暗鬥，岳母怕他繼承了田地後不負責任，他覺得這種想法表示他沒有被信任。兩人整個心理爭鬥中，家中氣氛詭譎、沉重。男人最後選擇外出大天下，可是家裡耕地良多，迴非女人可以應付，她才託人帶信央他回來。才入門，兩人就開始口角，把昔日心中所有的舊恨講出來。對話無法表達的，作者會適時伸出頭來，解說一番，使整個情節形成一個完整的故事。

「夜歸人」的寫作方法與「大姨」很類似，前者以入贅的客家習俗為背景，而處裡的焦點並非在這個習俗。客家的人贅習俗，曾給不少窮苦女孩帶來悲慘的命運，也成為日後女性意識高漲之際，爭相探討與批評的文化。不過，「夜歸人」的主要情節在於男人在這種外界壓力下，思考自己的出路，他放不開他對她的愛，因此，整篇小說屬於「微觀」(micro perspective)的事件。「大

姨」取材於日據時代後期一些愛國的人士受到日警的殺害，是一種殖民恐怖的背景，可是「大姨」的故事焦點也不放在日本殖民恐怖上。日據時期的殖民恐怖灼傷了許多愛國人士的心靈，摧殘了不少家庭，迄今仍然是很多人揮之不去的夢魘。但是「大姨」也不在寫這個背景，而僅僅關注呂永正面對姨媽過時的悔恨與不捨。兩篇小說的主角都是中年客家人，他們對於外在的殖民壓迫或民俗文化並不特別關心，他們呈現的僅僅是他們內心的掙扎。

## A Guide to Returning at Night

The story of *Returning at Night* was about a man who had a matrilocal marriage. In practice, a matrilocal marriage was a custom, both in the Hoklo and the Hakka cultures in Taiwan, where the male considered as the sole legal heir. If a family has no male progeny, a female child will be selected for a matrilocal marriage, in a hope to find a husband who will live in the wife's family after the marriage. This custom was, to some extent, based on a male-dominant tradition, which culture was also perceived in the naming of female children. If both children in one family were females, the second one would usually be called Chao-ti, to provide auspice that the next child will be male. The third child - if female - would be named Chu-ti, with the same meaning as Chao-ti, or she would be named Man-mei, to signifying that the family has too many daughters.

If a man chose to marry into a woman's family, it is usually because his family was poor or had no fields to farm or that his family needed money badly. In any case, the man choosing to marry into his wife's family was without no great pressure.

The story began with a knock on the door in a cold, quiet night. The suspense of the strange midnight visitor was lifted with the opening of the door and familiar cursing; it was her husband working out-of-town. Expressing relaxed that his mother-in-law was not home, he called her an "old fox." His mother-in-law had no son, and had only given birth to two daughters. Given that the elder daughter eloped, she could not help asking or forcing the second daughter to have a matrilocal marriage. The man's family, while not well off, was not in such saddened straits that he needed to marry into the woman's family. The couple gave birth to two daughters, but the mother-in-law wanted them to keep trying for a son. The man knew, however, that once there was a son in the family, he would give his way to nothingness. The mother-in-law was afraid that the man would not take up the responsibility of providing for the family once he inherited the family fields, while the son-in-law felt that such thoughts betrayed an inherent mistrust for him. The war between the man and his mother-in-law raised all turbulence and uneasiness. Under such circumstances, the man ran away home and worked outside. Eventually, the family has too much land for the woman to work alone, so she asked him to be home. The immediate quarrels between the couple

indicated the difficulty in their marriage. The focus of this story lay on the psychological developments of the husband, which was not unsuccessful at all.

The technique in writing showed a great influence from Anton Chekhov, who always began his short story with the middle instead of with the beginning. All the follow-up events or plots emerged step by step by way of the dialogues. It was the dialogues that played the central role in such writing. Accordingly, the language should be either full of simplicity or colloquial, much the same as the dialogue in a play. From this perspective, Chung worked very well in *Returning at Night*.

In essence, the custom of the Hakka people for matrilineal marriage was considered as background instead of the theme, much the same as the writing in *Aunty*. In *Aunty* the general background was the era of Taiwan colonized by Japan. However, the main focus of *Aunty* was the psychological developments of the protagonist. In other words, that the protagonist's father was killed contributed nothing to the story other than an introduction.

The protagonists in both stories are both middle-aged Hakka men, and both are not particularly concerned about the colonial oppression of the Japanese, or the local culture and traditions. Both short stories instead portray their inner struggles.

## 夜歸人

誰？

女的聲音有些模糊，卻也透著些許憤怒，還夾雜著驚悸的味道。

「誰？」

女的聲音高起來，驚悸的情緒突然顯現出來了。她已走到門後邊，可以猜想出她說話時一定推緊了木門，將耳朵靠在門縫間，門後邊有支三寸方木條，這時可能已抓在她手中了。

「到底是誰呢？半夜三更……」

「小聲點好不好！我嘛！」

「你？你是人是鬼！」

「幹妳老母！妳老公的聲音都聽不出來啦？」

門後面的聲音沒有了，門外男人等著。路燈照在他半邊面孔上，顯著十分不耐煩的色彩。男人身材相當的高壯，這時看著卻像混身軟棉棉不帶半點力氣，背微駝著，就好像連脊椎也鬆散開來了。他的小包袱擺在門檻上，一手支著門框。許久，卻沒有聽到開門的聲音。男人試著推了幾次，每次都啞啞咕咕地。那臉色是越來越僵硬了。

「幹妳老母！」

男人最後輕輕罵了一聲，彎腰提起包袱。就在這時卡答一響，門栓被拔脫開，木門鬆開一條縫，男人順勢閃了進去。門在身後關起，男人丟開包袱，用腳勾過屋角的籐椅，然後重重地坐了進去，整個身子就都癱在那裏了。

女人背靠著木門，一動也不動地注視著椅子上的男人。她的神情很奇怪，鬆散的亂髮底下，眼光閃動不定，顯示著不知所措的心情。不過，從她那抿得緊緊的嘴角向下弓著的弧形，可以明白看出女人的意志，那是自信和堅定的。可能是男人僕僕風塵和憔悴的模樣使她驚奇，因而使得她壓住了脾氣。她的臉孔稍長些，下巴尖削，眼簾略略浮腫，但在燈光下，並不難看。

「睡死了一樣，叫半天都不醒。」

男人懶洋洋的彎身脫鞋，很快房中就發散一陣中人欲嘔的氣息，女人皺緊了雙眉，一臉的厭惡和無奈。男人自動自的脫鞋脫襪，然後站起來脫下外褲，



脫下襯衫，往籐椅靠背上一擱，就伸手去掀開蚊帳。兩個孩子正睡得甜甜的，男人看了片刻，面孔慢慢回復了血色。

「從旗山走回來，足足走了一點鐘。」男人說著在床沿坐了下來：「累死啦！」

「你不去洗洗嗎？」

女人的話並不親切，她仍然站在門後，從男人進來後她就沒有移動過。

男人這時才抬頭看向女人，對女人的神情，他好像一點都不覺奇怪。他繼續的注視著，女人轉頭看向白壁，嘴角捫得更緊，下頷微微撓起。

「怎麼呢？看到老公那樣不高興嗎？」

「……」

「既然這麼討厭，怎麼又要叫人帶口信給我呢？」

「先去洗洗腳吧！」

「吵醒了那老狐狸討厭。」

「你怎麼可以這樣罵我媽媽！死人！」

「本來就是老狐狸！」

「死人！死人！」

「我不見她，我情願自殺。」

「她到下莊阿姨家去了，阿姨孫兒做滿月。」

「妳怎麼不早說呢？」

男人怔了一下，然後大聲地打了幾個哈欠，淚點漣漣地歪倒在床沿，仰臉向上躺了下來，四肢關節好像就在這一刻鬆開來了。

「累死我啦！」

男人不住地發著舒服的輕嘆，率性連眼睛也瞌上了。

女人頓了頓腳，回身開門走了出去。房裏男人雙手彎曲過來墊著後腦，他側著頭往蚊帳裏看著。兩個孩子一邊一個仍然睡得那麼香甜。均勻的呼吸聲輕輕地起落著，細細的，牽動人的睡思。女人的枕頭在兩個孩子中，白色的枕套夾在兩堆烏雲一般的長髮中，顯得格外刺眼。女人有潔癖，什麼都要乾乾淨淨。

孩子躺著，看起來已經很長。肚皮上裹著被單，睡態就如她們的母親，安穩又規矩。看著孩子，男子覺得無比平和舒適，他忽然高興自己回來的這個決定了。

女人在大鍋中加滿水，然後蹲到灶口取柴生火。柴木是上好的乾相思樹，灶中一會兒就跳躍出陣陣藍光。女人木然蹲著，光燄照射著她的面孔，一陣紅一陣藍的顯著一種不安的色彩。

丈夫回家來，不高興嗎？倒也沒有這種感覺。不過，也說不上高興，只是有些緊張，更加上無比的意外。

幸好母親不在家！

「這老狐狸！」

男人切齒的模樣在火光中突然跳出。

「不要這樣！」

「老狐狸！」

「請不要這樣。」

母親再不好再不講理終究是我媽媽，男人的蠻橫執拗令人怨恨。事實上，她知道自己沒有真正生氣的意思，從來就沒有過，有也只是為了男人沒有顧慮自己。而且她也真氣男人一走就一個月沒有信息。有時她也盼望男人會突然回家。她還是愛男人的。這樣想起來使她微覺對母親歉疚。不由她搖頭嘆氣。

男人的模樣更清楚地在火光中跳躍。但那不是目前這個落魄疲憊的男人。那是如此鮮明如此歡悅而且充滿活力。

從來招贅就很少有好到底的。阿姊十九歲那年出嫁，母親只有她們姊妹兩個女兒，父親在戰爭的最後一年被征派到南洋去，她出生時已經沒有父親的信息很久了。而且也就一直沒有誰再見過他。大姊應該招贅，姊夫那邊卻說什麼也不肯，而大姊有了三個月身孕。母親非常傷心，那時她才十五歲，她已決心要做一個好女兒了。人家都說大姊傻，誰知道當時大姊不是用詭計呢？

如果當時男人再堅持呢？她這個好女兒還做得成嗎？恐怕也要步大姊的後塵吧！男人家庭是窮，兄弟也多，但還不致窮到需要做人家贅婿的程度。母親曾經以死相脅，她也以服毒相敵。男人低頭了，以為一切就此解決，從此可以過幸福平安的日子，她家有一些田產。真沒有想到贅婿難做，母親的處處提防

掣肘，演成了今天的這種情況。男人要偷偷摸摸回家。當時又怎麼能想像得到呢？對男人，忍不住也要覺得歉然。可是這時候她什麼也改變不得了。男人數次想帶她出去，她已不想離開這個窩，即使是因而與男人分手也無可奈何。

母親希望著她快生一個男孩子，她自己也想要有一個兒子，就是男人又何嘗不想要一個男孩子呢？當然她和男人同樣地明白，假如有了兒子，一個接繼母親這邊煙火的後代，那麼男人在這個家庭中的地位，更要顯得無足輕重了。母親的心願是不希望她再生第二個兒子，那頂著父姓的兒子將是一個不受歡迎的麻煩的創造者。自從母親和男人感情交惡以後，母親甚至不諱言她對男人和那個根本不見蹤影的孫兒的感覺。對這件事，她一向不想也不願理會。可是男人對於她的靜默卻極為不滿。

「沒想到妳跟妳那母親是同樣的貨色。」

「胡說。」

母親是私心稍重。母親是頭腦稍頑固。母親是不甘心自己的財產與外姓人同享。而她和男人是相愛結合，她知書達情，男人對她說這種話令她氣憤難平。

唉！沒有母親就沒有這麼多討厭的事情了。她這樣想，忽又覺得罪過。仔細分析一下，她發覺自己真有這樣的意思，不論因為何等理由，她確實不想要多生孩子。現在她有了兩個女兒，兩個姓父姓的女兒，女兒將來要嫁出去，只要再一個，再一個兒子就夠了，而第一個兒子是頂自己的姓氏的。只要再一個！她不時這麼想。是不是她也像母親一樣存有私心呢？不！絕不！但是再想一想似乎無可否認的，母親確實已給了她某些影響。這樣一想她感到無比的慚愧起來。自己真不是那樣的人啊！

她並不是完全不關心男人。當然男人變了許多，他執拗懶惰又骯髒。使得她的感情冷淡下來，甚至於時時的要怨恨生氣。男人一切都是有意的。雖然她知道不能完全怪他，仍然覺得無法諒解。

如果男人永不回來，母親會逼她再招贅一次。她對男人雖然缺乏愛情，但絕未想過離婚。生活的習慣上她不能沒有男人。因此，男人賭氣離開了家庭，她跟母親也爭執了很長一段時期。

現在，男人回家來，不知該憂該喜，也不知道事情是不是好轉。最少，今夜是平靜的。幸好母親不在家。

女人再走進房間時，男人直挺挺地仰躺在床上，兩手交疊在腦後，老早就睡熟了。女人猶疑了一下，拖開衣櫥，將男人的內衣褲找了出來，然後輕輕拍著男人的肩膀。

「醒醒！起來吧！」

男人警醒地翻身坐起來，兩眼連連眨動著，一時睜不開來。

「輪到我的班了嗎？」

女人將衣服塞進他胳膊下。

「醒一醒吧！去洗個澡。」

「唔——」

男人突然又鬆散開來，順勢又想歪倒下去。女人手快，一把扶住了不使躺下。

「水已經燒好啦！」

「我好累，免了好嗎？」

「一身汗，不洗怎麼睡覺？」

「拜託！明天一定洗。」

男人哈欠連聲，但是他的精神卻好像慢慢恢復了。

「去！洗完身子舒服，睡得爽快。」

女人的話已經顯出了女人的味道。男人無奈地套了拖鞋站起身來，錯身時順勢就在女人胸前抓了一把，女人使勁往旁一偏身子，並使勁朝胸前的手擰了過去，不過男人縮得很快，待要發作，男人已經一歪一倒地踱出了房間。

水的溫度是熱了些，潑身上覺得陣陣麻麻辣辣。幾乎整整有一個月沒有洗到熱水澡了，熱水潑著，真舒服到了極點。

「幹他老母！這才有點像人過的。」

男人暗自想著。

由早班轉大夜班，有一日一夜的空檔，正好又剛剛領得工資，在工人宿舍睡了半天之後，他突然決定回家看看。

狡兔有三穴，現在他弄得穴穴難留。

父母雖然健在，但是兄弟分家後各奔一路，父母處已無他安身之所。他自己的家裏他卻如同外人，使他常覺如住旅店。這就是做人家贅婿的處境了。真是悔不當初。

一個人最大的缺點就是心地太軟，太容易說話。這樣那樣一向他都很順著女人的心意，這原因一方面固然是不忍傷害女人的心，另一方面則是他心許不深，在小地方女人確實比他週密太多了。女人家有五分雙季田，有間店房出租，還有五六甲山林，在他來看已是一筆不少的產業。女人別無兄弟，大姊出嫁已經失去承繼家產資格，這些產業在他們夫妻手中經營，應該可以過得相當不錯。婚後他並無他心，女人也相當溫順，但是他漸漸發覺到女人的母親對他存有戒心。聽說很多贅婿在婚後拐了女人也拐了財產，他跟女人越親蜜就越使丈母娘害怕。結果他的身份不是主人，卻恰如長工。

好男兒不住外家邊。何況是外家的產業。要改變就得趁年輕，環境得自己來創造。他初中畢業，身強力健，做個工人總是有人要的。到時女人跟不跟他出來看她自己，就是要各自婚嫁也得趁早。

想起來容易，事實卻困難得多了。離家一個月，幾乎無時不想女人想孩子，如果不是為了一口氣，老早就丟開工作跑回家來了。絕不能失敗回來。

工廠是新成立的鋼絲廠，他是第一批工人，經過幾天學習後他就成了領班。工資每天三十五元，三個月後提升為五十塊，以後每半年調整一次，吃工廠住工廠，什麼時候有能力成立一個新家養得起妻女呢？

工作不能丟開，日子總得過下去，他每期買兩張愛國獎券，有一天日子總會改善。工作很苦，累下就倒頭大睡，反正一起工作的人全都一樣。

同鄉的同事問他要不要回家，看人家得到假期的歡樂模樣，令人十分羨慕。他觸動了他的鄉心，使他忍不住想要回家看看，就是看一眼也好。

今天選的日子太好了。

房裏他的枕頭擺在女人身邊，女人躺在那裏望著屋頂在發呆。把大女兒推到床裏邊，男人傍著女人身旁躺了下來。女人移了移身體給他空出半個位子。

「幹妳老母，剛才我叫門半天，為什麼不開呢？」

「你為什麼一跑三十多天？也不跟我說。」

「為了免得人家趕，最好我自己先走。」

「誰趕了你嗎？」

「妳不看榕樹埔的老古錐，老後不是被老婆兒子趕去當廟公睡破廟！」

「那是他老不正經，又要飲酒又要賭博嘛！怪得誰？」

「幹妳老母！我看了就是害怕。妳們母女兩不是好人，不要將來把我剝碎了餵豬母。」

「死人！你三十天就學了罵粗話嗎？」

「本來就是那樣的嘛！」

「每個人都不相同，就是媽媽也不會那樣絕情。」

「呵！未可知哩！我賣力肯做牛當然就要我，假如一病倒或是要喝喝酒，怕不會比老古錐好多少。」

「誰不好比，比那老古錐，你怎麼不看看劉文發，人家多好？」

「劉文發命好，他老婆好多了。」

「嫌我不好，那又回來幹什麼？」

「回來看看我老婆有沒有想老公。」

「像你那樣子，死掉我都不想。」

「妳看！妳看！我還沒有老就那樣子了，還說得那麼好聽。」

女人輕笑一聲翻身以背對向男人。

「那你就去蹲破廟算了。」

男人沒有說話，只使勁地將女人拖過，同時一隻手在女人胸前摸索起來。女人口中發出厭煩的聲音，但是並沒有阻擋男人伸進衣服裏去的手。

「李永忠的妹妹也在加工區工作，她有沒有找到你？」女人問。

「如果不是她來找過我，我還不回來呢！」

「工作很苦嗎？」

「還好。」

「我托她帶了兩百元，你收到嗎？」

「拿到了。」

「你沒有錢怎麼出去的呢？」

「我借了兩百元。」

「我不知道你住在那裏，聽李永忠的妹妹說過才知道的。」

男人沒有說什麼，突然將女人摟得很緊，女人輕輕地喘了起來。

「你還要去嗎？」

「你要我走嗎？」

「誰管你走不走。」

「我不想去。真的。」

「那就不要走好了。」

「你媽媽明天回來，我還是走好。」

「你真要離開這個家嗎？」

「我也不知道。」

女人不響了，男人嘆了口氣，他偏過頭吻了吻女人，女人在流淚。男人用手指替她拭去淚水，一面狂吻著女人一面伸手往下摸索，女人突然推開了男人的手，男人很執拗。

「不行。」

男人沒有理會。

「現在不行。」

男人全身僵住，慢慢平躺回去。抽回墊在女人脖子底下的手臂，男人一聲不響翻過身子，拉起被單一把連頭一起蒙得緊緊的。

「幹妳老母，妳們母女倆這一生就不想讓我稱心。」

女人默默地聽男人在暗自嘀咕，她任由淚水自雙頰流落，許久不見男人動靜。

「我不是故意的。」

女人說，但是她發現男人已經睡著了。屋裏靜悄悄的，只有呼吸聲此起彼落，沒有誰聽見她的話。

（五九·十·臺灣文藝）

## Returning at Night

Who's there?

The woman's voice was vague, but laced with slight traces of anger and fright.

"Who's there?"

Her voice rose, suddenly expressing in full the fright which heretofore was only slightly expressed. She was now behind the door, and it could be assumed that as she spoke, she must have pushed shut the wooden door tightly while placing her ear by the wooden slats.

It was also assumed that she had held the three inch thick wooden stick behind the door.

"Who can it be? At this time of night..."

"Can you be any louder! It's me!"

"You? You who?"

"God damn it! Can't you recognize the sound of your own man?"

The woman behind the door fell silent. The man outside waited. Only half of his face was visible under the light of the street lamp, and it was colored with impatience.

The man was tall and muscular, but appeared weak and limp; his back was slightly hunched, as if his spine could no longer support him. A small sack rested on the porch while he clung to the doorframe with one hand.

He stood for a long while, and heard no sound of an opening door. He tried pushing the door a few times, each time muttering under his breath with an increasingly foul storm brewing over his brows.

"Damn it all!" he cursed softly at last. Just as he stooped to pick up his satchel, he heard the sound of the latch being lifted. The door creaked open just a sliver, and the man threw himself in.

The door closed behind him. He cast aside his satchel, then pulled over a rattan chair with his foot before promptly melting into the chair.

The woman stood with her back to the door, staring at the man in the chair without moving a muscle. Under loose, unkempt hair, her expression and darting eyes betrayed her feeling of being at sea. Yet her lips, pressed tightly together in a firm arch, also showed resolve and confidence.



Perhaps it was the travel-worn look on the man that sparked her surprise and curiosity, serving to tamp down her temper. Her face was slightly long, but her chin sharp; her eyelids were a touch swollen, but all were softened under the lamp's light.

"It's almost as if you were sleeping like the dead! Hard to get you up."

The man lazily bent down and took off his shoes, sending a wash of unpleasant odor flooding the room. The woman frowned deeply, her helpless revulsion at the act writ large on her expression.

The man took no notice and shed his pants and shirt, which he hung over the back of the chair before reaching over and drawing back the mosquito net over the bed. The two children were sleeping soundly, a sight that brought back some of the color to the man's wan cheeks.

"I've walked a full hour from Qishan to get back. I'm beat!" the man said as he sat down on the side of the bed.

"Aren't you going to take a shower?" The question was **delivered in a chill tone**. The woman still stood by the door and had not budged since the man entered.

The man glanced up at the question and looked at the woman. He seemed unsurprised at her expression and continued to stare. The woman pursed her lips even tighter and lifted her chin slightly as she turned to stare at the white-washed walls.

"What is it? Are you so unhappy to see your man?"

The woman remained silent.

"Well, if you are so unhappy, why did you have someone bring me a message?"

"At least go wash your feet first!" she said

"It's going to be a bother if I wake that old bat up."

"How can you call my mother that! You wretch!"

"Well, she is an old bat!"

"Wretch! You wretch!"

"I'd rather kill myself than see her."

"Well, she's visiting aunty in the lower village. Aunty's grandson is about to be one month old."<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> As is the custom in Taiwan, when a baby gets to be one-month old, after being born in 30 days, it is called *man-yue* (man=enough, yue-month). On that day, usually a party will be held for relatives. From that day on, the mother is allowed to leave the

“Why didn’t you say so!” the man said before yawning loudly and lying down on the bedside, as if his joints became unscrewed at that very comment.

“Damn, I’m tired,” he said after emitting sighs of comfort, and in the end, even closed his eyes.

The woman stamped her foot before walking out of the room. The man inside the room couched his head on his palms, turning slightly to look inside the mosquito screen. The children were still sleeping soundly, their rhythmic breathing itself a lullaby, lulling one into sleep.

The woman’s pillow was still between the children, the whiteness of the pillowcase and the soft black hair of the children was a sharp contrast. The woman was obsessed with cleanliness, everything having to be sparkling clean.

The children looked quite big even lying down, their sleeping forms wrapped with a light bed sheet, exactly like their mother, calm and regulated.

The man felt a comfortable calm fall over him as he looked at his children, and was very happy that he had made the decision to come back.

The woman filled up the big pot with water before squatting in front of the stove to add kindling to the fire. The kindling was dried Acacia of fine quality, and in no time the stove was crackling with a merry blaze.

The dance of light and shadow across her passive features colored in the light of unease. Was she unhappy that her husband returned home? No, she didn’t have that feeling. However, she can’t be happy, either. It was more of a feeling of nervousness, and a sense of extreme astonishment.

It was a good thing that Mother wasn’t home!

The image of the man gritting his teeth and muttering, “The old bat!” leapt out at her from the flames.

“Don’t be like that!”

“The old bat!”

“Please don’t do this.”

Whatever her failings, however unreasonable, she is still my mother, and the man’s stubbornly rude attitude towards her was indeed hateful. In fact, she knew she wasn’t truly angry. She never had been.

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room or walk out. This is quite different from what we have in the Western world.

If she was, then it was because the man was not looking after himself anymore, and that he had merely left and remained at large, with no contact, for one month. She sometimes hoped that he would suddenly come home.

She still loved the man; though thinking such thoughts made her apologetic towards her mother. She shook her head and sighed.

The man's image appeared clearly in the flames, but it wasn't the tired, downtrodden man she just saw. It was the image of a happy, vibrant man who had stood out so clearly from his peers.

There were very few good-endings for men with an matrilocal marriage<sup>4</sup>, the woman thought. When the eldest sister got married she was 19. Now she and her younger sister were left to keep her mother company. With father drafted to the South Pacific in the last year of the war, there had been no news of her father for a very long while since she was born. No one has seen him since, in fact. According to tradition, the eldest sister should wed her husband matrilocally, but the brother-in-law had adamantly refused. At that time, the eldest sister was pregnant with a three-month-baby. Mother fell into despair. At the time, the woman was only 15 years old, but she had already decided to be a good daughter. Everyone said that the eldest sister made an unwise choice. However, the woman wondered if it was her sister's tricks.

What if her man had insisted on refusing an matrilocal marriage, would it possible for her to be an obedient girl? She may very well have followed her eldest sister's step! To be certain, the man's family was poor and he had many brothers. Nevertheless, his family was not so poor as to be forced to accept an matrilocal marriage. The man eventually agreed under the threat of her mother's suicide attempt. It was thought that everything should have been resolved, and they should have been

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<sup>4</sup> An matrilocal marriage is now disappearing. Ten or twenty years ago, it was quite common in Taiwan, both for Hakka or for Southern Min. The basic idea lies in the concept that only a male heir can inherit *xianghuo* of one family. Note that *xiang* = incense, and *huo* = fire. Combined, *xianghuo* symbolizes the existence in being. It is believed, even today, that when one dies, the soul would find its location or where to live by incense. If there is no incense of one family, then the dead will become a wild ghost, meaning that it has nowhere to lodge. For this reason, if there is no brother, an matrilocal marriage is required so that there will be a male heir.

able to live a happy and peaceful life. However, she hadn't considered how hard it was to be a son-in-law under an matrilocal marriage. Things went from bad to worse when her mother seemed very suspicious of him in every respect, which has led to the current situation -- The man had to sneak in when he got home.

But how could she have thought of such things before? She felt sorry for her husband, but nothing could be done to change the situation. The man had tried to convince her of moving out, but she refused to leave this house, even if she was forced to part from the man.

Her mother wished that she would give birth to a boy soon. She and her husband had the same idea. However, it was clear to her and her husband that if they had a son, he would become the heir. In that case, the man's presence would become even more insignificant. Her mother secretly harbored the wish that she would not have a second son, for the second son, who was conventionally to have his father's surname, would be an unwelcome trouble-maker. Since the conflict between her mother and the man became obvious, her mother went further to make clear that she did not care about the man, even though there was no sign of a grandson. Toward the unspeakable conflict, she would not say anything, which made the man even more displeased.

"I never had the idea that you were no different from your mother."

"Nonsense," said she. Her mother was slightly selfish and stubborn, which she did not deny. She also realized that her mother was reluctant to share her wealth with those not of the family. However, she married him because of love. As it was, she was educated and well brought-up. For this reason, she felt mad about his comments.

Ah! If mother was not here, there would be no such worries. When she had such an idea, she began to feel guilty. Further analysis brought her to realize that she was of the same position. No matter the reason, she did not want to have any more children. Now she had two daughters, who took the man's surname. Daughters were to become daughters of other families. Then what she wanted was just a son. Another son would be enough. The only son was conventionally supposed to take her surname. If she just wanted a son, then she might be as selfish as her mother. No, it could not be so. A further thinking brought her to the fact that her mother had greatly influenced her. To get to this point, she felt ashamed. She did not want to be that kind of person.

It wasn't that she didn't care for the man. But what she cared about was that he had changed drastically, changing from an honest, hard-working farmer into being

slovenly, lazy and bull-headed. Such a change irritated her. She was even more annoyed when she thought that he made such a change on purpose. When she was reasonable, she knew that it was not all his fault. However, she could not forget about it.

She just couldn't understand. If the man had never come back, her mother would pressure her to find another husband. While she lacked love for the man, she never considered divorce! Her living habits have simply made her unable to live without him. So it was that when he had left home, she had also fought against her mother for a long period.

Now that he's back, the woman didn't know whether to be worried or to be happy; she didn't know if things were taking a turn for the better. At least, tonight was quiet. It was quite fortunate mother was not at home today.

When the woman walked back into the room, she found the man lying on the edge of the bed, his hands couched behind the back of his head and having long since entered the realm of dreams.

The woman hesitated a while before she dragged open the cupboard, took out a pair of the man's underwear and undershirt, and patted the man gently on the shoulder.

"Wake up! Come on, get up!"

The man rolled over and sat up adroitly, but his eyes were still gummed with the vestiges of deep slumber.

"Is it my shift?"

The woman stuffed the clothes under his arms and said, "Wake up! Go take a bath."

"Oh--" the man groaned and was about to collapse back onto the bed before the woman's hand arrested the motion.

"I boiled some water already!"

"Come on! I'm tired! Can we skip this?"

"How can you sleep without washing? You smell of sweat!"

"Come on! I'll wash up tomorrow!"

Despite his yawns, the man seemed to collect himself.

"Go wash up! You'll feel better and sleep all the more sound after bathing."

The man crumbled helplessly against her feminine nature. After tucking his feet into a pair of slippers, he stood and started to walk out. As he was about to walk by her, he suddenly reached out his hands and grasped her breasts. The woman tried to

lean out of the sudden grope and reached out to the hand, intending to give a firm twist of the hand. The man, however, had already retracted his hands, and had left the room by the time she was about to show her irritation.

The water was a little bit too hot, bringing him a soothing burn across his body. It was extremely satisfying to feel hot water splashing across him after not having had a hot bath for about one month.

“Damn that hag! This is what it feels like to have a life!” the man thought to himself.

His job rotation was shifted from day to night so that he got one day and one night off. Meanwhile, he had just been paid, so he suddenly felt an urge to return home after sleeping half the day away in the worker’s dormitory.

As the saying goes, a clever rabbit should have three burrows, but now he found he had been smoked out. Although his own parents still lived, his brothers had moved out for their own families. There was no place for him at his parents’ house. He was an outsider whenever he went home, as if he had been staying at a hotel. This was the price for an matrilocal marriage. Oh, how he regretted this decision.

He knew very well that his greatest fault was to be too soft of heart and was easily talked into doing things. To the woman’s wishes in this or in that he had always been compliant. The main reason was that he was unwilling to break the woman’s heart. On the other hand, his personality was straightforward, and he didn’t think of playing any tricks. The woman had indeed far deeper insights than he for pondering the minutiae of things. The way he saw it, the woman’s family had five fen of farming lands that could each be harvested twice a year. Besides, she owned 5-6 acres of forest land as well as one store for rent. In total, it was a considerable fortune. The woman had no brothers. By convention, her older sister married, and hence lost the right to inherit anything. The woman and the man would have been very happy if they had worked hard harmoniously.

The man had been loyal to her after the marriage, and his wife was quite docile, too. However, he gradually came to the observation that his mother-in-law was wary of him. He had heard that many men in matrilocal marriages had, in the end, made off with the woman and the property, and it seemed that the closer he became with the woman, the more alert his mother-in-law kept. Eventually, he felt treated less as the owner, but more as a worker without pay.

It occurred to him that a dignified man should not live with their in-laws, much less think to inherit their property. He attempted to find chances for his own success when he was young. He was slightly educated, having graduated from junior high school, and was still strong in body. If he would like to work, there would be chances. When he made it, it would be entirely up to her determination whether she would come to him or not. Even if they each needed to find a different partner, they should do so as early as possible.

However, it was easier said than done. During the month that he had left home, there wasn't one moment which he had not missed the woman or his children. If it were not to prove a point, he would have quit his job and come back. He could not return with failure.

The factory which he worked at was a newly established steel wire factory, of which he was one of the first wave of workers. After several days of learning, he was promoted to be a foreman. The position earned him 35 dollars a day, and would be raised to 50 dollars a day if he stayed at the factory for three months. Every six months after that, his salary would be raised again. The factory provided both room and board, but even so, when would he be able to buy a new home and sustain his wife and daughters?

He could not quit his job, and he had to press on as best he could. He bought two lottery tickets every term, and one day life would be better. Work was harsh, but he just flopped down and slept whenever he was finished. Every other worker was the same.

Some of the workers from the same township asked him if he wanted to go home. It made him envious, seeing the others so happy with their holidays; and it touched a part of home in him -- Maybe, just maybe, he would go home, just to take a peek.

Today was the perfect day.

Walking back into the room, he saw his pillow laid beside the woman's. She lay there, staring at the roof in distant contemplation. He nudged his eldest daughter further into the large bed and laid down in the spot the woman had vacated for him.

"Damn it, why didn't you open the door before I hollered for so long!"

"Why did you just run off for thirty days, without any explanation?"

"I left first before someone forced me out."

"Who could force you out?"

“Remember the Old Rumpey down in Banyan Row? He was chased out by his wife and son to sleep in the run-down temple!”

“That’s because he didn’t mind his ways after he aged, always drinking and gambling! He had only himself to blame!”

“Damn it! I’m afraid after seeing that. Both you and your mother are up to no good! Pray that I’m not chopped up and mixed into the swine feed!”

“You wretch! Have you learned how to curse so in only 30 days?”

“I speak nothing but the truth!”

“Everyone’s different. Even mother wouldn’t be so heartless.”

“Ho, ho! That remains to be seen! If I worked and toiled mightily, of course she would have me! Should I fall sick, or crave a cup of something stronger, I fear I may be as fortunate as Old Rumpey!”

“Of all people, you compare yourself to Old Rumpey! Why not Liu Wen-fa? See how well-off he is?”

“Liu Wen-fa has a good life, and his wife is much nicer.”

“If you dislike me so, why have you returned?”

“I came back to see if my wife missed her husband.”

“With you as you were? I’d barely miss you if you died.”

“See! See! I’ve yet to age and already the attitude! Oh, spare me the sweet lies!”

The woman snorted in laughter and turned her back towards the man before saying, “You can go straight to the temple, then.”

The man remained silent, only to drag her over forcibly while reaching over a hand fondling her breasts. The woman, despite making sounds of protest, nonetheless allowed the man to do so to his will.

“Lee Yung-chung’s younger sister is also working in that area. Did she find you?” she asked.

“If it were not for her, I wouldn’t have come back!”

“Was work difficult?”

“Not too bad.”

“Have you received the two hundred dollars I asked her to hand you?”

“Yeah, I got it.”

“How did you manage to leave the village when you had no money?”

“I borrowed two hundred dollars.”



“I didn’t know where you lived until Lee’s younger sister told me.”

The man remained silent, but suddenly hugged the woman hard. Her breathing quickened.

“Are you going to leave again?”

“Do you want me to go?”

“Who would care whether you left or not.”

“I don’t want to leave. I really don’t.”

“Then don’t go.”

“Your mother is returning tomorrow. I think I’d better go.”

“Are you really going to leave this family behind?”

“I don’t really know.”

It was the woman’s turn to remain silent. The man gave a sigh and pecked her on the cheek, then wiped away her tears with his fingers. His hands began moving lower as he continued to kiss her, but the woman suddenly pushed aside his hand. The man was persistent, and the woman finally had to voice her refusal.

“No.”

The man ignored her and continued his actions until she spoke again, “Not now.”

The man became very still and slowly laid back down, pulling his arm away from the woman’s neck. He turned over wordlessly, drawing up the covers.

“Dam it all. Both you and your mother will make this life miserable.”

The woman listened to the man’s grumbling with tears flowing down her face freely. For a long while, she did not see the man move.

“I didn’t do it on purpose,” she said softly, but she found that the man had already fallen asleep. The room was quiet save for the soft breathing of those sleeping, and no one heard what she had said.

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## 「大姨」導讀

「大姨」描寫一個政治受難者後代的掙扎故事。呂永正的父母親原為教師，住日本宿舍，顯然這故事是發生在日據時代的後半期。後來可能是呂父涉及復國有關的事務，遭日本警察槍殺，母親也隨即自殺身亡。小男孩在父母雙亡後，被送往大姨(媽媽的姐姐)家居住，受大姨撫養。大姨生活並不寬裕，先生以做泥水工為生，大姨整天田裡與家裡忙進忙出，還要張羅兩個小叔，一個小姑，自己的二個兒子，一個女兒，再加上呂永正，一家九口的吃食。在那樣艱困的日據時代後期，巧媳婦也難為無米之炊。

故事從大姨過世，呂永正接到噩耗立即回家奔喪開始。呂永正望著大姨的遺體，面容莊嚴，安詳，嘴角微帶笑容。這是他心中一直期盼大姨擁有的表情啊!但回想從前，從童年以迄他入師範學校，畢業後出來擔任教師為止，記憶中的大姨，不變的是一臉的悲苦、嚴峻，開口說話總帶不少的怨恨，且嘴臉冷漠，沒有表情，個性又急躁。印象中的她，臉上似乎永遠不曾有過笑容。呂永正從小功課好、愛讀書，大姨卻並不喜歡他。她有一個與呂永正一樣大的男孩，國校畢業馬上去當泥水工學徒；當呂永正考上初中，全村為他歡慶時，只有大姨滿臉不高興，他以為大姨是忌妒，或是怕他增加家庭的經濟負擔。不過，姨丈卻毫不猶豫地拿出整整一個月的薪水讓他去註冊。很久之後，等呂永正成了家，才慢慢了解大姨的辛勞，了解她的付出不易，了解到她那種鄉下人特有的愛的含蓄表達方式。曾有幾次想好好地向她懺悔，每次卻都欲言又止。如今，大姨走了，縱有再多的歉意、謝意，也都無法向她傾訴了。

「大姨」整個故事，雖以政治受難家屬為主角，但「政治受難」其實僅僅只是布景，與小說情節的發展關係不大。小說的重點毋寧在於呂永正心理成長過程的描寫。自小缺少母愛的他、生活在經濟窘困的環境裡缺乏可以談心的同伴，以至於對親如媽媽的大姨，情感裡只有怨恨、怨懟與不滿。這些負面的情緒隨著年齡的成長，竟慢慢地淡漠了；而經歷各種人生歷練後，他逐漸了解從前天天為生活劬勞的大姨其實是很愛他的，只是當時的表達方式太令他無法苟同罷了。

文學經典中不乏像呂文正的樣的故事，最佳的範例為毛姆的自傳性小說「人性的枷鎖」(Of human Bondage)。毛姆十歲時父母雙亡，他被送到叔叔家長住。他的叔叔是慳吝的地方牧師，嬸母是德國人，幹練而節儉，毛姆一下子從養尊處優的家境來到這麼有規律而單調的家庭，心中無限的恐慌、焦慮、無助，直到後來他在寫作嶄露頭腳之時，才逐漸諒解並以懺悔的心緬懷他的叔叔與嬸母。毛姆以長篇贖罪，並一舉而解除了長期盤據他心中的陰霾。

有人認為呂永正的故事與台灣五零年代的白色恐怖有關，但從追殺其父的日警謾罵與叫囂「你通敵，你叛變」，可知故事的背景遠在日據時代的後期。因為那個時候台灣有不少熱愛祖國的青年，一方面與日軍敷衍，另一方面積極準備協助國人顛覆日本政府。

「大姨」一文的寫作技巧是純熟的，敘述點穿插在回憶與現實中，時而是過去的回憶，時而為現實中伴著大姨遺體的心情起伏，感情與情緒的節奏，跳躍在周遭人物的眼神之中。鄰人，親屬莫不以看戲的心看著呂文正回家見到大姨時的表現，然而他並非如眾人所期望地放聲大哭，他代之以更為悲戚而隱忍的泣涕，淚流滿面，這讓大家覺得滿意。這種襯托旁寫的技巧，使這篇小說更臻藝術的境界。

## **A Guide to *Aunty***

The story of *Aunty* was based on the psychological conflict of the descendant of a victim of Japanese political oppression. Lu's parents were teachers when Taiwan was under Japanese colonial rule. His father, suspected of involvement in a spy case, was killed by Japanese policemen. His mother committed a suicide right after her husband was killed. The child was forced to live with his aunt's family, which was already on hard times. His aunt's husband was a cement worker, and she took care of family matters, both within the domicile, and outside matters. It was very hard to sustain such a large family, with nine members, as most of the food was required to be sent to the frontier for the war.

The story began with Lu's return to the countryside right after he was informed that Aunty has passed away. Looking at the peaceful expression on Aunty's face, Lu was astonished, for it was an expression that he had long expected to see. However, to his best knowledge, Aunty was far from peaceful. She was always mad, cruel, and cold. Whenever she spoke, no good words ever came out. It occurred to him that she never smiled. Lu liked to study and he was very good in the class. However, Aunty did not like him. She was afraid that Lu would follow in the steps of his father and become involved in political events. While Aunty's eldest son became a worker like his father, Lu was admitted to a junior high school, which excited all the people in the village except Aunty. He thought she was jealous. Nevertheless, his aunt's husband took out his whole-month salary for the tuition. It was a very long time later when he became a father that Lu realized how hard his aunt had worked. She just behaved like a country woman, trying her best to refrain from speaking her mind. After he came to such an understanding, he wanted to say thank-you to her. However, he seemed to find no appropriate occasions. Now she was gone, and all the guilt and apologies he had never said would forever remain unsaid.

While the story of *Aunty* may seem to be centered on the descendant of a political victim, careful examination leads us to the conclusion that such information is only a scene, and is not largely concerned with essential plot. The theme was, apparently, focused on Lu's psychological developments, from naïvete to maturity, from simplicity to complexity. Bereft of a mother's love, Lu felt lonely and deserted. He

found few friends with which to share his thoughts. As a result of this, he thought Aunty was prejudiced. Since he began to teach, he matured in his contact with society, learning more about Life. He knew that Aunty loved him. The problem stemmed from his cognition of his Aunty and her methods of express such love.

In literature, such cases are not unusual. The best example would be Somerset Maugham's autobiography-based novel *Of Human Bondage*. The protagonist, one Philip Carey, moved into his uncle's house after the death of his parents. Aunt Louisa tried to be mother of this child, but her husband was cool to him. Maugham himself had lost both of his parents at the age of 10, and he, too, moved to his uncle's house, living in fear, worry, and helplessness. It was not until he began to win his name in the British literature that his hatred for his uncle and aunt began to wane. The writing, as Maugham claimed somewhere, released himself from the bondage of feeling guilty for his uncle and aunt. He was free mentally after the publication of *Of Human Bondage*.

Some critics claimed that Lu's story reflected the tragedy resulting from the White Terror period in 1950s Taiwan. Judged from the scene where Japanese policemen running after Lu's father had shouted, 'You traitor. You consorted with the enemy,' when they fired him, it is obvious that the event occurred during the latter half of Japanese colonization of Taiwan. As is well-known now, there were a lot of young patriots attempting in very effort to help Taiwanese fight against the Japanese government.

As a fiction, *Aunty* is a fine piece of work in terms of writing skills. The narrative moves back and forth between memories and realities, sometime Lu reminisces of his past, while other time recollecting himself at the scene of his aunt's death. The back and forth style became the rhythm of the narrative, reinforcing the density of the story. Some details were left to the readers' own judgment and interpretation. In general, *Aunty* is a very good story, weaving humor, irony, and sometimes absurdity together into the outline of a common person in the world. Above all, the presentation of how the Hakka people behaved at a funeral was quite a gem deserving of our attention.

## 大姨

呂永政知道大表哥阿盛建了三樓房，只是沒有想到建得這麼宏偉氣派。「木相師父沒眠床，泥水師父沒浴堂」，大表哥似乎終於打破了他們小時候常常用來取笑他的鄉下諺語了。

這是呂永政生活了十幾年的家，周遭的一景一物他無不熟悉。他到柵門口就下了計程車，車子是客運站前僱的，司機是個在地的年輕小伙子，愛講話，嘴巴吱喳吱喳不停的嚼著檳榔，他熟知大表哥阿盛家的事，卻不認得呂永政。確實，離開這個地方，算起來頭尾已有十三年，小鎮的偏遠，閉塞是沒有什麼改變，只是人事已全然不同。

大姨丈去世以後，二表哥阿吉到板橋去另圖發展，這兒鄉下老家便只留下大表哥一伙人照顧母親看守田園。呂永政總覺得自己跟阿盛哥比較沒有親密的感情，因為在年齡上他們相差足足十歲，他被大姨接來的時候，阿盛哥雖然他不過十六七歲的年紀，只是他身材粗壯，幾乎已跟大姨丈一般高大，早就隨著大姨丈四處去做水泥工，拿大人的工資了。呂永政還記得那時他和柵背楊家的參妹打得火熱，下工回來就在燈下苦記山歌，很少注意阿吉和他。所以，在感覺上呂永政總覺得彼此倒像隔了一輩子一樣。這也是二表哥阿吉離鄉後，他一次又一次計畫帶家人回來而總是未能成行的心理的原因之一吧！

呂永政目送著計程車沿著田間車路遠去，一面努力壓抑著心胸中不停翻滾的濃烈的哀愁激情。接到電話時他已哭過一次，大表哥雖然也告訴他事情已經過去，要他不必急著趕來。可是像是要補償內心的某種負欠似的，他竟然無法壓抑自己。人事主任告訴他，姨母的喪事他不能請喪假，但他顧不得這些了，連調課的事都托給了教務處，逕直便趕車來了。出發前僅給妻子秀蓮掛了一個電話，告訴她說：大姨已經去世。大姨，對呂永政來說就是母親，他深覺對大姨多所虧欠。

當他心神稍定回過身的時候，阿盛哥和阿盛嫂已經從屋裡迎出來了。呂永政發現眼前的阿盛哥已不復再有青春的氣息，他的模樣看起來十足就是鄉下農人，加上臉上所籠罩的哀傷，甚至讓他感到一股過了中年以後的蒼蒼老態。驟

然面對離別多年的兄長，接觸了他依舊親切柔和的目光，因為大姨突然去世已被挑動的心弦，這時鄉愁洶湧衝激，眼睛鼻子一陣酸痛，連手帕都不及掏出來了。

在他模糊的視線中，阿盛哥臉色似乎更滯重了。他粗糙的雙手緊緊的握著呂永政，兩個人淚眼相對。在他們旁邊的阿盛嫂早已開大嗓門聲嚎哭起來。

「我的好命的娘呀！怎麼會怎麼狠心！一聲不響的丟下我們哪……」阿盛嫂哭訴著：「昨天還好好的，還替我餵豬餵雞……。我的娘喲……。」

阿盛哥放開了他的手。他過去拍拍阿盛嫂的肩膀，想勸慰勸慰她，不意她跪倒地上哭得更痛腸了。呂永政費了好大勁才把她拖起來。

「她沒有什麼痛苦，神色非常平靜。」阿盛哥無奈地告訴他：「我們昨天晚上還一起看連續劇天地良心。她還說劇中一個小流氓長得像你，還談起過年要叫你們一家人回鄉一同過年。誰也沒有想到！」

「她都是一個人睡的嗎？」他問。

「以前我那最小的阿娟在家時同她阿媽睡。阿娟去讀書後就她一個人睡了。原本好好的人。」阿盛哥解釋著：「平常時有些小感冒，都是我過去陪她的。偏偏這次沒有，誰也沒有想到。」

「唉！天氣冷，對老人家較不利。都是命！」他說。

「你阿嫂每天晚上都煮一壺滾水，給她灌滿水龜放入她的棉被裡面。水龜早上都還熱熱的。」

「阿吉哥到了嗎？」

「他全家趕回來，大概馬上就到。」

「幾時入殮？」

「申時，你也知道母舅家沒有更長輩的人在世了，表兄吩咐叫我們自己處理就好，他們可能要更晚才能趕到。」阿盛哥說：「我們進去！」

屋子裡聚集了許多人，大都是呂永政熟識的親人。大家默默的點頭招呼著。呂永政知道按規矩他這時應該要放聲悲哀哭才對，大家好像都在期待著看他表現哀思，但偏偏這個時候他反而情緒安定，再也流不出眼淚來。

大姨躺在客廳的一角，身子底下墊著一塊全新的榻榻米。兩頭用長板凳綁緊四小竹棍支柱，掛著白色的蚊帳。腳尾矮凳上一盞煤油燈，另一個舊鋁鍋燒



著紙錢，空氣中充滿了草紙和医燴麻布的氣味，發散著喪家特有的氣息。阿盛哥為呂永政掀開了蚊帳，陪他一同跪落在帳前。

大姨的神情確實如大表哥所說的，平靜又安詳。她的眼皮輕闔著，隻唇緊閉，嘴角微微上翹，好像十足滿意毫無牽掛了。鼻樑仍削直令人稍感銳利，但是整個面孔肌肉柔和平順，沒有一根橫肉。這是呂永政一直盼望的大姨的模樣，卻也是他一直都沒有見到過的神情。沒有想到這個時候才出現在她的臉上。這種神情他依稀記得正是他的母親在他腦海中的印象。是不是解除了生活上一切的苦難和壓迫，現在的神態才是大姨原本的面目呢？

呂永政一直盯著大姨削直而略嫌單薄的鼻樑。他是曾經那麼憎恨過她，千百次當遭到大姨惡毒的叱罵時，他就是那樣盯著她尖利的鼻樑，以及人中上滴滴汗珠。他從來不敢接觸大姨的目光，她的眼睛裡永遠都閃耀著凶悍憤怒的火光，她一開聲就是罵人。在他的印象裡，大姨沒有閒下來過，也見不得任何人閒下來不做事的。有時他和二表哥阿吉在聊天或遊戲，只要大姨的身影一出現，他們都會不自覺的跳起來，低著頭東摸西摸，或掃掃地什麼的，即使是這樣，大姨看來還是不順眼的。

「沒頭沒神的，蹭上蹭下，給我們閃遠點兒，讓人看到討厭。」

得到這句話，他和阿吉哥一溜煙便跑離了苦難的家，不到洗澡不再回來。如果沒有大姨這句話，他們還真不敢出柵門一步呢！

那真是一段苦難的日子。他早已了解自己不應該憎恨大姨。但即使在夢中見到大姨削直薄利的鼻樑逼近過來的時候，他都會嚇得渾身是汗的醒過來。認真想來，那不應該是憎恨的情緒，那應該是一種潛意識的恐懼。對多難童年的恐懼。

大姨應該像眼前的神態那樣慈和安詳的。這才是母親的形象。他是多麼盼望大姨能像媽媽那樣的對待他啊！然而他卻直到這個時候，才看到這種神態。呂永政突然又有想哭的感覺，視線隨即模糊不清了。

初到大姨家來的時候，大姨確曾有如母親般慈愛，那時他的父親剛剛出事被捕，母親憂急自殺，他還處在驟然失去溫馨的家庭和父母的震懼迷離的情緒中，對姨丈和大姨全家特別優容他，以及大姨的眼光中那股憐憫的神情並不太能感受到，依稀只感到一種類似客人般的氣氛。等他情緒安定下來，慚慚習慣

了新的生活環境以後，大姨就是他所認知的大姨那樣冷漠急躁了。那才是現實生活中的大姨。

比較起來呂永政家的日子比大姨家好得太多了。大姨一家人口眾多。姨丈學泥水，常常出外做工，家裡沒有田產，耕種的六工人地是向莊中劉家租來的，除了大表哥阿盛二表哥阿吉外，還有二個表姐，姨丈的兩個弟弟和一個妹妹，姨丈的父親早逝，整個三合式的夥房中以姨丈的母親阿婆年紀最長是家主婆。但內外操持工作的就只有大姨一個人。

他在大姨家一住十幾年，在這期間小姑出嫁，阿婆去世，姨丈的兩個弟弟結婚分家各自出去，這一切都由姨丈和大姨負責主持。就呂永政印象裡大姨家一直就在負債累累三餐難繼的情形下苦苦的支撐著。而他在大姨家自然是大姨的一個沉重的擔子，不管是心理上或經濟上，尤其他自小身體多病，完全不能跟表哥表姐們的健壯相比，更增加了大姨精神上的負擔。他還記得有一次出麻疹後他染上了肺炎，他們住的村莊沒有醫師，是姨丈和大姨輪流背著把他送到四公里外的鎮街上去。醫師架子很大，沒有小轎車根本請不動，而鎮街上才只有兩部轎車，價錢貴得驚人。他氣息奄奄的，大姨又急又累又氣，他伏在她削瘦多骨的肩上，只聽到大姨一面走一面惡毒的罵著。

「你為什麼不死呢？乾脆死了讓人清心！生害人死害人，你們兩人爺都一樣，害虫，害物。」

他知道大姨沒有錢，姨丈瞞著阿婆把剛收成的黃豆偷偷糶了一半。看不起西醫了改吃中藥，他迷迷糊糊的睡了半個多月，病好後瘦得只剩下皮包骨，姨丈脾氣好，有時背著表哥表姐們給他一毛錢，讓他可以買些零食。可是大姨始終冷冰冰的。

那時，他好恨大姨，有時也恨不得自己一死了之。他曾經想出去，卻沒有地方可以去，於是晚上他也有輾轉反側，憂愁得失眠的時候。在靜靜的夜晚，大表姐在廚房後面天井中洗全家人的衣服，大姨在大廳上剝豬菜。耳中聽著洗衣板和豬菜砧板那單調又有節奏的聲音，他要好久才能入睡。

他想過去自己的家，他想著那已離他而去的爸爸媽媽，似乎那些全都是古時候的事情了。從他有記憶起，他們便住在學校的日本式宿舍裡，寬平整潔的榻榻米房間，他可以穿過來穿過去，絕不像大姨家這樣處處是破舊髒亂的農

具，處處發散著泥土黴味和腐爛蕃薯的臭味！爸爸是學校的老師，他和他的那一批朋友們全都看起來乾乾淨淨清清爽爽，他們三天兩天的聚在家裡喝茶談天，看書討論。有時輕聲細語，有時慷慨激昂。媽媽總是含著笑容為他們準備茶點膳食。日本戰敗了，呂永政對這種事原本不會有什麼記憶，但是爸爸和他的朋友們大叫大笑的歡樂情景卻是他永遠也不會忘記的。他們是那麼興奮激動，使他恨不得自己也趕快長大好參加他們的歡樂。

他更懷念他的母親。他的母親跟大姨是完全不同的類型。母親的鼻子挺直但不像大姨削利，皮膚細緻白皙，面孔的輪廓線條柔和清楚，沒有人不讚她美麗。大姨姊妹三人，只有母親受過學校教育，因為她排行最小，全家寵愛全在她一人身上。爸爸到過日本內地去上過大學，他們婚姻曾被好多人羨慕過。確實，他們也有過甜美幸福的日子。

伴著這些美好的回憶的，卻是令他從惡夢中驚醒過來的破滅。突然一天他的爸爸失蹤了，常常有人半夜敲門要找他。母親帶著他急急的離開了他們甜蜜的家，回到祖父留給爸爸的鄉下的家裡。鄉下祖父的房子在村外田野間，祖父去世後便沒有人居住。爸爸開始學習下田種作，也替附近鄰家做零工。大姨這時常常過來，他和媽媽一聊便是半夜，直到姨丈騎單車來載回去。母親好像非常悲哀，也非常膽小，經常風吹門響便要嚇得失神。他反而堅強起來，必要時他會勇敢的走到門外去看看，然後安慰媽媽，母子相擁流淚。從那時起他就開始討厭大姨。因為大姨總是怪怨他的爸爸，罵他不知足，罵他愚蠢無知，罵拖累妻子，連親戚都受到牽連。反倒是媽媽來替爸爸辯解。

「讀書那麼多有什麼用？讀書的反而不如不讀書的，好好的日子不過，弄到今天這樣東逃西走的見不得人，可要害死妳了。」

他聽過大姨不只一次在媽媽面前這樣的批評爸爸。媽媽常常只是搖頭流淚。

「妳莫害怕，堅強的撐下去，只要阿姐這一碗飯吃，一定分半碗給妳。妳姐夫人很好，絕不會看妳們母子挨餓。」大姨總是這麼安慰母親：「再說他們呂家也有不少田產，夠妳們母子生活的。」

「他的事情如果確定了，聽說財產要沒收的，我們什麼也沒有。」有一次他聽到媽媽這樣告訴大姨。大姨先是驚訝，繼而憤怒咒罵，然後堅定的告訴媽媽：

「草窩裡不會餓死蛇，有阿姐在，再困難的日子也過得下去。」

「如果有什麼事情，我最不安心的就是他。」媽媽以下巴朝他躲避的床角啾啾：「阿姐你要照顧他。」

「不會有事的，他一人做事一人當。好要堅強起來，不要給人嘲笑。」

在大姨在鼓勵和安慰下，他和媽媽平靜的過了一年多。他們養鴨養豬種菜，他們也像其他鄉下農家一樣吃蕃薯簽飯。雖然比不上爸爸在時那麼舒服，但他們知道爸爸在某一個地方躲著追捕，希望總是有的。有一天爸爸突然回來了。那天他半夜裡被驚醒，一張眼便看見爸爸和媽媽在床沿相擁哭泣。透過窗口微弱的光亮，他不必多看便感到了爸爸的親切的身影。他靜靜的躺著不敢驚動他們，其實他是多麼想跳起來大叫爸爸啊！但是媽媽是麼的哀傷，爸爸抱著她在她耳邊輕聲的說著話。他們在黑暗中緊緊的相擁的景像是那麼的令他感動，他也靜靜的流下眼淚。爸爸的聲音是那麼低沉有韻味，他在安慰媽媽鼓勵媽媽，也不住的請媽媽原諒，他聽著聽著，不知道什麼時候竟然睡著了，直到鞭炮聲再度驚醒他，外面天已大亮，爸爸媽媽都不在房間裡，他衝出臥房穿過廊屋，媽媽倚在後門外柴堆上，滿臉絕望的朝遠處張望，她全身顫抖著。

「他們追你爸爸去了，他們追你爸爸去了。」她喃喃的說著，聲音嘶啞顫動。

「誰追他？誰追他？」他什麼也沒有看見。

「他們拿著鎗，他們在開鎗，天哪！」媽媽看起來嚇壞了。

「我沒有看見什麼啊！」

「走，我們快去看看。」媽媽突然拉了他的手朝後園跑去，他們跑得很急，穿過蓮霧園才跨上田埂路不遠，前面便有四五個男子轉過甘蔗園迎頭過來。媽媽站住了，她張口結舌的看著，這時他才看清楚，走在最前面跌跌撞撞的，可不正是他的爸爸嗎？他的眼睛被毛巾蒙著，雙手反綁，衣衫襤褸滿身泥漿，腳步蹣跚地被推著走。田埂是那麼狹隘，三兩步不到便仆倒了，是那樣連頭帶身地栽進稻田泥漿裡。後面男人把他拉起來，氣沖沖的又打又踢。

「巴軋牙魯——阿哪達口兀賴啣——！」他們用日語怒叱著。

他和媽媽看得全身血液都要翻滾了。媽媽忽然衝過去，她跑過長長的田埂衝向爸爸，一面拉他一面對那些人大叫：

「為什麼要打他！為什麼要打他！」

後面一個男人閃出來擋開她，惡狠狠的。

「巴軋牙魯——滾開。再講一句話把妳也帶走。」

那人手一揮便把媽媽推得不住後退。他原想扶住媽媽的，但撞過來的力量這麼大，於是兩個人一同翻倒在稻田裡的泥漿中。

媽媽在哀嚎，爸爸便被那幾個人推著走遠了。村子裡的狗在狂吠，遠遠還可以聽到怒罵詛咒的聲音。

「巴軋牙魯，誰家的野狗再不拉走，我把牠斃了！」

那真是一場惡夢。呂永政想忘也忘不了。還有更令他驚悸害怕的事。就在爸爸被帶走的那個晚上，媽媽自殺了，姨丈和大姨撞開他們臥房的門，他瞥見媽媽倒伏在地上，滿地觸目的是通紅的鮮血，他只聽大姨大叫一聲便什麼也不知道了。

當時他並不知道爸爸做錯了什麼事。大姨她們也從不告訴他，此後他就沒有再見過父親了。大姨的家也成了他的新家。

這是一段呂永政最怕回憶的惡夢。如今因大姨的去逝再度從心底翻起，他仍然感到全身緊張汗濕。大表哥阿盛拉著他的臂膀拖他起身，他才驚覺地從大姨臉上收回模糊的視線。周圍的親人們看到了他滿面的淚痕及失神落魄的模樣，終於安心滿意了。他們紛紛上前跟他拍肩拉手，親切的探問近況。充滿關懷和羨慕。

大學畢業後他在中部一所高中當老師，妻子秀蓮也是一個國小的老師。夫婦兩個都有職業，生有兒女，買有房子，這些全都是生存的起碼條件，但在故鄉這個偏僻的農村，他的這點成就仍然是親人所羨慕的。連大姨都也為他驕傲。

剛出來工作的那幾年，他每年春節總要回鄉去過年團圓。大姨把理家的事務交給了阿盛哥阿盛嫂後，沒有生活的負擔了，呂永政覺得她平易了許多。後來孩子讀書補習了，年節交通又不便，於是有十多年他沒有再帶著家人返鄉

去，去年春天，大姨隨旅行團到台中，打電話給他，呂永政去接她到家裡住了一夜。對於他的生活，大姨十分滿意，也默認了他有出息。但對大姨從前的責難，呂永政卻無論如何都難於釋懷。

從小學開始，呂永政就愛讀書，只要有書看，他便可以忘掉一切的苦難。他的成績一直都是最好的。對於他在學業上的成績，只有大姨一個人不高興。

「讀那麼多書有什麼用？好好耕田或學樣手藝，最少不會害人害己。」大姨總是在他面前這麼睥睨的表示。

似乎大姨也真的不想讓他多讀書。國小畢業後他以第一名的成績考上鎮裡的初中，這對他們村裡國小來說也是天大的喜事，校長和級任老師都來家中道賀，還送了很多禮物。姨丈並沒有因為自己的孩子阿吉無法考取中學而不高興，他逢人便讚美這位外甥聰明。

「讀書有什麼用？就是像他爸爸那麼有才能，又有什麼好結果？」大姨堅持她的主張。

那時他好恨大姨啊！如果不是姨丈，大姨真的不會讓他去受中學教育，那他的一生可不就毀在大姨的手中了嗎？他總認為大姨是嫉妒，表哥阿吉都沒有上中學，反而要供別人去上學，他的學費又是大姨家的大負擔呢！他成績越好大姨越不高興。不僅不高興，有時他似乎感覺到大姨看他時的神情中竟還充滿了絕望和憂愁。

「大姨，妳放心，我用掉的錢將來我賺了錢一定加倍還給妳。」

有一次姨丈把整整一個月才結算得來的工資全數交給他去註冊時，他向大姨保證。大姨卻只瞪了他一眼。他聽過大姨曾經滿懷心事的對姨丈說：

「這孩子越來越像他爸爸啦！」

呂永政一直很奇怪，為什麼大姨會那麼恨爸爸，他很奇怪大姨的改變，聽說她原來是非常疼愛爸爸的啊！

「你大姨疼惜你有了報償，你沒有使他失望。」是姨丈的妹妹阿珍姑拉著他的手說：「不要忘記了是我用腳踏車載你去考中學的喲！」

「是的阿珍姑，好久沒有看到你。是我沒有對大姨盡到孝心。」他哽咽著說。

「你大姨很滿意啦！她常常談起你，比她談阿盛和阿吉的次數還多。」阿珍姑說。

去年大姨到台中時，妻子秀蓮特地把結婚時一對手鐲翻造後送給她老人家。大姨走時很高興。

「要好好工作，你比你爸爸強。不關你的事千萬不要去惹。看到你們在這裡很好，我就安心了。」她反覆的告誡著他。

大姨是個老老實實過生活的人。生存下去！這在她是最嚴肅的事情。在那段苦難的日子所受的，由大姨加給他的許多委曲，使他這麼憎恨大姨，憎恨這個家庭。

初中畢業後，他放棄了省立高中的機會，毅然選讀師範學校，因為師範學校是公費的。當了幾年國小教師，然後一年年一次次參加檢定考試，好不容易才取得高中教師的資格。他以自己未能進入大學讀書為憾，但也不後悔自己的選擇或大姨的窮困無法供他讀大學。為了及早脫離讓他不快的環境，任何代價都是在所不惜的。

是自己有了孩子以後才漸漸淡忘了對大姨的憎恨。呂永政想著心中更覺慚愧。過份的關心會使人表現得急切和浮躁。大姨對他和對自己所生的阿吉其實並沒有兩樣，甚至因為阿吉身體較強壯，在分配工作的時候也比自己還多些。只因為大姨不是自己親生的母親，大姨沒有像母親那樣慈愛溫和，於是招來自己幾十年的仇恨。呂永政越來越了解大姨的心意，但他一直沒有向大姨表示，除開遇而逢年過節寄點金錢和禮物，連回鄉一趟都有困難，工作忙碌，總是安慰自己的藉口。如今，大姨去世了，一切都已太遲。這是大表哥阿盛電話報喪時他忍不住悲哭失聲的原因啊！

有他的電話。呂永政接過聽筒，在電線的那頭，是他的妻子秀蓮的聲音。

「我把孩子托給李老師照顧，要不要我現在過去，大姨害了什麼病？為什麼這樣突然呢？」

「替孩子都去請假，把他們都帶來，請三天假，馬上過來，我會去車站接你們的。」他吩咐著，秀蓮溫順的答應了。

柵門外有汽車停下來。然後是二表哥阿吉摧肝裂脾的悲號，兩位表嫂哀哀哭女哀的聲浪，交織出傳統的喪家悲苦的場面。親人們都陪著落淚。由窗口看

出去，二表哥阿吉雙膝著地，正一路哭著爬了過來。放下電話筒，呂永政回到大姨帳前，再度哀哀的哭泣著跪了下來。

苦難已經結果。看大姨的神情，不是那麼安詳寧靜嗎？



## Aunty

Lu Yung-cheng knew that his eldest cousin A Sheng had built a three-story house; he just hadn't imagine that it would be so grandiose and majestic. "Carpenters have no beds, and the construction workers have no bathrooms," they quoted the proverb in jest, making fun of his career, but it seemed that the eldest cousin has freed himself of such stereotypes.

Lu Yung-cheng had lived here, in this region, for over a decade. He was familiar with everything around him, every scene and every object. He stepped out of the cab - - hailed in front of the bus station -- by the gates. The driver was a young, local kid. He liked to talk, and amidst the chewing of betel nut he told Lu Yung-cheng everything about his eldest cousin A Sheng. However, he didn't recognize Lu Yung-cheng. Indeed, he had left the town for thirteen years. The town's location and its occlusion to outside news remained the same, but the people around were different.

Since Lu's eldest uncle passed away, A Chi, Lu Yung-cheng's second cousin, had moved to Banciao seeking greener pastures. Only the eldest cousin and some other relatives remained living in the countryside house, looking after aunty and the nearby fields. Lu Yung-cheng always felt that he wasn't as close with A Sheng as he should be, due primarily because they were ten years apart in age. When aunty had brought him in, A Sheng was only aged 16 or 17 but was already as tall as eldest uncle, and was working as a construction worker and earning the wages of an adult.

Lu Yung-cheng remembered that at the time, A Sheng was pretty in love with the third daughter of the Yang family living at the end of the village and trying hard to learn how to sing Hakka songs. As far as Lu Yung-cheng was concerned, A Sheng rarely paid attention to him and A Chi. He felt that they were of a different generation. This accounted for his putting off the decision to return with his family -- again and again -- after A Chi had left home, even though he had toyed with the idea multiple times. He was simply emotionally unable to go through with the plans. Lu Yung-cheng watched as the cabby drove off into the distance through the fields. Meanwhile, he tried his best to suppress the sadness roiling tumultuously throughout his being. He had already cried once when he received the phone-call, and though the Eldest Cousin had told him that she had passed away and he need not return in a hurry, he could not

control himself. It was as if he needed to compensate for what he owed to his aunty. The Personnel Office director at school told him that he was not able to take bereavement leave as the deceased in question was his aunt, but he didn't care, and even delegated the affairs of rescheduling his courses to the department of educational affairs before he hailed a cab and headed out here. Before departure, he gave his wife a ring, saying that aunty had passed away. To Lu Yung-cheng, aunty was his mother.

By the time he had collected himself, A Sheng and his wife were stepping out of the house to greet him. Lu Yung-cheng found that the A Sheng in front of him no longer possessed the essence of youthful vigor. Instead, he now looked every bit a farmer in the countryside. With a sad countenance, A Sheng looked far older than his age. With such a sudden face to face confrontation, Yung-cheng burst into a torrent of tears, with so much sorrow and nostalgia pouring out of his heart. It was too sudden even to pull out his handkerchief.

Through tear-blurred eyes, he saw A Sheng's expression become even heavier. Their hands gripped each other's tightly as they stood, looking at each other tearfully. A Sheng's wife had already started bawling.

"Oh, poor mother. How could you be so cruel to leave us behind!" she cried. "It was just yesterday that you were still helping me feed the pigs and the chickens. Oh, mother!!"

A Sheng let go of Lu's hands and walked over to his wife, attempting to soothe her sorrow, but he didn't expect that she would collapse onto the ground and cry even harder. Lu had to exert himself to drag her up from the ground.

"She didn't suffer any pain, and seemed to be at peace," A Sheng told Lu. "We were still watching a soap opera last night, and she mentioned how one of the little thugs in the show looked like you, and said we should invite you and your family back for the Lunar New Year. Who could have thought this would happen!"

"Does she usually sleep alone?" Lu asked.

"A Chuan, my youngest child, usually sleep with her grandma if she was home. Since her leaving for school, Mother has been sleeping alone. She was usually fine, and I would go sit with her when she has a little cold now and again. Who could have thought this would happen this time I wasn't there."

"Ah, the cold weather is usually bad for the elderly. It's fate," Lu said.

“Your sister-in-law usually places a towel-wrapped water-jug full of boiling water in her blankets every night. The jug was still warm this morning.”

“Has A Chi arrived yet?”

“His whole family is coming. He should be arriving soon.”

“When are we placing aunty’s body into the coffin?”

“Around 3pm to 5pm. Since aunty’s mother’s side has no surviving elders, and the cousins on mother’s side told us to start without them, as they may be late in coming,” A Sheng said. “Let’s go on in, then.”

There was quite a crowd in the house, mostly relatives that Lu knew well. Silent nods of greetings were traded throughout. Lu knew that by custom he was expected -- and everyone in the room seemed to be waiting with baited breath -- to express his sorrow and cry, but it just so happened that he was calm, and could not summon another tear to his eyes.

Aunty was placed in one corner of the living room on a piece of tatami. On either end of the tatami were two benches supported with four short bamboo poles. Over the body was a mosquito net. On the bench where her feet were laid was a kerosene lamp. Beside the lamp, there was a used aluminum pot in which were bits of joss paper burning. The room smelled of joss paper and hemp, a scent signifying a funeral. A Sheng parted the drapes for Lu, and both knelt down in front of the tatami cot.

Aunty looked quiet and peaceful, just as eldest cousin had said. Her eyelids were shut, lips firmly pressed together, the corners of her mouth slightly upturned, as if she were extremely satisfied and showed no more regrets. The ridge of her nose was straight, almost blade-sharp, but her expression was serenely calm. It was what Lu Yung-cheng had always hoped aunty to look, but it was one he had never seen before, and he had not expected that he would see such an expression at such a time. It was an expression that he vaguely remembered on his own mother. Could it be that this was aunty’s true visage, freed from all the oppression and pains of life?

Lu Yung-cheng stared at his aunt’s straight, albeit somewhat too narrow nose-bridge. He had once hated her so, and had stared -- as he did now -- at her nose bridge, and the beads of sweat on her philtrum, during the many, many times she had railed at him. He had never been able to meet her gaze, for her eyes were always ablaze with fury. Every time she spoke, it was to berate someone. From what he could remember, Aunty could never sit still for a moment, and could not abide to see others

lounge around. Sometimes he would be talking or playing a game with A Chi, but whenever Aunty appeared, they would, subconsciously, leave off whatever they were doing and start fiddling with objects or sweep the floor. Even so, Aunty found them to be somewhat of an eye sore.

“Jumping up and down and looking lazy! Out! What a nuisance!”

They would scamper out of the miserable house at that comment, and would not return until it was time to take a bath. They wouldn't have dared to leave the house without such express commands! Those were the hard days. He had long since arrived at the understanding that he shouldn't hate Aunty. He deduced that it wasn't truly hateful he felt after giving the incident considerable thought.

It was more of a subconscious fear, fear of a troubled childhood. Yet, despite this understanding, he would still wake in a cold sweat when, in his dreams, Aunty and her blade-thin nose bridge looked over him and came ever closer.

Aunty should have been as she appeared now, peaceful, calm, serene and kind. That was how a mother should have been, and oh! How he had wished so that Aunty would be a mother to him! However, it wasn't until now that he saw such an expression on Aunty's face, and his eyes blurred as sorrow once more welled up within him.

He remembered that when he first came to Aunty's, she had extended to him love and care in a motherly fashion. That was when his father had first been arrested and when his mother had committed suicide. He was at the time still in shock from suddenly losing both of his parents and a loving family. He did not comprehend the leniency his aunt and uncle and their children afforded him as something akin to being a preferred guest. He was not yet at the state of mind to pick up Aunty's pitying expression. When the shock wore off and he became used to his new life, Aunty was always cold and irascible. That was the Aunty in real life.

Compared to Aunty's family, Lu Yung-cheng's fared better economically. Uncle was a cement worker and was often out and about on the job. Aunty's family had no land of their own, and the plot of land requiring six people to work was rented from the Liu family. Aunty's family was quite large. Apart from their four children, uncle's two younger brothers and one sister also lived there. Uncle's father passed away at an early age. In and out of the house, Aunty was the only one who could cope, though in name Uncle's mother, the eldest in this family, was in charge.

He had lived in Aunty's family for over a decade. In the ten years, Aunty helped her husband with the funeral of his mother, the wedding of his younger sister, and the marriage of his two younger brothers, both of whom moved out afterwards. To the best of his knowledge, Aunty's family had always been in debt to such an extent that it was hard to make both ends meet. Furthermore, he was a great burden in this family, either psychologically or financially, due in part to his poor health. In contrast, his cousins were quite healthy. He still remembered that he had come down with pneumonia after a case of measles. As there was no doctor in this village, uncle and aunty took turns carrying him downtown 4 kilometers away. When they got there, he was barely breathing. Aunty was worried, tired and angry at the same time. He put all his weight on Aunty's thin, bony back and heard her curse vehemently, "Why won't you die! You should, and lift this burden! Oh, you and your father are the same: pests and blights, both living and dead!"

He knew that Aunty was short of money so uncle had to, without his mother's knowledge, sell half of the soybeans that they just harvested. They couldn't afford Western medication and resorted to traditional Chinese medicine. He had been lost between life and death for more than half a month before he recovered. Uncle was the good-tempered sort, and would often give him a cent behind his cousin's backs so he could buy some treats, seeing as he was skin-on-bone after the ordeal. Aunty, however, was cold and aloof as usual.

At the time, he hated Aunty. Sometimes, he wished to die, or try to leave the family. But he had no idea where to go. So he found himself sleepless on the bed, hearing the dull but rhythmic sounds of his cousin in washing and Aunty in preparing feed for pigs. The sounds lasted long before he fell asleep.

He missed his own family and he missed his parents, all seeming to be memories an age ago. Ever since he could remember, Lu's family had lived in the school's staff dormitory. It was a building of the Japanese style. The rooms were stacked with clean and flat tatamis and afforded him easy access between rooms. It was certainly not like Aunty's house, which was cluttered with old, mud-stained and used farming tools and reeked of mud and rotting yam! His father was a teacher. He and his friends were always well-dressed and clean, and often gathered in the house every two or three days, drinking tea and talking or reading. Sometimes they would converse softly, and at other times they would be impassioned. Mother would always prepare their tea and

food with a smile. Then there came the Japanese defeat in the war, which might be of no significance to Lu's memories. However, he could never forget the happy shouting and laughing of his father and his father's friends. They were so excited that he wished he could grow up sooner, to better share their joys.

He missed his mother even more. His mother was completely different from Auntie. Mother's nose was straight, but not as sharp as that of Auntie's, her skin white and clear, and her facial features clearly, but not sharply, defined. No one was without praise for her beauty. Among the three sisters, his mother was the only one that was educated, as she was the youngest and the youngest was graced with the love of the entire family. Father had also been educated in an in-laws Japanese city, and their marriage had been the envy of many. Indeed, the family had enjoyed some good memories.

With these memories however always came the catalyst. One day Father disappeared mysteriously, and often there were men knocking on their front door at midnight looking for him. Mother had brought him along, hurriedly leaving their sweet home behind, and finally settled in the countryside house that grandfather had left for his father. Mother began learning how to work on the farm. She did the odd jobs for the nearby households. Auntie had visited quite often during this time. She and mother would often stay a long time chatting well into the night, until uncle came by with his bicycle to take her back.

Mother appeared to be sad and spooked, often spacing out whenever the wind blew against the door. Yung-cheng became strong, and when necessary he would walk out to have a check before assuring her that there was nothing outside. Both mother and son would then embrace each other, crying. Since then he had started hating Auntie, for she would always be blaming his father, stating that he was constantly unsatisfied with his lot; that he was ignorant and stupid; that he had brought this upon his wife, children and even relatives.

"Did it do him any good to study so much? The educated are instead less well off than the uneducated! Don't know how to take life just as it is. Now he's out there running about and afraid of being seen. Oh, how you have suffered on his behalf!"

He had heard Auntie say as much, and not just once, in front of mother, but mother would just shake her head tearfully.

“Don't be afraid, just tough it out. As long as your sister has a bowl of rice, you'll at least have half. Your brother-in-law is a good person, and he won't let you or your son starve,” Aunty said.

“Besides, the Lu family has a lot of farmland under its name; it will be enough for both you and your child to live on.”

“If they have judged this incident, it's rumored that all property has to be confiscated. We won't be left with anything,” he heard mother tell Aunty once.

Aunty was at first surprised, then continued to curse angrily before telling mother firmly, “With land you won't starve. If I am here, we will get through, no matter how difficult the days.”

“If anything happened, I want you to take care of him, dear sister. He's the one I worry about the most,” mother said to Aunty, pointing with her chin at the corner of the bed where he was hiding.

“Nothing will happen. You must be strong, and give others no reason to make fun of you,” Aunty said.

Under Aunty's encouragement and reassurances, mother and I had lived in the countryside for over a year, raising ducks and pigs while planting vegetables, even eating rice laced with chopped up sticks of yam like other farming families. Life wasn't as easy as when father was around, but they knew that father was hiding somewhere. There was hope. One day father suddenly returned. He was woken up in the middle of the night, and saw father and mother sitting at the bedside, holding each other and crying. He recognized father's familiar backside from the weak light coming in through the window, and he lay there quietly, unwilling to disturb his parents, even though he wanted nothing more than to jump up and cry, “Father!”

He listened quietly as father held mother, and talked quietly to her. It was a sight that moved him to tears. Father's voice was low and rhythmic, offering mother encouragement and comfort, as well as asking her for her forgiveness. He didn't know when he had drifted back into sleep as he listened until he started back to wakefulness from the sounds of firecrackers. It was day outside, and his parents weren't inside the room. He rushed out of the bed and went through the house until he found his mother leaning on the stack of kindling, her figure trembling, her expression full of despair, while looking off into the distance.

“They’re chasing your father. They’re chasing your father,” she mumbled in a hoarse, quavering voice.

“Who’s chasing him? Who’s chasing him?” He couldn’t see anything.

“They have guns, they’re firing, oh!” Mother looked absolutely frightened out of her wits.

“But I don’t see anything!”

“Come on, we must have a look!” Mother suddenly took him by hand and started running towards the back yard. They were running very fast, but they had only passed through the wax-apple yard and stepped onto the balk path when they saw four or five men coming their way, just turning the corner from the sugarcane field. Mother suddenly stopped, mouth agape. It was then that he saw clearly, that the figure, blindfolded and hands tied behind his back, tottering forward was his father. The balk was narrow, and the pushing of the men behind him cause father to fall -- completely plunging into the muddied water of the fields to either side -- every second or third step. The men would pull him up and angrily kick and hit him, all the while crying out in Japanese, “Bastard! Traitor!”

Mother and he stared at the sight, blood near boiling. Mother suddenly rushed over, across the long balk and pulled father towards her, while shouting at them, “Why are you hitting him? Why are you hitting him?”

One of the men behind Father came to the front and blocked her path, looking at her menacingly. “Damn it -- Get out of our way! One word more and we’ll haul you away, too!” he said and pushed Mother back with a shove of his hand.

Mother was forced back from just that one push, and while he wanted to hold mother and stop the momentum, it was of such great force that both of them ended in the waters.

Mother was bawling as father staggered forward, further and further. The dogs were barking, in the distance, and ever so faintly, one could hear the angry cursing of the Japanese: “Damn it! Whose dog is this? If they don’t stop, I’ll kill it!”

It was a nightmare, one Lu Yung-cheng could not forget, even if he wanted to. Yet, there was even one more horrifying event to follow. On the night that father was caught and taken away, mother had committed suicide. When uncle and aunty forced open the door to the master bedroom, all he saw was mother, lying on the ground, covered with bright red blood.



He only heard Aunty yell something before he fainted. At the time he had not known what father had done wrong, and Aunty had never told him. He had never seen his father again. Aunty's became his only family.

This nightmare, of which he was most afraid, came again to his mind upon Aunty's passing away. He was till drenched in a cold sweat.

It was not until A Sheng pulled him up that he turned his blurry vision away from Aunty's face. The surrounding kinfolks were satisfied, seeing him beside himself with tiredness and his face streaked with tears. They came up to shake hands, asking how he fared of late. Their tones conveyed both concern and envy.

He was currently teaching at a high school in central Taiwan, and his wife -- Hsiu-lien -- was also a teacher at an elementary school. They both had a job, owned a house and had children; it was the most basic requirements for living, but in the eyes of those in his home town, this rural countryside, this "small success" was nonetheless the point of envy for all relatives. Even Aunty was proud of him.

In the first few years that he started working out of town, he would always return for the grand reunion over Chinese New Year. After turning over the duties of managing the household to A Sheng and his wife, Lu Yung-cheng felt that his Aunty was much more approachable. He had not returned with his family for over a decade or more, because his children started going to school and because transportation was difficult to come by. Last spring, Aunty called him, saying she was visiting Taichung with a tour group. He drove her to their house for the night. Aunty was very satisfied with his life, and tacitly recognized that he had made something of himself. But Lu Yung-cheng found it difficult to erase her sharp words from his memory.

Lu had been an avid reader ever since his elementary school days. As long as there were books to read, he could forget everything. His grades at school were always the best. Aunty was perhaps the only person who was unhappy with his scholastic performance.

"What use is it to read so many books? If one learns to work on the farm, or learn a handicraft, at least they won't be in danger, or do any harm to others." Aunty would always say scornfully in front of him.

It seemed that Aunty tried to stop him from further studying. He had entered the junior high school in town with first place in exam scores; it was a big celebration in the village, and even the Dean and his teacher had come visiting, bearing gifts and

praise. Uncle didn't seem to be unhappy that his own son, A Chi, got no admission to the junior high school. Instead, he felt proud of his nephew's achievement, and said that he was quite smart.

"What use is it to study? Even if he were as talented as his father, what good would come of it?" argued his Aunty.

How he hated Aunty at that moment! Were it not for uncle, Aunty would have really prevented him from going to junior high school. Would his life not have truly been ruined by Aunty, he thought at the time. He had always thought that Aunty was jealous, that A Chi had not made it to junior high school and she had to pay for someone else's expense. His tuition fees had always been a great burden on Aunty's household! The better his grades were, the unhappier Aunty would be. Not only would she be unhappy, he felt as if he sometimes detected worry and despair when Aunty was looking at him. There was one time after uncle had given him the money from an entire month's worth of salary for his tuition that he had told Aunty,

"Don't worry, Aunty. I will pay you double back for everything that I have used."

Aunty only glared at him then, but he also heard Aunty tell uncle, in very touched tones, "That child is becoming so very like his father!"

Lu Yung-cheng was mystified why Aunty hated his father so much, and he was also mystified at the change of attitude, for he heard that she had once been very fond of him.

"Your Aunty is satisfied what you achieved in school. You never disappointed her," uncle's sister A Zhen said as she held his hand. "Don't forget that I carried you on my bicycle for the junior high entrance exam!"

"I haven't forgotten, A Zhen. It's been a while since we've met. I didn't do as much as I could for Aunty," he said, still gripped by emotion.

"Your Aunty was very pleased with you! She often spoke of you, more often than she spoke of A Sheng, or A Chi!" A Zhen said.

Hsiu-lien had given Aunty the pair of bracelets she wore at the wedding. Aunty was very happy when she left.

"Work hard! You're better than your father. Don't get into anything involved with the troubles. I can rest easy now that I see both of you doing so well for yourselves here," she said.

Perhaps, Aunty was of the type to live a life as it was. Survive yourself, which was the most serious goal in life. In those hard times, the grievances he suffered under Aunty had made him hate Aunty all the time.

After junior high school, he abandoned the chance to high school and instead chose to study at a normal school because the tuition was free. He taught at elementary school for several years and, through many tests in the past years, he obtained the certificate to teach at a high school. He had been very sorry for not being able to studying at college, but he never regretted his own choice. It occurred to him that whatever the price it was worth it only to be rid of Aunty's family.

It was not until he himself became a father that his hate towards Aunty began to wane. Lu Yung-cheng was increasingly ashamed of what he felt about Aunty. Apparently, Aunty treated him no differently from how she treated A Chi. In distributing work, A Chi always was assigned more because he was stronger. Most of his hatred resulted from the idea that Aunty was not his own mother so she was not kind enough. However, this idea was obviously not true. Thinking from this perspective, he understood Aunty more and more. However, he found no chance to let her know. Save for some cash or presents on festivals, he was too busy to come home. He always tried to find various excuses for himself. Now she had passed away. Everything was too late. That's why he burst into tears upon receiving the news.

The phone rang for him. It was his wife, Hsiu-lien, on the other end. "I've asked Mr. Lee to take care of the children. Should I come over? What happened to Aunty?"

"Bring all the children back home as soon as possible, and ask for a three-day leave for all. I'll pick you all up at the station," he said.

There came a car, stopping outside the gates, followed by a reverberating cry. It was A Chi and his wife. Now the house was full of wailing, and all the relatives were present with tears. Looking from the window, he found A Chi kneeling down, crying at the top of his lungs as he crawled in the rest of the way. He himself could not resist kneeling down before Aunty and giving way to tears.

The pain and torment was over. He looked at Aunty's face. Was it not calm and at peace?



## 「女人與甘蔗」導讀

藉著小說創作，鍾鐵民觀察與紀錄鄉村小農的土地變遷，而他本人是小鎮樸實風氣下的老師，或所謂的白領階級。對於農地耕種，他是觀察者，然而，作為作家，憑著對土地的熱愛，他其實是很關心農業種植、成果的產銷與農民經濟收益的，因此他常愛聆聽他們的抱怨，分享他們的快樂，這些都是他能將社會觀察融入寫作的主因。至於白領，由於他本身就是老師，頗能體悟存在於白領階級的心理、工作模式、壓力、及抱怨。有些處境也難以避免尷尬。

在早年的客家鄉村裏，「先生」(老師)代表有學問的人，是一個令人尊敬的職稱，即使是最粗鄙的貧者或黑道，對老師也不敢失禮。然而，老師的收入其實是微薄的，尷尬的。「先生」們通常手無縛雞之力，但面容、手足、穿著無不乾淨大方，與村農的黎黑、粗手大腳，形成強烈的對比。「女人與甘蔗」的故事寫的就是一位「先生」被老婆要求送甘蔗去市場擺攤販賣，內心掙扎的心理歷程。故事開始的前一年，據說甘蔗價格飛漲，於是大家搶種，老師家也不例外。一年後，甘蔗產量大增而滯銷，價格一路往下掉。眼看著田裡的甘蔗賣不出去，又無法送給人家吃。老師愁於內，無法施展，他的老婆卻明快地作了決斷，決定自己到市場擺攤販售。有一天，老師上完四節課，才從學校回來，準備午餐，沒想到電話鈴響，老婆竟然催促他趕緊幫她推幾捆甘蔗到市場販售。「先生」恪於尊嚴、礙於面子等階級意識的難題，但老婆堅持，他雅不願意地推著一車甘蔗走上街頭，一路總意識到別人對他推車這件事指指點點。中途果然遇到幾個淘氣的學生，他們一邊笑，一邊趕緊過來幫老師推，還不忘一路捉狹嘲弄老師，讓老師左右為難，空有一身架子，卻無法發揮。好不容易終於到了市場，老師還老實地想請學生吃牛肉麵，可是學生們一哄而散，還不時鮮老師的底，「幫鄰居推甘蔗」。故事的最後，寫他的老婆去方便，要老師單獨照顧甘蔗攤。這時一位阿婆，在孫子極力哀求下，來到甘蔗攤，並一再殺價，老師基於不二價的原則，當然更多的是基於一位「先生」的尊嚴，極力維持一斤 50 元的價格。來回爭執了數次，老師還是堅持不讓價，不料背後卻傳來老婆一聲「好」，拍板成交。更慘的是，阿婆要求賣方把甘蔗送去他家，這時候，老婆期期以為不可了，強調沒人力，不外送。阿婆說，就教這個男人送

啊，他又不是「先生」！老婆急了，說；「是的，他是的。」老婆急著退錢，不願先生下海，面子盡失。沒想到這時「先生」卻說；「沒關係，我等一下吃過飯給你送到街裡去」，這時受驚的反而是老婆了！

階級意識形態是很微妙的抽象觀念，台灣社會的階級意識其實並不特別存在，大家都從貧困中一路走來，如今也說不上富，卻總覺得想要的都有了，一幅恬然自足的樣貌。「女人與甘蔗」寫的是「先生」從積極維護階級的優越到妥協的心理歷程，最後的結局暗示了彼此了解彼此尊重的重要，也暗示無謂的階級意識毫無意義。這與西方文學中的階級意識大不相同，例如英國小說家毛姆(S. Maugham, 1874-1964)的作品中寫盡了上層中產階級優越的意識形態，如在「珍寶」(The treasure)一文中，寫獨居男人與家中女管家的相處故事。女管家事事精明，舉止優雅，有大家風範，對好酒精品尤其善於區辨。有一晚平日嚴肅的男主人窮極無聊，請女管家到外面喝酒、跳舞，夜深返家還忘情纏綿。次日醒來，男主人心中忐忑不安，深怕女管家誤以為彼此的階級不再，連聲叫苦！沒想到，他才一醒來，女管家一如往昔，先送來餐前茶，準備早餐，拉開了窗簾，一切如舊，昨夜甚麼事已是雲淡風輕，階級還是存在，上等人得救。於是，男主人大大地鬆了一口氣。

與毛姆有相當不同的處理方式，半因為客家聚落裡畢竟多半是佃農的社會。鍾鐵民的作品與土地密不可分，他長期關注土地變遷下的農民，心中的「道」永遠都與農民的喜與樂有關。除了階級意識外，「女人與甘蔗」著墨較多的還是在農人對於種植的一窩蜂，小農的無知，永遠只貪圖「今年」需求比較多的標的，舉凡大蒜、香蕉、檸檬、到甘蔗，無不一路搶種，結果往往價格僅有一年的好光景，每次搶種的結果莫不帶來價格的再度崩盤。可是這麼樣的循環並沒帶給農民教訓，如今還是現在「價格高，搶種，價格崩跌，慘叫」的循環之中。

優秀的作家觀察周遭的生活，進而發現問題，指出問題，但是這些嚴肅的元素都必須技巧地藏藏在故事中，讓小說中的人物自然地生活。細心的讀者卻能從字裡行間，發現作者「文以載道」中的「道」。以這個角度來看，「女人與甘蔗」不失為一篇結構良好，風趣又有啟示性的小品。

## **A Guide to *Of Women and Sugarcanes***

Through writings, the author tried to record in words what he observed in change of farmers and farm lands over time in the small village he lived. He was an observer for all agricultural activities, very much concerned with what was planted and how the products were sold out. He spent a lot of time listening the farmers' wishes, happiness, complaints, frustration. What he listened to and observed constituted the basis on which he wrote his stories. Meanwhile, he was a teacher in profession, which might be treated a white-collar in this village. He acted more like a spokesman of the farmers than as a pure friend of farmers.

In the Hakka tradition, a teacher, or master in the Hakka language, was a model figure commanding respect and honor, and one parents encouraged their children to emulate. It was a profession with authority in knowledge as well as in moral behavior. Ironically, the income of a teacher was barely enough to keep the body and soul together for his family, although he was expected to be dignified, neat and clean in apparel. In contrast, dark-skinned farmers, with their calloused hands and feet, were freed from concerns of clothing.

The theme of *Of Women and Sugarcanes* is the self-conscious realization of conflicting social striation in the mind of a teacher when he was asked or forced to help sell sugarcane in a traditional market in Taiwan.

In context, the price of sugarcane had soared the year before, prompting every farmer to plant sugarcanes. The master's family was no exception. Eventually, the excess in supply of sugarcane resulted in a slump in value. Now the teacher and his wife were confronted with the difficulty of trying to sell out the sugarcane piled up in the yard and the fields. As a determined woman, his wife decided to set a stall in the market and sold the sugarcane by herself. One day after class, the teacher had no sooner got home than he was called to bring over some more sugarcane to the market, for all she had was sold out. The set the stage for the conflict. As a teacher, he was not expected to do things like bringing sugarcane on a cart to the market. It was unbecoming, and not dignified for his status. No other excuses could be found, however, so he began to pushed a sugarcane-laden cart to the market. On the way, it struck him that all the people standing or walking in the street looked at him with a

sardonic smile. All of a sudden, a group of students came from nowhere, who, teasingly, tried to help the teacher. With their help, he finally got to his wife's stand.

At the closing of the story, his wife had to leave temporarily to relieve herself and the teacher was left to take care of the stall. An old matron was persuaded by her grandson to buy a packet of sugarcanes, but wanted to haggle over the price. The master refused to lower the price simply because he thought the price was reasonable and it was beneath him as a teacher to haggle over price. In the process of a bargain, the wife broke the standoff between her husband and the matron by agreeing to sell at a lower price, but the matron demanded that the teacher deliver the sugarcanes to her house. His wife did not agree, because in her mind a teacher was not supposed to perform such errands. "Why?" the old matron said, "after all, he is not a master." "He is," claimed his wife silently. Here came another deadlock. "I will do that after my meal," said the teacher, which startled his wife.

Class consciousness was a very abstract concept, and was not particularly prevalent in Taiwanese society. Everyone came from the same level of poverty, and while not particularly rich in the present day, they felt that they had obtained all they wanted - the very image of being content.

What was made implicitly in this story was in reality the change in psychology for a teacher. It was in vain to defend the superiority of his class status as a teacher. The ending brought into light the importance of mutual respect. The concept that the class of a white-collar was superior was far from the case.

English writer S. Maugham (1874-1964) had wrote many short stories depicting the class consciousness of the middle-class and upper class in British society. The short story *The Treasure* was the story of the interaction between Richard Harengar, a man living alone, with his hired female butler, Miss Pritchard. Pritchard was graceful, knew her wines and etiquette and was quite shrewd in all matters. Harengar had one night invited her out for a drink, dancing and a tumble in bed. The next day greeted him with a terrible fright that the class barrier between the master and the parlor maid had dissolved. Pritchard, however, went about her duties as was normal. Relieved that the class barrier still existed, and the upper-class man was saved, Harengar became "a very happy man" once again.

The difference, of course, was that the Hakka village still comprised of mostly farmers working on rented land. Chung's works were inseparable from the land; his



attention had long been focused on the people and their changes with the land. His concern was tied, foremost, to the joys of the farmers.

While class consciousness was one of the themes, the story *Of Women and Sugarcane* placed more emphasis on the farmers -- how they swarmed to plant the same crops; their ignorance; their focus on the profits “this year,” such as garlic, bananas, lemons to sugarcanes, leading to only one year of profit. The cycle never ended, for the farmers never learned their lesson. They continued to plant what they perceived to be cash crops and then were faced with excessive supplies leading to a price crash.

The writer found problems by observing life around them and pointed them out. The seriousness of the issues must, however, be couched within the story, and allowed the story’s characters to naturally progress. The sharp-eyed reader, however would be able to pick up the “point” the author wished to make by reading between the lines.

From this perspective, *Of Women and Sugarcane* is quite a well-structured, inspirational, and witty short story.

## 女人與甘蔗

扮什麼就應該像什麼！把自己修飾得光鮮整齊，配合自己的身分職業，我認為這是一個人應有的體貌；也是他的責任。小時候到外婆家，外婆家世代種田，幾個舅舅全都是農人。鄉下人早晨一起床就赤了腳，我們小孩子如果到早餐後還拖著木屐走動，外婆便要嚴厲的罵人了：「你們是先生（老師）嗎？」我們就急忙踢掉腳上的木履，踏上沁涼的土地，無拘無束。「先生」在我們鄉下人眼中是充滿尊嚴的職業，人人敬仰，怎能仿冒？如今，僥倖自己也爬上了這職位，十幾年來，不敢妄自菲薄，最少也維持了這「先生」的尊嚴。當然，我並不敢追時髦派頭，也不致油頭粉面，但好幾次出外，有人猜測我是學校老師時，著實令我深感欣慰。

這個世界上，這麼無視於我的身分和這份職業尊嚴的：大槩是我那黃臉婆了。真讓人頭痛。古人說家有惡妻，如蛆附身。一點都不差。就像現在，一通電話，居然要我推一車甘蔗到市場上去。這兩個星期她在市場邊秀坤先生金店前走廊，擺了個攤子削甘蔗賣，害得我十幾天來，連市場鄉公所的那個方向都不敢去，這已經夠我汗顏了，現在她竟然還要我推著甘蔗車，招搖走過半條大街，世上可還有公理存在嗎！

在學校連上四堂課，回到家中冷鍋冷灶，連人影都沒有，又累又餓已經滿腹懊惱了。電話一響，電線那頭女人的口氣倒還頗顯高興呢！豈有此理！

「你果然到家了。」

「不到家！我還到高雄去嗎？」我沒好氣的回答。

「今天生意不錯，快幫我送一二十把過來，早上三十把快光了。」她說。

「嘎——？妳要我送甘蔗去？妳不會自己回來搬。」

「我是分身不開啦！連打電話都走不開。好像又有人要買甘蔗了。快點哪！我要走了。」

「不行欸——！妳怎麼可以叫我送甘蔗！妳又不是不知道，我……！」我堅決的拒絕。

「我知道你是『先生』，先生就不能送貨嗎？我們鄉長大人推大糞車種香蕉，報紙上連照片都登出來了，你沒有看過嗎？呃——你比鄉長更偉大啦！——」女人的話很有諷刺的味道，也顯得不耐煩。

「妳明天再賣行不行？我餓死啦！」

「今天星期六，難得生意好。你送甘蔗來，我請你吃粉條。」女人停了一口氣：「你不趕快給我送來，明天我賣不完全削了給你當飯吃。」

不可理喻！就算我平常愛啃幾根甘蔗吧！也不能把庭院裏堆積得小山頭般高的甘蔗叫我給吃掉呀！

「可是，妳看，一把甘蔗二十多斤，妳真要我揹上二十把走過半條街嗎？」我發現自己說話的語氣太軟弱，幾乎像在祈求她一樣，一由便有些生氣起來：「妳到底還要不要這個頭家！」

「哪！你先到對面阿屏仙家，他有一台力阿卡（手推車），一把把搬上去推過來就行了。等你來吃飯。」

卡達一響，電話給掛斷了。氣得我差一點把兩顆蛀過的大牙都咬碎了。那裡有這麼蠻橫不講理的女人！好像她這一生的目的，就是為了要折磨我。一次又一次的，除開給我造麻煩外，我不知道她還能做什麼。

不錯，我父親留給我將近一公頃的雙季水良田。這塊田地幾十年來曾養活過我們一大家子人。傳到我手中，可能是子女不肖，讓田地的效用低了。耕田的事一直便由我那女人來負責。女人如果好好安分的插秧種稻，賺回全年伙食外，還可以有些餘糧可以出售農會，用來支付肥料、農藥，和各項工資開銷應也夠了。偏偏女人財迷心竅，硬想從這片田地裡擠出點油水。有時種毛豆，有時種紅豆，不然便是蕃茄啦甜玉米啦等等，說是經濟作物利潤較大。十年來卻也盈盈虧虧的，合計下來我沒有發財倒十分明顯。不意女人胃口越來越大，前兩年透過農會，與日本商人契約種植菊花，由農會貸放資金，約定繳花時農會再由花款中扣還。大家一開始頗發了一點小財，我還趁機換了一輛新摩托車，上班時不必再騎那輛滿身斑駁、烏油四濺的老爺車，確實曾經風光了幾個月，逞了一時之快。不意東瀛花商擺了農會一道，收去菊花以後就杳如黃鶴，一去不返了。農會的錢可是貸放的，不分一毫全要收回。於是，無緣無故的反揸了一身債，直到今年上半年，才分期攤還繳清了債務。

有人得到教訓，會從失敗中學習，有些人卻永遠學不乖。我那女人便是後面的那類人。田鄰李三財哥要遷到台北去倚靠兒女，一公頃多的田地，情願無條件給我那女人耕作，只要代他保管和繳納水租田賦。不料女人忽然心雄起來，去年初全栽種紅甘蔗，看見人家賺錢便眼紅，我怎麼反對都沒有效，連經濟制裁都收不到嚇阻作用。

「我自己借錢投資，不要你一毛錢。我可跟你講明啊：我賺的錢你不要想分哩！」

說不理真能不理嗎！結果學校的三個互助會，全給標去買肥料發工資用光了。前兩個月紅甘蔗終於甜夠可以出賣了，價錢卻賤得比不上當肥料的雞糞。照去年的價格可以包給中盤三十萬左右，現在連三萬塊錢都賣不掉。老妻急瘋了。

「我怎麼知道有這麼多人種甘蔗嘛！」她氣沖沖的說：「為什麼大家總要一窩蜂湊熱鬧哇！真氣人。」

「這要問妳自己啦！」

我的一口氣雖然出了，女人也得到了教訓，但十幾萬塊錢可是我的血汗呀！而且兩公頃地的甘蔗也得處理掉。中盤販子既不肯承包，送人也送不完，即使請所有的親戚朋友來吃，日夜不停也可以吃半個多月，還不一定吃得光呢！

「我自己來賣！」女人毅然決定。

商量好了秀坤先生把騎樓借出，女人沒有徵求我的意見，搬了一個小桌子，一個大竹筐就賣起甘蔗來了。兩個星期沒晝沒夜，田裡砍甘蔗，雇工人搬回家中堆放，再運到市場販賣，逼得我天天泡麵，整箱速食麵都快泡光了，這豈是正常的生活？我原抱定置身事外、不聞不問的，但顯然是辦不到了。庭院裡昨天又砍回來兩車甘蔗，堆積得有人頭高，聽說田裡還有一大半沒有收割呢！

真沒有想到，一把甘蔗是這麼沉重。將二十把甘蔗搬上手推車疊好，喘得我上氣不接下氣。換好衣服和布鞋，找了頂舊草笠頭上罩著，看清了前後無人，把手推車一下便推上了馬路。

車子走起來還算輕快，一會兒就走過一大段路程了。正是午餐時間，路上少有行人。我正慶幸自己運氣不差，可以輕鬆的吹吹口哨，不意從街市的那邊，一片藍色制服的影子就撲的刺入了眼簾。

糟透！我忘了這也正是學生放學，他們騎腳車走到這兒的時刻。這時要退去已是不可能了，只有低著頭，矇混過去。好在近年來的學生越來越不懂禮，常常面對師長時視若無睹。平時，我對基礎教育中不加禮儀科目深感不滿，學生們幾乎全是率性發展的，除非家庭教育能關顧及此。可是一般家庭，有多少是夠水準的呢？尤其在鄉下，這樣發展起來的國民，怎得不粗魯，怎麼能表現中華禮儀之邦的高雅氣質？不過，這個時候我倒希望他們一如往常。我不看他們，他們也別看我。否則，他們若是像日本孩子那樣，一個個規規矩矩來一個鞠躬禮，我這付模樣豈不慘哉！

古代皇帝都贊成「不聾不啞不作阿翁。」但要裝啞裝聾確實不是易事。第一群學生錯身過去，一到身後就聽到壓抑著的喧嚷。

「嚴老師呢！」一個說。

「我嚇了一跳，怎麼戴破笠帽。」一個接著說。

「我以為看錯人了呢！」另一個說。

「推甘蔗哩！」

「回去跟他買甘蔗！」

「嘻——……」

笑聲闐闐聲漸漸遠去，我覺得自己全身冒汗，氣憤填膺。這群孩子，看來平常對面不理人，原來不是近視看不清，他們眼睛尖得很哩！可惡。

我低著頭不理會他們，他們三三兩兩過去，我總能聽到嚴老師的稱呼夾著嘻嘻笑聲。其實不姓嚴，因為我一向上課嚴肅、不苟言笑。我總認為師嚴然後道遵，學習最重要的是態度，學道而不謹嚴，怎能有成就呢？也不知道什麼時候，我變成嚴老師的。那還是有一次我又聽到學生低呼嚴老師，再看看左右都沒有別人，再想想本校根本就沒有老師姓這個姓，這才抓他過來審問的。審了半天，他才忸忸怩怩的說出來，原來把我稱作地獄中森羅殿的閻羅王了。真是從何談起！就這樣，學生們都叫我嚴老師，我想頂迷糊的一定是一年級剛進來的新生了，明明嚴老師，怎麼又姓李哩！

明後天到學校去，不知道要怎麼去宣揚了。事已至此，就隨他們去編排吧！才一抬頭想吐口氣，那個從客運巴士上下來對著我笑的女生，不正是我班裡的那幾個嗎？

「老天，完了；怎麼偏偏碰到這幾個呢！」我心中暗嘆。

「老師！老師！」

吳英美的聲音又尖又清楚，想故作耳聾也不行。她們邊叫邊擁過來，引得路人注視微笑。

「老師，一個人推這麼多，重不重！」

「我們幫老師推！」

「哎呀！好重哩！老師您推到那裡去嘛！」

這些女生吱吱喳喳十足像一群鴨子。她們也不由分說就把手推車給接過去了。

「老師，送到哪裡去？」吳英美一副老大的派頭，大家都看著她：「我們替老師送。」

「唔！這個……我還是自己來吧！」我說：「妳們還沒有吃飯不是嗎？妳們回去好啦！」

「這沒有關係。我們很容易招待，每一個人一碗牛肉麵好了。」吳英美豪氣的說。幾個丫頭又笑成了一團。

「老師如果錢不夠，牛肉湯麵也可以。」洪金枝自動降價。

簡直是敲竹槓要脅。這情勢頗有虎落平陽、龍游淺灘的意味。這兒沒有校規可以依恃，她們真要胡鬧，就是真是森羅殿的閻羅王恐怕也要破財了，何況我只是仿冒商標而已。而且街上還有眾人注視著這邊情勢的發展呢！

「好吧！我們送到市場邊去。」我說。

「老師！您怎麼會推甘蔗嘛！」吳英美又問了。

「哦！這是……這是隔壁人家請我送的。」我說。

「這個——要賣的嗎？」吳英美驚異的看著我：「師母呢？隔壁人家怎麼會要老師送甘蔗去啊！」

「奇怪！」另一個接著搖著頭笑。

我抱定不答腔的姿態，押著手推車前進。這群小姑娘儘管多話愛笑，但腳程可不慢，我必須快步半跑的才能趕得上。跑到市場前面，我已滿身是汗狼狽不堪。當她們推到蔗攤面前，看到老妻圍著圍裙在替客人削甘蔗時，立刻又噤噤咕咕笑成一團。老妻看著我，我莫可奈何的攤攤手。

「師母，我們幫妳把甘蔗搬下來。就排在這裡嗎？」洪金枝忍住了笑動起手來。幾個人很快就堆放好了。

「好啦！我請妳們吃麵去。」我慷慨的說。

「不必啦！我們開玩笑的啦！」洪金枝說。

「家裡會等我們吃飯呢！老師再見！師母再見！」

她們整理一下書包衣服，敬過禮就走了，仍然是嘻嘻哈哈的。這個年紀，真是快樂。

「老師！隔壁人家啊！」吳英美說。臨走還不忘損人。這事恐怕有得傳述了。唉！都是女人惹出來的。

「肚子餓了吧！來，先嚼一段甘蔗。」女人說。她為一個摩托車的男子，把削好包好的甘蔗放進他摩托車的後貨箱裡，把桌上剩下的一截甘蔗遞給我。還有兩個人在蔗堆前等著。我讓得遠遠的，看柱子上張貼的電影海報，唯恐熟人看到。

「我不要！妳快點。」我說。

「要不，你拿錢去先吃飯。牛肉麵好嗎？」女人圍裙兜袋中掏出一張一百元券給我。

「天天吃泡麵，不要吃麵了。我們一起去吃飯。」

「好，那你等我一會兒。」

女人把錢又收起來。我繼續看海報。還兩部電影一起放映啦！好久沒有看電影了。

「頭家娘！這一把多少錢？」

戴了安全帽的中年男子翻選了一把甘蔗問。

「五十塊錢就好。」女人趕緊走過去：「又脆又鬆又甜，我們自己種的呢！」

「今年甘蔗實在是便宜。」男子說：「前天我買的也是五十元，全家吃得高興。這一把幾枝？」

「九枝，每把都一樣。」女人笑容可掬，有人讚好，好像遇到了知音。

「太重了搬不回去，不然我就買兩把。」男人說。

「我明天還要賣，歡迎再來買。」

「有人替客人送到家去呢？」另一個年輕男子也說：「如果包送就更好了。」

「我沒有人手，包送是沒辦法的。」女人歉然的解釋：「但我的甘蔗比人家好，你們看看，沒有一枝有蛀節的。是不是？」

「好吧！我也買一把。」年輕男子也搬了一把：「現在的孩子好命，這麼好吃的甘蔗，還不愛吃哩。這一把恐怕吃到月底還吃不完。」

「可不是嗎！他們還真懂得吃！專愛吃進口的貴的。香蕉、芭樂、橘子不要，連蘋果都不愛吃！」中年男子接著說：「我們小時候，撿甘蔗節嚼，還要跑得快才能在蔗渣堆中找到一兩節哩！」

兩個男人感慨嘆氣。女人幫他們把蔗巴綁好，千恩萬謝的一再鞠躬，目送著他們發動摩托車離開以後，才回頭看我。神情還頗得意呢！

「怎麼樣，成績不錯吧！」她說。

「就為了那一百塊錢，值得嗎？」我忍不住潑她冷水。

「你不能這樣說欸你知道嗎？早上我賣了兩千多塊錢，也就是說，我們的甘蔗銷出了四十多把！這成績不錯吧！」女人把肚兜裡的錢抓起來晃了一下，確實有一大把，都是十元五元一百元的小鈔。

「那，該吃飯了。」我覺得口裡胃裡都酸酸的。

「再等一下，我已憋了半天。你在這裡看著，我去那裡馬上回來。」女人指著鄉公所大樓後面，也沒等我答應就跑開了。

越怕鬼就遇到鬼。女人前腳才離開，後面一部鐵牛車就停在蔗堆前面。七八個剛從菸田下工的女人紛紛跳下車，滿身菸油斑剝，汗氣薰人。我要想再躲在大柱子另一邊裝作不相干的人也不行了。

「買甘蔗！買甘蔗！」她們的聲音堅決有力，一邊就動手翻起一把把的甘蔗來了。我一直避開金舖正面的位置，就怕裡面熟人秀坤先生看到。



誰賣的甘蔗？」一個婦人大聲朝金舖裡問。

「我、我。很甜的甘蔗呢！」我從柱子後只好走出來了。

「一把多少錢？」另一個婦人問。

「五十塊錢就好。」

我覺得耳朵發燙，聲音虛弱，好像比站在講台上講課還要辛苦。第一次上講台也不曾有過這樣怯場的感覺，記得那段還滿有自信哩！孟子說：行有不慊於心，則餒矣！我李某人堂堂正正，居然怯對一群不相干的婦人家嗎！無非是怕人家識破自己的身份而已。現在在她們眼中，我不過是一個賣甘蔗的小販，她們關心的是甘蔗的好壞、價錢的多少，誰管你是什麼人！好像自己把自己估量得過高了！

「喲！李老師，幫太太賣甘蔗嗎？太體貼啦！」店裡秀坤先生在櫃台後面看到我，很親熱的招呼著：「進來請喝杯茶。」

婦人們每個人挑了一把甘蔗搬上鐵牛車，誰也沒有多看這李老師一眼，我倒真有點遭到漠視的不快呢！

「今年吃甘蔗吃得真過癮！」一個婦人說。

「是呀！去年一枝賣到四十塊錢，沒想到今年會這麼便宜。」另一個說。

「種得多了，沒辦法。」

她們邊談邊動手。一個年紀較長的婦人點了一下車上的甘蔗。

「九把，四百五十元。頭家，你先付吧。」她說。開鐵牛車的男子笑著把錢交給我，然後發動引擎，一群人談談笑笑爬上車子，一陣濃煙揚長而去。

「李老師，辛苦啦！來，請喝杯熱茶。」秀坤先生端了杯茶出來，熱氣騰騰的。

「不好意思，在這裡打擾你。」我說。

「種不少吧！」

都是婦人家，栽了將近兩甲地！」我說。

「如果是去年就好啦！」

「就是因為去年太好了，大家才搶著種。」

「台灣無三日好光景。真是無奈何啊！」

「如果有計畫有組織就不致這樣，像菸葉一樣，至少合理的利潤是沒有問題的。」我說：「現在大家都存著賭賭看的心理。我那婦人家就是不聽我的話。」

我們相對嘆氣。心中都有一股無形的隱憂。這兩三年來，好像做什麼都不對路，誰都沒有賺錢，許多錢都到那裡去了呢？

一個老婦人牽著孫子走到蔗堆前，小男孩突然站住不走了，要奶奶買甘蔗。

「有沒有削好皮的？」老婦人抬頭對著我們問。秀坤先生接去我手中的空杯子回到舖子裡。

「只剩下一把把的。買一把好了。」我：「才五十塊錢。」

「一把幾枝？」

「九枝呢！」

「才九枝要賣五十塊錢哪！前幾天我買的一把有十一枝哩！」老婦人說。

「我這甘蔗好欸！又脆又甜又長節，妳看，沒有一枝有蛀節生蟲的。」我半開玩笑的吹起來。

「五十塊錢太貴了！如果不是我這小孫兒是土生仔愛吃甘蔗，我還捨不得買哩。五十塊錢，太多了。」

「老人家！一把五十塊錢妳嫌貴？算起成本，這一把甘蔗我要倒貼一百錢請妳吃。可憐不可憐？收妳五十塊錢，妳還嫌貴？」我心中火氣不住的翻騰。真是天理何在啊！

「哼！不買這一把甘蔗，我這五十塊還穩穩放在自己衫袋裡呢！」老婦人理直氣壯，還頗有責怪我少不更事般的看我幾眼。我真該一頭撞柱子撞死。

「阿媽！我要吃甘蔗。」小男孩搖著老婦人的手叫。

「好啦好啦！喂，賣甘蔗的，算四十塊錢好不好？」老婦人左挑右挑，翻出一把上下打量著，連看都不看我一眼。

「不行。」我說。

「那麼四十五塊錢好啦！」

「不行。」我說。

「好啦！就算四十五塊錢給妳好！」是女人從後面走出來，滿口答應。

「怎麼可以……」我說。

「可以，可以……」女人阻止我說話。平常母老虎一般的女人，對老婦人卻客客氣氣，真是異數，真讓我滿頭霧水。老婦人瞪我一眼，不情不願的掏出了錢包，算了四十五塊錢交給女人。

「我家住在花樹街，阿康伯藥房左邊那間，妳們幫我送過去。」老婦人說。

「啊——」女人為難的說：「你自己揹回去吧！」

「什麼，這麼一大把甘蔗，妳要把我壓死嗎？」

「可是，我沒有人手，沒法給妳送。妳回去叫家裡人來這裡搬好了。」女人說。

「我家裡年輕的都出去工作了，不天黑不會回來。」老婦人指著我：「妳讓你揹過來，這麼壯的還揹不起嗎？路也不太遠。」

「那怎麼可以！」女人吃驚的說：「他是……他是不能替妳送甘蔗的。我把這錢還給妳吧！」

女人慌忙把剛收下的四十五元找出來遞給老婦人，對方卻不肯接下。

「他又沒有缺手跛腳，揹那麼一點路也不行嗎？」老婦人嘮嘮叨叨：「他又不是先生。」

「他是……他正是……」女人吃吃的說，神情十分狼狽的看著我：「我才不會讓他替妳揹……」

「算啦！沒有關係！我等一下吃過飯給妳送到家裡去。」我說。

女人驚訝得睜大了眼睛瞪著我看。我連自己也感到奇怪，自己居然心平氣和，只是感到十分疲乏，再也懶得為任何事情去爭持。老婦人滿意的點點頭，牽了小孫子的手要走，臨行忽然又瞥見小桌上剛才女人削給我而我沒有吃的一小段甘蔗，她順手抓過去遞給孫子，兩個人高高興興的走了。

望著祖孫二人的背影遠去，女人和我都不言不動。

「為什麼妳要答應她減價呢！已經夠虧本了。」最後我問。

「唉！反正也不差那五塊錢。我只想著又可以賣出一把，心裡就高興了。」女人說：「你又為什麼答應替她送到家裡去呢？」

「唉，妳不是說嗎？賣去一把就是一把啊！」我說。

女人默默的看着我，眼眶红红的。我想她这个时候大概才知道惭愧，把老公害了半辈子，还不应该为自己的莽撞行为后悔吗！不听先生语，吃虧在眼前。这么一想，不由得又稍微高兴起来。

「算了，我们又不靠这个生活。」女人也笑起来，理了理头发说：「我们去好好吃一餐饭。」

我已经好久没有注意到，女人笑起来还真像甘蔗那么甜呢！

## Of Women and Sugarcane

If you play a part, you should play it well! I have always believed that it is becoming of a man that he should dress in accordance to his profession. I remembered my grandmother. When I was a child, I visited her quite often. She came from a family of farmers, and all of my uncles were farmers as well. Those living in the rural areas usually went about bare-foot from the time they woke up, and she would scold us and ask whether we were masters (teachers) if we still put our clogs on after breakfast. We would immediately divest ourselves of the clogs and step onto the cool earth, freed from constraint. Everyone in the countryside looked up to teachers, for to us, it was an occupation of great dignity. No one would dare pose as a teacher! Now, I have become a teacher. I have remained humble over the past ten or so years, and at the barest minimum, upheld the dignity of the profession. I of course refrained from staying at the forefront of fashion, and did not become one of those Dandies. I was nonetheless deeply gladdened when others recognized that I was a teacher when I went out.

In the entire world, the one person who gave absolutely no regard to the dignity of my position and vocation was my wife. Ah, what a headache! The ancients were right in saying that a bad wife was as hard to shake off as a leech that had latched on to you. For example what happened just now was that by merely a phone call she had me heading towards the market with sugarcane on a cart. Over the past two weeks, she set up a stall selling peeled sugarcane on the footpath in front of Hsiu-kun's shop. I was so embarrassed that I avoided approaching the vicinity of the township office and the market. How unjust it was to ask me to waltz down half of the main street, pushing a cart of sugarcane?

I had just returned from the school, having taught four classes, exhausted, famished and upset. I came to an empty house. Picking up the ringing phone, I found there came, to my surprise, the woman's sound, full of joy.

"I thought you would be back home by now."

"Not home! Where else would I be, in Kaohsiung?" I said snappishly.

"Business is amazing today. Bring over another 10 to 20 stalks of sugarcane; I have almost sold out the 30 stalks I've brought with me in the morning," she said.

“Huh? You want me to deliver sugarcane to you? Why don't you just come back and grab them yourself.”

“I can't possibly go back for I almost didn't have time to step away to make this call.<sup>5</sup> I think there's another customer for sugarcane. Hurry up, I need to go!”

“I simply can't! How can you have me deliver sugarcane! You know that I ---” I said, firmly refusing the request.

“Does being a teacher preclude you from making deliveries? Our venerable township mayor has made the paper with his photograph of pushing a wheelbarrow of manure for bananas. Have you not seen it? Um, of course you're far more important than the mayor ----”

The woman's comments rang with sarcasm and impatience.

“Can't you sell them tomorrow? I could eat a horse now.”

“It's Saturday and business is unusually good. Bring the sugarcane over and I'll treat you to a bowl of rice noodles.” She paused, and then added, “if you don't hurry up and bring me the sugarcane, I'll peel every sugarcane left tomorrow and feed you up for dinner.”

Incredible! I confessed that I enjoyed munching on sugarcane now and again, but it was impossible for me to finish off the small mountain of sugarcane heaped in our yard!

“But, look! A stick of sugarcane weighs some 20 Jin.<sup>6</sup> Would you expect me to put it all on my back and just walk there, do you?” I realized that my tone seemed too weak to show my anger, “Am I still your husband or not!”

“Eh ... Go to Ping-hsien's house across the street and borrow his handcart, then load the sugarcane onto the cart and wheel it over. I'll be waiting for you for lunch.”

With a click, the phone went dead. I gritted my teeth so hard I almost cracked my molars. The unreasonable woman! It was as if her goal in life were to torment me.

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<sup>5</sup> At the time when the story happened, there were no cellphones. When one had to make a phone call, one either used the public phone in a booth or a private phone in a shop or store. That's why it was mentioned that the woman was too busy to make this call.

<sup>6</sup> *Jin* is a weight unit adopted in Taiwan. One *jin* equals 605 grams.

Time after time, she brought me nothing but trouble, and I knew not what else she could bring.

It's true. I inherited from my father nearly a hectare of land, yielding two seasons' rice, which sustained our entire family for over several decades. When I inherited the land, the production became much less, due in part to our ignorance. The main job on the farm was left to my woman. If she had stayed simple and planted rice, it would have not only produced enough food to last us an entire year, but would also have left something for sale. The earnings, though little, helped us afford the cost of fertilizer, pesticide, and other expenses. The woman was, however, obsessed with money and wanted to take more advantage of the land. Sometimes she would plan various crops, such as soybeans, red beans, tomatoes or sweet corn, claiming that they were more profitable. So over the past ten years, our luck had run both high and low. But one thing for sure was that we were not better off. The woman would become even bolder. Two years ago, she signed a contract, by way of the Farmer's Association, with a Japanese merchant for chrysanthemums. The association agreed to loan the fund for the planting, which was to be paid by a certain percentage of the selling cost. In the beginning, most of the farmers made some fortune. Thanks to the profit, I bought a new scooter. I fancied that I won more dignity by getting rid of the old, oil-splattered one. It lasted for only quite a short time. And then it was found that the Japanese merchant had vanished from the world. We took nothing from the sale, but we had to pay every cent that we loaned from the association. In other words, we were essentially left with nothing but a great debt.

In this world, some would learn from their failures, but there were, perhaps, more who learned nothing out of a lesson. My woman happened to be one of the latter. Our neighbor Lee San-tsai, before his departure to Taipei, asked my wife to take care of his hectare if she paid for his water and land taxes. The woman's ambition swelled with the size of arable land. She planted sugarcane across two hectares of land, for the price of sugarcane rose to a record high. To this my protests were in vain, even if I claimed to sanction the family cost.

"I'll apply for loans and won't use a cent of your money. But let us be clear: Don't even think of sharing in the profits!"

Could I really wash my hands of her decision? Soon all my savings in the three mutual-aids<sup>7</sup> was spent on fertilizer and workers' fees. The sugarcane finally became sweet enough for sale two months ago, but by that time, the price had fallen. Now it was even cheaper than the chicken droppings used for fertilizer. The same amount, which might have earned 300 thousand last year, was now barely about 30 thousand. My wife was nearly mad with the price, and she was worried.

"How should I know such would be the case? Why do people always flock to the hottest trends like bees to honey," she said with a huff.

"You would better ask yourself," said I.

It seemed that my prediction was the case, and I was satisfied that the woman had got her lesson. But every cent of the more-than-100-thousand investment came from my efforts. Moreover, we had to dispose of the entire crop of sugarcane harvested from the two hectares. The wholesalers refused to buy. Even if I invited home all of my relatives and friends to enjoy sugarcane, it would take more than one year. We were entirely lost at sea.

"I'll sell them myself," she said.

Without asking my opinion, she soon hammered out a deal with Mr. Hsiu-kun and set up a little table in front of his shop. For the past two weeks, she worked day and night, chopping down the sugarcane, asking workers to move it home, and then she began to sell sugarcane. I was forced to eat instant noodles, and in no time I found I had consumed an entire box. Could this be a normal life? In my mind, I tried to keep

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<sup>7</sup> Mutual aids were a specific kind of financial method for the poor. In the past decades, they were quite popular in Taiwan. Each participant paid his own share from which s/he earns some interests. For example, there are ten participants, each paying 100, and then the total will be 1000. The first 1000 will belong to the one in charge of the aids. For the next round (per month, week or year), each participant has the right to provide a sum, say, 200, for competition to win the privilege to get the next sum. The one who calls the greatest sum will be the winner, and the owner of the total. However, each participant at the second round merely pays 1000 minus the sum called. For instance, if 200 is called, then each participant needs to pay merely 800. The mutual aids are of a very good idea, because the one in need of money doesn't pay much interest, while the one who doesn't need money earns better interests.



myself away from the business. It seemed, nevertheless, too late. Now in the yard were two carts of sugarcane, piled as tall as I stood. Far more were left untouched on the farm.

I did not expect the sugarcane to be so heavy. When I put the 20 bundles onto the handcart, I wheezed for breath in no time. Changing my clothes and putting on an old straw hat, I wheeled the cart down the road, noticing that nobody was around.

Before long I had covered a significant distance into the town. It was lunch time, and there were not many people around. I was just congratulating myself on my good luck, and felt relaxed enough to begin whistling when a flicker of blue uniforms stabbed into my eyes from the direction of the market.

Damnation! I forgot that it was the time for students to go home as well. It was impossible for me to back away now that they reached this juncture on bicycles, and I could only lower my head and hope to meander through them unseen. I was fairly confident of doing so, as students in recent years were uncouth and not educated in etiquette and manners, often disregarding their elders and teachers, even if they were standing face to face. I was deeply unsatisfied with the absence of etiquette classes in basic education, as students were left to their own devices unless their families happened to pay particular attention to such needs. Most of the parents were far from such high expectations, especially in the countryside. Under such circumstances, future citizens could not but become rough and crass. Precious little elegance and poise in manners would be expressed. However, at this moment, I wished that they would, following their usual norm, ignore me. Otherwise, if they acted like Japanese children and came over to bow in greetings one by one, I would be in serious embarrassment.

A proverb has it that it would be impossible to become a good father-in-law if one were not deaf, blind, or mute. However, it was still more difficult to be a feign deaf. When the first group of students passed, noises came to my attention.

“It’s Mr. Yan!” one said.

“I was startled to see him in that tattered straw hat,” another student said.

“I cannot believe what I saw.”

“He’s moving a cart of sugarcane.”

“Let’s return and buy some sugarcane from him!”

“Hah--”

The commotion eventually faded away. However, I felt myself drenched in sweat, and was in quite a huff. Those kids! They seemed not to be too near-sighted to see me. What devils!

I kept my head lowered and paid no attention to them, but as they passed by, I could often hear the greeting, “Mr. Yan” amidst giggles and laughter. As a matter of fact, I was not Mr. Yan. They labeled me so owing to the fact that I was strict and serious in class. In my belief, a teacher should be strict, and then discipline would follow. I had no idea of when students began to nickname me Mr. Yan. I didn’t even learn of the connection of me and Mr. Yan until one day when I heard Mr. Yan’s name being directed at me. To the best of my knowledge, there was no Mr. Yan among my colleagues. I then asked the student and after a long hesitation he said that he was being punished by King Yanluo.<sup>8</sup> Well, where did that come from? The nickname stuck, though it would be confusing for the first-year students why a Mr. Lee would be referred to as Mr. Yan behind my back.

I didn’t know what talk would be circulating around the school the next day. Now that what happened had happened, all I could do was to free myself from whatever worries. No sooner had the idea occurred to me than I caught the glance of a student, just getting out of a bus, smiling to me. Why was this naughty group in my class?

“Ah, I’m done for; done for! Of all the students I could have met!” I sighed to myself.

“Sir<sup>9</sup>, Sir!” Wu Ying-mei’s voice was clear and shrill, and it was impossible to turn a deaf ear to her. As they shouted, they wended their way to me, drawing the eyes of others witnessing the event and bringing a smile to their lips.

“That’s a lot, Sir. Is it heavy?”

“Let’s give him a hand.”

“Hah! How heavy. Where are you going?”

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<sup>8</sup> It is a quite common belief in Taiwan that the king in charge of the hell is King Yan Luo. Yan in Chinese means strict and serious. Although the narrator in this story is not Mr. Yan, he is called so because he is serious and disciplined in class.

<sup>9</sup> In most cases, we directly call a teacher in class ‘teacher,’ which incidentally corresponds with the meaning of ‘Sir’ in English.

The girls took over my handcart. Meanwhile, they giggled like a herd of ducks. “Let’s take over, Sir.” Wu Ying-mei seemed to be the leader of the group and everyone peered at her. “Where are we going now?”

“Um.. I should do it myself. You haven’t yet had lunch, have you? It would be best for you to go home.”

“It doesn’t matter at all. We’re easily satisfied, just a bowl of beef noodles for each of us,” Wu Ying-mei said, drawing yet another round of laughter from the girls.

“If you don’t have enough money, Sir, we would be satisfied with beef soup and noodles,” Hung Chin-chih said to avoid embarrassing me.

Well! Hares were pulling the dead lion by the beard. There were no school rules to stop them. If they insisted, they could pluck a feather or two from old King Yanluo himself. What else could I do in such a crowded street?

“Alright! We need to deliver these to the market,” I said.

“So why are you delivering sugarcane, Sir?” Wu Ying-mei asked.

“Oh! Uh... a neighbor of mine asked me for help,” I said

“Is this --- for selling? Where’s Shimu<sup>10</sup>? Why would the neighbor ask a teacher to deliver sugarcane?” She said in astonishment.

“It’s strange.” Another girl said, laughingly shaking her head.

I kept quiet and kept going with the handcart. While these girls were quite chatty and loved to laugh, they still kept a quick pace, forcing me into a quick march in order to keep up. By the time we reached the market, I was sweating like a horse. When they brought the cart in front of the sugarcane stall and saw my woman peeling sugarcanes, they once again burst into a giggling laughter. My wife looked at me, and I shrugged and spread my hands in helplessness.

“Shimu! We’ll help unload the sugarcane. Should we put them here?” Hung Chin-chih said, trying to hold back her laughter. They were soon finished.

“That’s that! I believe noodles are on me!” I said generously.

“Ah, we were just kidding! There’s really no need for that,” said Hung Chin-chih. They left after picking up their bags and jackets, still giggling and laughing. Ahh, to be an age without cares in the world!

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<sup>10</sup> The wife of a teacher is called Shimu, literally, *shu* refers to teacher and *mu*, mother.

“Hey, Sir! ‘It’s a neighbor!’” Wu Mei-ying said just before she left. Oh, what rumors and stories would be born of this. Ahh, it was all the woman’s fault.

“You must be hungry! Here, have a stick of sugarcane,” she said, handing me some left-over sugarcane that she had prepared for the previous client, which she peeled, chopped and bagged for the man to put in the storage compartment of his scooter. There were two other clients waiting. I stood off to the side, peering at a movie poster on the power pole so I wouldn’t be seen should anyone we knew passed by.

“I don’t want any! Hurry up,” I said.

“Would you like to eat first? Here, take some money. Do you want beef noodles?” she said as she fished out a hundred-dollar bill from her apron.

“I’ve had instant noodles for days and I’m tired of noodles. Let’s have something with rice.”

“Alright. Just a second.”

She put the money back and I kept on looking at the poster. Oh, two movies showing at once! It’s been some time since we last went to the movies.

“Hey, miss! How much for a bundle?” a man wearing a helmet asked as he started picking at sugarcane.

“I’ll let you have a bundle for fifty,” she said, walking over quickly. “It’s guaranteed to be sweet, and the meat succulent and crunchy! It’s all home-grown!”

“Sugarcane is pretty cheap this year. I bought a bundle for 50 dollars just the day before, the entire house was happy. How many sticks per stalk?”

“Nine for each stalk.” The woman was positively beaming, almost as if she found a kindred spirit just from someone praising her sugarcane.

“If it weren’t too heavy to carry, I would buy two stalks,” the man said.

“I’ll still be here tomorrow, and you’re more than welcome to drop by!”

“Would you do house deliveries? If there were deliveries it would be great,” the other young man said.

“I’m afraid I don’t have workers to do house deliveries, but my sugarcane is better than others you see on the market! See? Not a single one nibbled on by pests!”

“Alright, I’ll take a stalk! Children nowadays are spoiled for taste, and such delicious sugarcane won’t attract their attention. I’m afraid the stalk won’t even be finished by the end of the month,” the young man said.

“You don’t say! They truly are spoiled for tastes, asking for expensive, imported fruits. They don’t want any bananas, guavas or tangerines. They don’t even like apples!” the middle-aged man said, “To think that when we were young, we could only chew on the nodes of the sugarcane.”

Both of them heaved a sigh with mixed emotions as the woman assisted in tying the sugarcane stalks onto their scooters. She bowed many times saying ‘thanks’ as she watched them leave. Finally, she turned to me, looking quite chuffed with herself. “Well? Not bad, eh?”

“Is it really worth it for merely 100 dollars?” I couldn’t help but try to dampen her good spirits.

“You can’t say that! Don’t you know I’ve got 2,000 dollars, over 40 stalks, in the morning. That’s a pretty decent sale.” The woman grabbed a fistful of cash from her apron and waved it about. It was quite a fistful of bills of small denomination, ranging from five to 100 dollar bills.

“Then it’s time for lunch.” I felt a bit of sourness in both my stomach and mouth.

“Just a moment more! I’ve been holding it in for ages. You stay here, taking care of the stall. I’m going over there and will be right back,” she said, pointing to the rear of the township office building and ran off before I could even formulate a response.

The moment the woman left, my worst fears came true. Seven or eight women who just left from their work in the tobacco fields jumped out of a motorized rickshaw.

“We want some sugarcane,” said they in a determined voice. I was still off to the side, avoiding the direct entrance to the incense shop for fear that Mr. Hsiu-kun would see me.

“Whose sugarcanes are these?” A woman asked directing her question inside the incense shop.

“Mine. They are mine. The sugarcanes are very sweet,” I said, reluctantly coming out from behind the pillars.

“How much per stalk?” Another woman asked.

“Just fifty.”

I felt my ears burned as I gave the reply in a weak voice, as if it were more difficult than teaching. I had no experiences of stage-fright like this. Even when I taught my first class, I did with great confidence, as far as I remembered. Just like what was meant by Mencius’ saying, “If one’s actions are not true, then one will lack courage.”

Now I was in a state of fear to bargain with them due in part to being recognized as a teacher. In their eyes, however, I was simply a sugarcane seller. What they cared was the quality of the sugarcane, and how much they had to pay. They didn't care who I was. To think of this, it seemed that I overestimated my value and worth.

"Ah, Mr Lee! Come to help your wife sell sugarcane? Such a thoughtful husband," Mr. Hsiu-kun called out from behind the counter in the store after seeing me. "Come. Come on in and have a cup of tea."

However, none of the buyers paid any attention to the "Mr. Lee." They kept on talking. For this, I felt a little bit unhappy.

"Ah, we've enjoyed the sugarcane this year," said one woman.

"Oh yes! The price was too high. Nobody expected this low price this year," said another woman.

"Too much sugarcane was planted this year. Nobody can help with the price."

One of the elderly matrons counted the sugarcane stalks placed on the rickshaw then said, "Nine stalks, 450. My dear boss, would you please pay for us?" The man driving the rickshaw smiled and handed me the money. The women all clambered on, laughing and chatting; the rickshaw belched a plume of smoke and drove off.

"Here's a cup of tea, Mr. Lee. Long day, isn't it!" Mr. Hsiu-kun said as he came out with a steaming cup of tea.

"Quite sorry for inconveniencing you by setting up here," I said.

"Planted quite a bit, didn't you?"

"It's all my wife's idea. Nearly two Jias."

"If only you did it last year!"

"Well, last year was too great a success, which caused everyone to plant sugarcanes this year."

"Boom periods never tend to last long in Taiwan. It's a shame that we're so helpless."

"We would not be in this state if there was relevant information provided in advance. Look at the tobacco industry, at least they have no problems obtaining reasonable profits," I said. "Everyone is taking a gambler's attitude now, just to see if they would luck out. My wife just won't listen to me."

We looked at each other and sighed, both feeling an intangible burden pressing down on us. Over the past two or three years, it seemed that doing anything was a bad investment and no one made any money. Where had all that money gone?

An old woman leading her grandson happened to pass by the sugarcane stall when the boy suddenly stopped, wanting his grandmother to buy him some sugarcane.

“Are there any peeled ones?” The old lady peered up at us and asked. Mr. Hsiu-kun took the empty cup from me and took it back inside the shop.

“Only stalks are left. You should buy an entire stalk; it’s only 50!” I said.

“How many are there in a stalk?”

“Nine, I suppose.”

“Only nine, and you charge 50. I bought a stalk that could be chopped into 11 segments couple of days ago,” the old woman said.

“My sugarcane is very good. It’s crunchy, sweet, and tender. See, no faults at all,” said I, boasting in a tone of half-joking.

“50 is too much, indeed. If it weren’t for my youngest grandson who likes sugar cane, I wouldn’t even consider buying any. Really, 50 is too much.”

“Look, lady! Do you think a stalk for 50 is expensive? Going by overhead, I’m losing 100 dollars to have you buy this one stalk! Shouldn’t I be pitied? The nerve of you thinking it’s too expensive to buy a stalk for 50.”

“Hmph! I would rather keep my 50 in the pocket.” The old woman said, sounding as if I were a hot-headed young man. I wanted so much to hit my head against the pillar!

“Granny! I want some sugarcane,” the young boy whined, swinging the old woman’s arms to and fro.

“Okay, okay! Ho, sugarcane dealer! How about 40?” The old woman said, eyeing at the sugarcane she plucked from the pile without even deigning to look at me.

“No can do,” I said.

“How about 45!”

“Nope,” I said.

“Alright, 45 and it’s yours!” It was my wife who agreed as she walked up from behind me.

“How could we ---” I started to protest.

“We can, we can,” the woman said, stopping me from saying more. I was mystified at seeing the usually fierce woman become so polite with the old woman, which was quite odd to me. The old woman glared at me before unwillingly taking out her purse and counting out 45 dollars.

“I live on Huashu Street, just at the left side of the pharmacy. Please deliver it there,” the old woman said.

“Ahh, just take it with you,” the woman said with some hesitation.

“What? This is a big stalk of sugarcane. Do you want me to be flattened under it?”

“But... I have no one to deliver it to you. Go back home and have someone from your family come and get it,” the woman said.

“All the young people in my family are out working, and won’t be back until dark.” The old woman pointed at me then said, “You should have him deliver the sugarcane. He looks strong enough. It’s not that far off.”

“It’s out of the question.” My wife said in astonishment. “He’s a... He can’t deliver sugarcanes for you. Here, let me give back your money.”

The woman, quite flustered, dug out the 45 dollars she just received and tried to hand it back to the old woman, but the old woman would have none of it.

“There is nothing wrong with this gentleman. Why can’t he do me the favor? He’s not a teacher.” the old woman muttered.

“But he’s... he IS...” the woman stuttered before looking at me in great distress. “I won’t let him carry it for you...”

“Well! It’s of no consequence. I’ll deliver it to you after my lunch,” I said.

The woman stared at me greatly puzzled and astonished. I was quite perplexed, myself, even though I tried to be calm. I was simply tired, and couldn’t bring myself to more argument. The old woman nodded in satisfaction and was about to walk off, her grandson in tow, when she saw the stick of sugarcane the woman had chopped off for me when I arrived. She grabbed it in the most nonchalant manner and handed it to her grandson, both leaving the stall in a happy mood.

Both the woman and I watched them leave, mute and unmoving.

“Why did you agree to lower the price for her! We’re losing enough money,” I finally asked.

“It’s only 5 dollars. I was just happy that I could sell another stalk,” the woman said. “And why did you agree to deliver it to her house?”



“Well, you said it, didn’t you? A stalk sold is one less stalk at home,” I said.

The woman stared at me mutely with red eyes. Only at such a moment would she feel ashamed, I thought. She had brought me half a lifetime of trouble, and now she should regret the rash behavior. I was kind of happy to think of this.

“Well, then, we aren’t making a living by this trade anyway,” the woman said with a beautiful smile. Fixing her hair a little, she said, “Let’s enjoy a decent lunch.”

It has been some time since I’ve seen it, but the woman’s smile was truly as sweet as sugarcane.

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Editor’s Note: *The short story was also collected in the book “The Legend of Sam-bak-gung” published by Laureate Publications in 2001*

## 「三伯公傳奇」導讀

「三伯公傳奇」是鍾鐵民比較後期的作品(1992)，在寫作技巧上更臻成熟、老練，布局更是一派舒緩，已沒有躁進的痕跡。比起前期的小說，「三」文可說是他一個很成功的範例。

故事描寫一位老農銀喜，他天生忌諱聽到烏鴉啼叫，總認為那樣必然帶來不吉之事，當他回顧從前往事，似乎證據歷歷如繪，斑斑可考。有一次發生在他有機會抽種菸苗栽種的當天，一早就聽到烏鴉啼叫，結果當然沒抽中。又有一次，他用彈弓射中一隻烏鴉，當天他父親被水沖走。故事的重點來到了銀喜夫妻老年孤獨的身影，老人家整天期盼遠在外地工作的孩子帶孫子回來共享天倫之樂，可是孩子每每多藉口，總是無法回來讓兩老有含飴弄孫。銀喜只好到廟口去下棋，打發時間。銀喜嫂則忙著摘毛豆，作點傭工，賺些外快，藉機會與鄰居話話家常。有一天，有人看上了他家中的山坡地，出高價上千萬想買這塊地。老銀喜心中喜孜孜的，銀喜嫂卻一點也不想賣，畢竟這是養活全家的土地呀，也是她嫁過門後胼手胝足開墾的結晶哪！銀喜講了三伯公的故事，村中有個人一向貧窮，常被村民瞧不起他，管他叫三斤狗，頗為輕蔑。有一年除夕，這位仁兄由於借不到錢，窮得買不起祭祖用的三牲，想不到過了午夜，他的兒子竟回來了，還帶了一大包錢回家。他父子倆只好用銀元來祭拜祖先，全村一時轟動，競相過來向他拜年，認親，改稱「三伯公」。銀喜自然想當三伯公，而不想把土地交到給兒子手中將來被他們變賣。

這原是個農業經濟邁向工業經濟中常見的故事。不過，鍾鐵民刻意地在小說的書寫裡寫入台灣農村發展的軌跡，讓讀者看到銀喜如何從租佃耕種的吃苦時代，藉由政府三七五減租與耕者有其田的政策，終於擁有了自己的田地，一步一步邁向小康之路。如今的他，可說達到人生可以感到「滿足」的境界了，唯一美中不足的是，孩子不願意留鄉耕稼，守住這些田地；個個離鄉背井，跑到外面的工廠上班，反映台灣工業起飛的初期，年輕人棄土地奔向都市生活的趨勢。

在寫作技巧上，本文始於烏鴉啼叫，敘寫銀喜的個性。但現實世界裡，烏鴉啼叫卻帶來了一通電話，語調中帶有深深的嘲諷敘意涵。小說的敘事觀點自

此轉移到銀喜家中的現況，再從銀喜嫂的回憶，倒敘了台灣農民自佃農邁向自耕農的艱苦背景，襯托著目前生活的小康樣貌與場景，也順筆點出小農的容易滿足，擁有自己的田，三餐自足，小孩有工作，這就是最理想的人生了。故事中轉折從容自然，場景更迭處也見到筆法的細膩。

「三伯公傳奇」也似鍾鐵民其他的小說作品，兼敘小鎮村農恬然自足的農家生活及台灣農民從佃農到自耕農的奮鬥歷程，為台灣農村的發展作見證。

## A Guide to The Legend of Sam-bak-gung

*The Legend of Sam-bak-gung* was composed in the latter period of Chung Tie-min's writing. More skillful in plot structure, presented in a slow but firm tone, this piece of work became one of his more successful stories.

The story was concerned with an old farmer, Inxi, who believed that if he heard a crow caw, it would spell misfortune for him. His belief was further confirmed by his own experiences. He had not been drawn for the lot for distributing licenses to plant tobacco due to his unfortunate encountering a crow that morning. The second experience was his father's death, which happened on one day when he heard a crow cry. His father drowned in a river, which was unusual because his father was well-known swimming abilities. The main theme of the story is then introduced, painting the picture of an old couple - Inxi and his wife, Chu Fu-mei - living in the hope that their children and grandchildren would be able to visit more often. The children, however, cited busy schedules, prompting Inxi to spend most of his time playing chess at the local temple, while his wife picked peas to earn a little money.

One day, a broker approached Inxi and offered a very good sum for Inxi's land on the hill. He was excited at the prospect, but his wife was reluctant, for the land had provided the family in the past years. Moreover, she had toiled over the land for most of her life. In an attempt to persuade his wife, Inxi told a story about Sam-bak-gung, who was so poor that he could not procure the necessary offerings to worship his ancestors on Chinese New Year's Eve. He was despised as sam-gin-bak. To everyone's surprise, sam-gin-bak's son returned home with great wealth. With no time to purchase the necessary offerings (pork, chicken, fish, etc), father and son were forced to worship their ancestor with paper bills and coins. From then on, he was respected by everyone, and they honored him by calling him Sam-bak-gung. So, Inxi made clear that if the sons did not want to follow his step on the farm, he would rather sell the land by himself. He preferred to be a Sam-bak-gung, by himself.

The background of the story occurred during the transition from agricultural to industrial economies. Throughout the story, we see how Inxi went from being simply a tenant on someone's farmland and coming into his own as an independent farmer, with his own lands, due to governmental policy. It was expected that the readers was

familiar with the history of Taiwanese agricultural village development. At his current stage in life he could be said to be content, with only one regret- that his children were not with him, further highlighting the fact that the younger generation preferred the urban over the rural.

From the perspective of writing, there was a paradoxical tension between the metaphor that Inxi disliked crows and the reality that the crow's cawing brought about the phone call offering such good deal to sell his land. From this point onwards, the narrative focus was placed on Inxi's family, and re-traced the hard time the family has been through from his wife's view. When Inxi proposed to his wife, his family was rather poor. She accepted because he was an honest, hard-working man. From nothing to owning a piece of land, she considered herself happy and she was treated one of the luckiest women in this village. The flow of writing and its transitions, either in character or in psychological developments, are on par with works from other excellent writers. The humor revealed from the character Inxi was a direct reflection of the Hakka people - inward, self-confident, persistent, boastful, and easily satisfied.

Along with the excellent writing, the story presents different pictures of daily life for the Hakka village. Most of the inhabitants worked their way from tenants to landowners. The story, to a certain extent, provided the readers with a vivid history of the Hakka in Taiwan.

## 三伯公傳奇

烏鴉子叫——衰。天方濛濛光，屋背苦苓樹那邊就有成群的烏鴉啞啞啞吵得翻天。這令人厭惡的衰鳥已經有很久沒有看到了，不想一來就是一群，一定是那幾棵木瓜樹上的黃熟木瓜把牠們招引出來的。

老銀喜氣沖沖開門衝出禾埕，把大門撞得砰碰響。他朝屋背吐過口水，嘀嘀咕咕罵著，一邊扣上衣一邊走進廊屋。阿喜嫂在廚房洗菜，看到老貨子一進一出，不由搖頭好笑。農村裡的人都不喜歡烏鴉，自古傳說看到烏鴉多少總有些不吉利的兆頭。尤其在這樣大清早被烏鴉吵醒。

阿喜嫂了解丈夫的脾氣。老銀喜不是暴戾的人，事實上這個人像個「天銃」，什麼都不怕不在乎，平時樂觀，慷慨，偏偏從小就對烏鴉特別忌諱。每次碰到烏鴉好像就突然碰到了鬼，又咒又罵，還要吐口水，越是在困苦年歲，越是表現得強烈。她記得申請菸草耕作許可的那次，抽籤的那天早上也是烏鴉當頭叫，氣得銀喜跳腳，還果真沒有抽到那足以立刻改善他們生活的許可證呢！問題是農村鄉下，莊頭莊後那裡不是成群烏鴉呢？老銀喜異常的忌諱於是也成了莊裡老老少少的打趣笑談。連小孩子偶然都會開他玩笑，尤其是那幾個牧牛的頑童。

「阿喜伯，現在千萬不要去棚背，我們剛從那裡來，有整百隻烏鴉，碰到會衰死呢！」臭頭阿雄每次碰到他，都會一本正經的提出警告。

「死小猴子！衰你的骨頭。」老銀喜從來沒有生過氣，總是笑罵一聲也就算了。他也知道自己的忌諱沒有道理，只是忍不住生氣吧！

幾十年過去，臭頭阿雄都已經子女成群。老銀喜忌諱烏鴉的心情卻仍然不改。這幾年烏鴉因為農藥和人們獵殺都快絕種了，現在驟然聽到啞啞連聲，連阿喜嫂都感到一陣類似親切的喜悅。對老貨子的激烈反應，她便感到好笑起來。

不過在那段早年艱苦歲月中，好多次烏鴉當頭叫都曾帶給他凶惡的遭遇，不管是不是巧合，但是老銀喜飽經苦難是個事實。也難怪他那麼痛恨烏鴉了。聽

他說過，他小時候跟同伴去沙埔牧牛，水牛相鬥相逐，他被自己家的牛衝倒踩踏，差一點死在牛蹄下，那天早上就有烏鴉在他肩上拉了屎。十四歲那年碰到烏鴉交配，他拿彈弓射傷了一隻，那天下午西北雨後，他父親去大河壩撿拾洪流中的大水柴，沒有人相信，水性那麼好，能在黃濁洪流中隨著滾滾巨浪一上一下渡河救人的人，竟然自己也會被大水沖走。這是他家苦難的開始。他曾自責射傷烏鴉，他一直以為是碰了這種衰鳥害死了爸爸，也害得媽媽和弟弟們跟著嚐盡貧窮的滋味。

阿喜嫂並不相信烏鴉真會給誰帶來衰運。烏鴉又不是只對著某一個人叫的，那有聽到的人都要倒楣的道理呢？但是偏偏就有那樣的怪事，是她嫁給銀喜以後遇到的。那年，是老二出生後，日子特別難過，全莊人都吃蕃薯，所有的米不知道到那裡去了。租穀、地稅、肥料、水租，樣樣都要繳穀，剩下一點只能摻蕃薯簽煮飯。生活比光復前還要辛苦。奇怪的是那年烏鴉特別多，蝗虫也特別多，成群成群的，有人說台灣都被吃窮了。銀喜幾乎天天都要發瘋一陣，奶水不足，又要整天勞動，老二不到週歲就夭折了。這讓她想起來還要斷腸。當然這都是過去的事情了。

電話鈴響起，是誰這麼早打電話？她聽到客廳裡老銀喜已經在應聲了。老貨子講電話嗓門奇大，好像不這樣對方會聽不清楚。她很想聽聽他們的對話，但是屋脊的烏鴉吵得太凶了。啞啞啞的叫聲把客廳裡的說話聲都給吵得聽不清。那有這種吵法的！她邊將飯菜端上桌子，準備吃早飯。一邊心裡也有些惴惴不安。待會兒老貨子是不是又要發瘋呢！

「那些木瓜早就不能吃了，毒素病弄得沒芯沒葉，率性剝掉，省得煩惱。」阿喜嫂指的是那些烏鴉。

老銀喜進廚房吃早餐時，臉色很平和，甚至可以說是帶著些許高興的神采，這令她狐疑不已。

「管牠去叫。『好事鴉來，壞事鴉閃開』！」他自顧自的端起碗就愉快的吃起來，跟剛剛衝出大門去又跳又罵又吐口水，簡直像是兩個不同的人。

「太陽從西邊出來了呢！」阿喜嫂低聲的自語。

「妳說什麼？」

「沒事。誰打電話？是不是阿忠他們明天要回家？」

「哼！這些子弟那裡還想得到要回來！我告訴妳，我就要發財了。靠他們，是枉然的！」

「你有什麼財好發？算了吧！就算六合彩給你中個特尾，每次簽一百元，發到那裡去？」

「哈哈，這次可不一樣囉，一千萬元以上，還看我要不要哩！」老銀喜臉有得色，好像說真的一樣。

「好哇！你去做發財夢也好。我等著過好日子。」

「我帶妳去遊覽全世界，絕不騙妳。」

老銀喜早餐要吃兩碗乾飯，幾十年的習慣。菜很簡單，即使只有醬竹筍和蘿蔔乾，他也一樣津津有味從不挑剔。但乾飯絕不能少，即使蕃薯簽飯，也一樣要兩碗三碗。這也是他在高雄兒子處待不下去的原因，牛奶、稀飯、豆漿、油條，那豈是人吃的？還是阿喜嫂的白米飯讓他覺得踏實飽足。

太陽還沒昇上山呢！莊路上人來人往，摩托車和汽車飛馳著，上班、上工和上學的人鬧鬧，一片生機蓬勃的氣息令人也感到有精神起來。烏鴉大概已鬧夠，自己飛走了。老銀喜坐在客廳裡大口的喝著濃茶，一邊開了電視看早上的新聞。阿喜嫂一面收拾桌子一面想著老貨子的話。一千萬元呢？哼！今生甬想！

老銀喜家是真窮。她想起剛嫁過他家來時，他們家連菜園地都沒有。那年她二十歲，是日本降服後第三年。本來銀喜的父親是佃農，租了五工多的水田耕種，另外他製了牛車，總利用農閒期間，駛牛車到磚窯去幫忙人搬運磚塊。父親不幸被水沖走後，地主嫌他們人手不足將水田收回去。他的母親只好帶著他到處做零工，或到糖廠做會社工勉強渡日。十六歲時銀喜就已高大得可以駕駛父親留下的舊牛車，偶而幫莊人載載柴草或穀包。搬運磚塊很辛苦，到他十八歲後，他的母親才肯讓他走父親的路，到磚窯去運磚。也在那一年，原來的地主文輝伯終於將他們原來耕種的那五工人水田又租賃給他了。

阿喜嫂從小就認識同莊的老銀喜，但是正如山歌所唱的「阿哥莊頭妹莊尾，雖然同莊各東西」，他們也不曾接觸交談過。她只約略了解他這個人的長相和家庭，當媒人提親時，她完全沒有意見。雖然說他家窮得沒有一角田一塊圃，但她家也並不富裕，她從小跟母親做工，從來沒想過要嫁什麼「吃頭路」的



人，穿「誰吉達」睡「榻榻米」。「做人就要拼，做牛就要拖」，她沒有什算享什麼福，所以嫁給銀喜，她不會懊悔過。

事實上，他們結婚那年，銀喜家陰霾早去，正是全家欣欣然發展的時候。有田地有車輛，銀喜工作又賣力。大清早天還沒就離家。運完一車車磚塊回來後立刻下田翻土。緊工時節犁完自家的田以後還要幫他人家犁。兩條水牛牯拼命的輪番工作，他一個人卻獨撐到底。有一次翻水田要蒔大冬禾，成片青苗有屋簷高，他踏著水駛犁在青苗間一回又一回的轉著，把青苗帶土翻過來浸水。忽然牛停下來拉屎，他也趁機舉起一隻沉重的腳架在犁上，雙手扶著犁臂閉目小憩。沒想到雙眼一閉就睡著了，一覺醒來太陽已經轉影，水牛啃光了身邊的青苗，正躺在泥漿中休息呢！老銀喜每次跟人提起這段往事都還面帶得色，並且再三讚嘆那頭水牛牯的馴順通靈。

「那時我常利用晚上運黃薑到上莊去，回來的路上總是迷迷糊糊的半睡半醒。牠自己認得路，平平安安把我和車子拖回家來哩！」

曾經有很多莊中的人們羨慕他們這個家庭。全家都那麼打拼，沒有一個吃閒飯的人。「阿喜嫂，像你們這樣的人家，不需多久，一定有春光的日子。」她常聽到這樣的讚賞。

照理，他們是應該能存些錢才對。老銀喜除了下棋唱山歌外，不嫖不賭，沒有浪費。可是跟莊裡所有的人一樣，再怎麼去拼命工作，也只能溫飽。好像除了自己生產的食物外，其他衣服用品總要花盡他們所有的金錢才能張羅出來。就是這樣，穿好穿壞，大家都一樣的沒有存錢。

幾十年已經這樣過去，阿喜嫂已經十分認命。憑她和老貨子那樣賣力工作，只要有人說是好的事業，再苦他們都嘗試過。所以，想靠耕田來春光，她知道是可笑的夢想。

外面有人在呼喚她，聲音尖尖細細的，一定是隔壁夥房的桂枝。她放下掃把走出廚房，果然是桂枝矮矮胖胖的身子堵在大門口。沒有看到客廳裡的阿喜嫂，摩托車也不在屋簷底下，不知道什麼時候老貨子偷偷溜出去了。

「走哇！阿喜嫂。人家快把豆苗伐光了。」桂枝神情有些急切，「妳還沒有準備哩！」

桂枝來邀她一同去摘毛豆。在這毛豆採收期，只要附近有豆田收割，她們總是去幫忙，坐著輕輕鬆鬆的摘下豆莢，賺點工錢。因為是論斤計酬的，所以時間早晚長短都沒有限制，只是去遲了太陽曬得厲害。

「明天禮拜天了。今天妳自己去好了。」阿喜嫂歉歉然的說：「那些子弟不知道回不回來哩！」

看著桂枝匆促的離去，阿喜嫂又開始了她逐間清掃的工作。盼望子子孫孫回來，成了她每個星期的例行事務。三合院的夥房恁大，除了正身，外加左右橫屋，總共有十幾間的房間。如果兒子女兒都一起回來，帶著內外孫，那時房間就不嫌多了。但平常要維持夥房內外的清潔卻是大工作，三五天不整理就到處長蜘蛛絲，像沒有人住的荒屋。這是阿喜嫂最沒辦法忍受的。

農村的年輕人一個接一個出都市謀發展，許多夥房都空蕩蕩的只剩下老的看守，甚至有些人把老年的父母接出去看家看孩子，只有那些原本功課不好沒能完成高學業的，或是不夠聰明靈俐的孩子反而能安心的待在家裡給父母溫暖。老銀喜的這座夥房原來是宗族中幾個堂兄弟共有的，一家又一家次第遷走，權利就由他頂了下來。阿喜嫂打算將來三個兒子各自分得一份。有好長一段時間，她希望能老老少少三代同堂，熱鬧和諧的住在這個大夥房三合院裡。可惜的是現實生活使她不得不放棄這個美夢。如今，除了過年和清明掃墓那幾天滿屋滿禾埕的家人和汽車外，難得全家齊集，那麼大三合院就兩個老人守著。她不辭辛苦的保持清潔，為了好隨時迎接家人。雖然只是幾天的團聚，阿喜嫂仍然熱切的工作著，從沒有抱怨過。

當老三阿順決定要攜帶妻兒出去時，阿喜嫂確實曾經失落得傷心哭過幾場。老銀喜也悶聲在王爺壇連續下了幾天棋。

「你留下來，日子過得去。這些土地房屋全給你。隨你去經營，我不過問。」老銀喜想盡辦法想留他。

「小孩子在鄉下生活才快樂。我還可以幫你們帶孩子，讓秀珠出去，她可以繼續做她的洋裁呀！」阿喜嫂也苦苦求著。

阿順看樣子也是為難痛苦的不得了。事情一直延宕著，直到阿順騎摩托車走五十公里上班途中摔倒受傷後，終於還是走了，到他做事的前鎮去租屋，拋下鄉下這麼好的三合院。

「爸爸，真要耕田，那一點山田加上山坪椰子園，實在不夠大，要企業經營不成規模，要再買田地又沒有資金。半生半死的在這裡拖日了，我受不了。」阿順說：「小孩子在城市裡受教育的機會比較好。如果爸爸肯，乾脆，我們賣掉搬到高雄去，擺一個檳榔攤都比現在更好。」

這種話老大阿忠老二阿棟出去時都曾講過。在外頭生活雖然緊張，夫妻兩個都要工作，但在農村忙慣了，工作對他們反而是一種生活的情趣。記得阿棟剛進工廠時寫信告訴爸爸，說白天上班時有事情做很快樂，下班後很無聊，不知道要怎麼辦。所以，他們都很賣力工作，阿忠的老婆做素菜擺攤子，生意好得不得了，常常招請做婆婆的去幫忙。阿順的老婆在自家門口掛了一個換拉鍊、修改縫補衣服的小招牌，聽說每個月也有一兩萬塊錢的收入。如果光靠那六分地，又是山田，什麼時候才能有現金的收入？一年三次收成，偏偏農產品不值錢。

摘毛豆是農村裡現在阿喜嫂唯一還可以去打打工賺錢的機會。毛豆採收時，但見大片田豆上處處插滿了大紅大藍的海灘陽傘。成群的老人和小孩先把豆苗割下來，拖到陽傘底下，坐著矮凳摘豆莢。按斤計酬，午後過磅領錢，一手交錢一手交貨，十分有成就感。阿喜嫂很喜歡這個工作，常常天一亮就下田割豆苗，割夠了一天的工作量，就躲在傘陰底下摘豆莢，一邊打嘴鼓聊天。

「阿喜嫂，妳是有福氣的人，子女每個月都寄錢，何必來跟人家爭這種錢來賺嘛！」每次看到她下田打工，同村的鳳金就會笑她。

「算啦！妳莫講人，妳自己大樓住著，老公又有月俸，怎麼妳也來摘毛豆呢？」她也不甘示弱虧回去。

摘毛豆雖然是不費力的事，但太陽高照，時間又趕，有老先生曬得當場中風的，也有老太太邊工作邊照顧孫兒，卻把孫兒給悶死的。

「不值得這樣賣命啦！」大家都這樣感歎。但是只要一聽到那塊豆田要採收，成群的人又擁過去，還是一片傘海。賺錢當然快樂，更重要的是農莊的這群中老年人忽然又覺得生活有了樂趣，比他們去商場聽商品展售會，領一點紀念品，結果被騙走大錢要有意義得多了。

只有在孩子可能回來前，阿喜嫂不想去賺錢。為孩子準備一個乾淨的家，對她似乎意義更大。雖然他們已經好幾個星期沒有回家。

魚販子財生貨車喇叭亂按，他的發財車直接開進禾埕停到她面前。

「今天的魚有夠新鮮。明天禮拜，兒子孫子回來，妳不買些好吃的給他們吃嗎？」

財生翻開貨台上的蓬布，十幾個魚箱上堆滿碎冰塊。他翻開冰塊露出底下的魚貨。

「這條土托魚是現撈仔，妳看，血水還在滴呢！要一片還是兩片？妳的孫子一定愛吃。」他熱切的推銷。

「哼！他們不買給我們吃就夠慘了，還要我買給他們吃！我們兩個人，一片就可以吃兩天了。」

阿喜嫂說著。看了看，她還是切了兩片。

「一斤多少錢？」她問。

「一兩十六塊錢，便宜吧！」

「嘎——？一兩十六塊錢？我可吃不下去。」阿喜嫂驚叫：「我不要了。」

「現撈仔哩！莫嫌貴了，妳現在那麼有錢，妳都不吃我賣給誰？」

「我那有什麼有錢！你亂講話。」

「誰不知道嘛！阿喜伯一塊山坡地就賣一千多萬，這還沒有錢嗎？」

「我們什麼時候賣山坡了？你聽誰說的？」阿喜嫂真是大吃一驚了。難怪早上老貨子反常，說什麼他要發財，好像還說要不要發隨他哩！這樣看來他顯然有賣。再說她也不相信，她們的那一點土地值得千萬元。

才打發走魚販子，老銀喜的老摩托拖著長長的烏煙回來了。老貨子滿面春光，原來他去剃過頭修過面，看起來年輕了十歲。手中還提著一串粉腸和兩瓶啤酒。

「哟——！發財了。」阿喜嫂驚奇的問。

「是發財了沒錯。」老銀喜滿臉喜色。

「你真把我們的山給賣掉了？」

「妳怎麼知道？誰說的？」

「是不是嘛！」阿喜嫂心情有些緊張起來。

「還沒有啦！再急也要先問過妳呀！是不是。」

「那片山我流了不少汗開墾出來，有今天那片椰子樹林，我有一半以上的功勞。我沒有同意你敢賣掉，我跟你拼命呢！」

「沒錯沒錯！朱富妹是厲害腳色，烏蠅飛過面前都要掐一隻腳下來的人，我敢背著妳偷賣土地嗎？又不是想死了！」

阿喜嫂不想跟他嬉鬧。她神色十分嚴肅。

「怎麼有賣土地的事情？」她問。她甚至不知道他要賣什麼。是山坡底下六分的山田呢？或是那一甲多的山坪椰子樹林。或者兩者統統賣掉。太讓她驚訝的消息了。

這些田地和山坡耕作了半輩子，就好像是他們生命的一部份。好好的突然要賣掉，就像要切險掉她生命中的一部份，怎麼能不叫她震驚呢？雖然沒有能讓他們發財，但這片土地也提供了全家衣食幾十年哪！

三七五條例實施後，租田給他們的田頭家急得要死，因為隨後即將實施的耕者有其田政策，會讓他將所有祖傳良田全部喪失掉。他租給銀喜的那塊六分多雙季水田靠近中埤，是全鎮最好的田地，也是他祖產的一部份。他要求銀喜放棄租權，他願意將自己後來購來的六分山田連同一甲多的山坡地奉送給銀喜作為交換條件。雖然很多人勸銀喜不要換，連銀喜的母親都反對，『拿胛心靚肉換人家沿旁（腰邊下肉）』。阿喜嫂倒是附合丈夫的意思的。既同情頭家的悲苦，再想想平白得到一大片地，他們不是惡心的人，已經十分滿足和感激了。幾十年來們開埤築圳，搬田填土，山田也可以蒔得水稻，正是打算留給孩子來接手耕作的產業，怎麼會傳出賣掉的事情呢？

「那天我在椰子園清理枯枝。鎮上的代書李永平帶了幾個人上山，到處走走看看的。我跟他相識，便過來聊天，他在打聽附近可有山坡想賣的沒有。我隨口問他對我們椰子園這塊是否中意，一分只要一百萬就賣掉。我當然是開玩笑的。他問我確定不確定，我哈哈大笑的點頭。他們幾個人交頭搭耳的談了幾句就走了。」老銀喜說：「就是這樣談起來的。」

「那當然是不可能的，一百萬買一分山坡地，又不是發瘋了。」阿喜嫂笑了：「人家沒罵你就很客氣了。」

「問題是真有那樣瘋狂的人想買哩！昨天李代書來找我，確定一下我的意思。那樣的價錢，我很難拒絕。」

「怎麼有這種事！椰子生產一百年都沒有那樣的價錢。我不相信。」

「人家還不要我們的椰子哩！他們只要地權，將來可能要開發建別墅或什麼的。在這以前椰子仍歸我們管我們採收。但他們要整塊土地。」

「連圍地嗎？」

「圍地不賣！」

「他們是誰？」阿喜嫂瞪著丈夫，滿臉疑惑。

「說是外地的大財團。到處在收購田地山林。據說土地代書光中人禮就先發財了。」老銀喜說：「早上的電話就是李代書打的，要邀我上他那兒去簽約給錢。」

「你要賣嗎？」

「一千多萬哩！老三八，我們兩個人拼到下一世人也賺不到這筆錢。那點山坡生產過什麼來了？想交給那幾個子弟去耕種，妳看，那一個肯要的？都把它當作累贅，要我趁早賣掉。妳又不是不知道。」

「現在他們知道值錢，我不相信他們還不肯要。一定會搶著回來接手了。留著土地才能留住他們，你不是一直希望他們回來的嗎？」

「要他們接手來守這塊地是不可能的。值錢的不是耕種有收益，是地皮，他們當然明白。遲早都會被他們賣掉。與其這樣，不如我自己發筆財跟你先享享福。」老銀喜說：「我手頭有錢了，看看這些子弟是不是還忙得沒有時間回來看家裡的老貨子。不靠那些子弟，今天我自己來做『三伯公』！」

阿喜嫂常聽老銀喜說「上夜三斤，下夜三百（伯）」的故事。傳說中的三伯貧困時靠撿破爛做零工過日，大家都叫他三斤狗，連村中的小孩子都看不起他。大年廿八向豬肉賒了一塊豬肉，放在滾水裡正燙著，準備除夕拜祖宗用的。卻被肉攤老闆娘趕來提了回去。當天過了午夜他出外的兒子賺了錢回鄉，已經來不及辦三牲了，第二天除夕，家家拜魚拜肉，只有他家拜銀圓和銀票。過年時大家爭先跟他拜年，全都口稱三伯，再沒有人敢再叫三斤。三斤變三百，有錢真是好！阿喜嫂能了解老貨子的心情。但是要她點頭答應，她還是很難同意的。她一向就以為這些財產，將來是要留給孩子們的，不能賣。

「還有六分多圍地更值錢。那些留給他們已經太多了。」老銀喜臉色也陰沈下來。「你們這些梳橫毛的婦人家，不要眼睛裡只有兒子。還有老公呢！」

看著老貨子憤憤的進入大廳，阿喜嫂有些心神不寧。想起那片山坡，那些走慣的蜿蜒小路和溪流，那些山石椰子，更心亂如麻，她在那兒消磨了半生歲月，把這片她熟悉的土地交給別人，她真是不甘願啊！難怪一大早烏鴉便亂叫了。還真有這樣的衰事！一千萬元對她並不重要，她不知道為何老銀喜那麼急切。突然她好想要孩子在她身邊。明天禮拜，應該打電話把他們全召回來。她相信這次他們一定不會再推說事忙走不開了。

客廳裡，老銀喜正和著卡拉OK唱山歌呢！

## The Legend of Sam-bak-gung<sup>11</sup>

The crow cawed --- ill luck. The sky was only dimly lit when the murmur of crows perched atop the Chinaberry tree at the back of the house. It had been a long time since these ill-omened birds appeared. But once they congregated, they came in droves. It must have been the ripening papaya nearby that had drawn them thither.

Inxi slammed the door open and stamped out into the fields, making a grand racket. He spat in the direction behind the house, and then he slowly came back under the eaves grumbling under his breath.

A Xi understood her husband's temper. Inxi was not a violent person. In fact, he was a maverick,<sup>12</sup> was afraid of nothing, and was concerned with naught. He was for the most part optimistic and generous. However, he was superstitious when it came to crows, a habit he had carried over since childhood. Every time he saw crows, he would react as if possessed by spirits, cursing and spitting. The more difficult the times, the more violent his reactions would be.

She remembered that time when they were applying for the permit for tobacco plantation.<sup>13</sup> That morning, there were crows cawing above their house, driving Inxi

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<sup>11</sup> Sam-bak-gong is a Hakka word. Literally, *sam* = three, *bak*=uncle, *gong*= grand, it means *the third grand uncle* if the three syllables are combined into a word. However, in Hakka, just as suggested in this story, Sam-bak-gong refers to someone who would spend what he has, which is quite different from the tradition in Hakka. Most Hakka people believe that one should live in simplicity, not wasting too much. One cent saved is one cent earned. In addition, what one earns will be the property for the next generation. However, a Sam-bak-gong won't do so. He would enjoy what he worked for without so much regard to his next generation.

<sup>12</sup> In the story, *tian-cong* (maverick) was adopted with a parenthesis, implying that the word was quite specific, which from the Hakka perspective means exactly what maverick in English refers to, a stubborn, persistent, while do whatever at his own will.

<sup>13</sup> In 30-60 of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the tobacco planting was quite popular in the Meinong area, where the story was based. The farmers who wanted to get the permit



to a rage. Lo and behold, they had not gotten the permit that would have improved their lives., They lived in a rural community, and so nowhere, neither here nor there, would one be free of the crows. So Inxi's superstition became an ongoing joke throughout the village. Even children would crack a joke with him about crows, especially the cattle-herding rascals.

"Ol' Inxi! Don't go outside now. We just came from that direction and there were over a hundred crows! You might be overcome by troubles with all that ill luck !" A Xiong would tell Inxi in a grave demeanor.

"I'll teach you bad luck, you young scamp you!" Inxi would say, but it was meant more as an empty threat than as true anger. He knew that his superstition was unreasonable. He simply couldn't help but feel irritated.

Several decades had passed, and now AXiong was already married and had children of his own. But Inxi's superstition still persevered. Over the past few years, crows were essentially extinct, both through increasing use of pesticides and human hunting. Now if there was an unexpected cawing of crows, A Xi was pleased with the familiar sound. Under such circumstances, the old man's violent reactions were amusing to her. However, in those early years of hardship, whether by coincidence or not, it was true that the cawing of crows had indeed brought Inxi pains and misfortunes. It was small wonder that he hated crows so much.

One morning, Inxi said, he accidentally caught some crow droppings on his shoulder. He was almost trampled by his own cow when he was herding cattle with other children down the riverside. At the age of fourteen, he shot one of the mating crows with a slingshot. In the afternoon of the same day, his father drowned in the river. Nobody could believe the news, for his father was so skillful at swimming. Inxi's family fell into decline since his father's death, and he blamed himself. In his mind, his killing of the crow had led to his father's death. His mother, brothers and sisters thence suffered from the misery of poverty.

However, A Xi didn't believe that crows would bring bad luck to anyone. After all, crows did not call to any one specifically. It was ludicrous to think that those who heard the crow caws would run into trouble. And yet, such things happened. It

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or license for tobacco planting should have a competition by drawing lots. Here in the story, it means that Yin Xi did not draw a lot for the permit.

happened after she had married Inxi, on the year when she gave birth to her second child. Times were especially hard. In those days, everyone in the village had to survive off yams. No one knew where all the rice had gone to. The land owner's tithe, the rent, the fertilizer and water rent; everything was paid for in grain. It was tougher than the time when Taiwan was governed by Japan. However, what was weird was that there appeared a lot of crows and a lot of locusts. The locusts came in droves, and it was said that Taiwan had been eaten dry by the unwelcome visitors. Every day Inxi raged against the crows, while A Xi worked hard. With a lack of mother's milk to feed the second child, her second child passed away at the age of two. The memory still tortured her, although it was all in the past.

The phone rang. Who would be calling so early? She heard Inxi answering the phone in the living room. The old codger was fond of speaking loudly over the phone, as if the person on the other side would not be able to hear if he did not. She wanted very much to listen in on the conversation, but the crows were cawing up a racket in the rear of the house and nearly drowned out the conversation in the living room.

Well! What a ruckus! She laid the dishes out on the table in preparation for breakfast, all the while slightly nervous, worried that the old codger would have another rant at the crows.

"Those papayas are inedible anyway. The toxins has made them leafless and without flowers. If you'd saw the trees down we would be spared the bother." she was of course referring to the crows.

She was a little confused when Inxi came in for breakfast, as his demeanor was calm, even a little happy.

"They can caw a way if they want. As it was said, 'Crows bring good fortune, and they leave when ill luck is due,' I don't care," said Inxi, who happily picked up his bowl, tucking into his breakfast. He seemed to become an entirely new person, compared to the one who would rush out the door, spitting and cursing at the crows.

"Well, the sun seems to rise from the west," A Xi said under her breath.

"What was that?"

"Nothing. Who was that on the phone? Was it A Jong, calling about coming home tomorrow?"

"Hmph! If only they would think of coming home! I'm telling you, I'm about to be rich! It's futile to rely on them!"

“What riches would you be able to make! Forget it! Even if you won the special prize in the lottery, you only buy one hundred dollars every time; there wouldn’t be enough for you to be rich!”

“Haha! This time it’s different! Guaranteed to be over NT\$10 million, and it is entirely up to me if I accept it or not!” Inxi said proudly, almost as if what he said were true.

“Well! It is for the best that you go and dream about being rich. I will be waiting for the good days to come.”

“I’ll take you on a world tour. For sure this time.”

Inxi habitually ate two bowls of white rice for breakfast, a habit that had continued for over several decades. He enjoyed the meal, even though the accompanying dishes of pickled bamboo shoots and cured radish were simple. Rice was the one thing that could not be done without. Even if rice was mixed with yam, he must have two or three bowls.

This was also why he was unable to stay with his son in Kaohsiung, for all that was available for him there was merely milk, congee, soybean milk, or fried fritters. What sort of man ate such for breakfast? In contrast, A Xi’s white rice made him full, and that was that.

Now the sun was not yet rising. However, the village had awakened in high spirits. People of every walk came and went, downtown or uptown, to office or to school, by motorcycle or by car, resulting in various noises. The crows disappeared, due in part to their shortage of energy. Inxi sat in the living room, drinking strong tea, and watching the morning TV news at the same time. A Xi was busy with the table cleaning. In her mind, she was lost in thought, ‘10 million dollars? Hmph! Not in this lifetime!’

Inxi’s family was really poor. She remembered that when she came to the house there was no land of their own. She was 20 then, three years after the Japanese had surrendered. Inxi’s father used to be a tenant farmer, renting a slip of land in need of 5 workers.<sup>14</sup> Meanwhile, he helped deliver bricks in between seasons with the ox cart he

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<sup>14</sup> In Hakka, the area for farms (not good for rice planting) or fields (good for rice planting) is usually counted by how much work a person can do per day. Here *a slip of land in need of 5 workers* refers to all the work on the land can be done by five

built himself. After his father got drowned, the owner claimed the land back. They had nothing left, then. His mother brought him up and worked odd jobs around the village, or did some chores at the Sugar Factory to make ends meet. By the age of 16, Inxi was already tall and stout enough to drive his father's cart, earning a living by helping villagers deliver wood, hay or grain. It was not until he was 18 that his mother allowed him to follow his father's track, delivering bricks, which was even heavier work. In the same year, the land owner agreed to lease him the slip of land that Inxi's father had leased.

A Xi had known Inxi since childhood. However, they never talked, just as is revealed in the Hakka song "The boy lives in one end and the girl in the other; both living in the same village, yet so far apart." She only had a faint idea of what he looked like and his family's situation, and she didn't really oppose the idea when the matchmaker came to propose. Although Inxi's family was too poor to have any land, her own family was not well off, either. Since childhood, she had been working odd bits and pieces with her mother. It never occurred to her that she would marry a white-collar worker, sleeping on tatami and wearing geta.<sup>15</sup> Rooted in her mind was the philosophy that to be human, one had to work hard, just like an ox hauling a cart. For this reason, she never regretted her marriage.

In fact, in the year when they married, Inxi's family was coming out of the slump and moving in a better direction. They had farmland, they had a cart, and Inxi was hard-working. He would leave home early in the morning for the brick delivery. After that, he came home, working on the farm. If available, he would go further to earn tips by helping others. Two buffalos took turns, while Inxi stayed the course by himself until the work was done.

There was one time when he was plowing the fields in preparation of planting the winter season crops. The weeds were almost roof-high, but they toppled into the

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workers.

<sup>15</sup> Tatami (たたみ) and geta (げた) were word originated from Japan. In 1895–1945, Taiwan was colonized by Japan and hence there was a lot Taiwanese vocabulary borrowed from Japanese.

shallow water as he plowed the field furrow by furrow, turning the earth and severing their roots. When the buffalo suddenly stopped to unburden its bowels, he set a foot on the plow, resting his hands on the plow handles as he closed his eyes for a brief rest. Little did he expect that when he opened his eyes, the shadows moved with the sun and the buffalo was resting in the mud, with its belly stuffed with the toppled weeds. He was proud to mention this experience and he heaped praised upon the buffalo for being so docile and intelligent.

“At the time I would often deliver a load of turmeric upstream in the evening. Usually I fell asleep on the way home. However, the buffalo recognized the way and hauled the cart home safely!”

In the family no one was spared. Every one worked hard so that their family became the envy of the village. “A Xi. It won’t take long that such a family like yours would be well off” was often told to her.

Accordingly, they should have accrued some savings. Inxi was not wasteful. His hobbies were playing Chinese Chess and singing mountain songs. He saved himself from brothels or gambling. Alas, like everyone else in the village, no matter how hard they worked, his family just made ends meet. It was as if, aside from the food they produced themselves, clothes and other expenses seemed to cost all they earned. So it was, everyone in the village had no savings, without much regard to clothing or eating.

A Xi has accepted life as it was. No matter how hard she and her husband worked these decades, this was just where they were. They tried every farming idea which was thought to be successful, but they eventually understood that the idea of being rich by farming was just a dream.

She heard someone calling outside. The thin and shrill sounds told her it was her neighbor Gui-zhi. Putting aside her broom, she walked out, only to meet the short and stocky form of Gui-zhi. She didn’t see Inxi in the living room, and she found the motorcycle supposed to be left under the roof gone. The old codger must have slipped away some time before.

“Let’s go, A Xi! They’ve almost finished plucking all the sprouts!” Gui-zhi said, looking slightly worried. “You aren’t ready at all!”

Gui-zhi had come over to invite her to pick green soybeans. It was the harvest season, and they would always help out should a green soybean farm begin

harvesting. The job was very easy, sitting by the stalks and plucking the pods. It was paid based on how much one picked, so it didn't matter what hour one went to work, nor how long. It was just that if one went later, the sun would be rather harsh.

"Tomorrow's Sunday. You should go by yourself, today," A Xi said, "I don't know if those young ones will be coming back."

Seeing Gui-zhi leaving in a hurry, A Xi returned to her work of cleaning. Her hopes that her children and their children would return home was the root behind her weekly chore of cleaning the house. The traditional Hakka building is spacy, with one main hall and two sides, more than ten rooms in total. Should the sons and daughters return with their children, she would feel that the rooms were not too many. However, to keep them clean, inside and outside, was time consuming. Once they were not cleaned in a few days, spiders would occupy instead, which was not tolerable to her.

More and more young people worked in the city. More and more houses in the village were emptied, left to the old couples. Some of those moving to the city even brought their parents with them, helping take care of their children. Only those who were not able to study at college now stayed in the village, accompanying their elders. The house Inxi lived in belonged to all of his cousins. But the cousins moved out one by one, and their shares were sold to Inxi. In A Xi's mind, this house will be divided into three parts, each given to one of her sons. Still, it had long been her wish to put three generations to live under the same roof. But life in reality forced her to give such sweet dreams up. Now, the large house was only tended by the old couple, save for festivals like Chinese New Year or Tomb Sweeping Day when all the rooms would be filled and the edges of the fields full of cars. She took pains to keep the house clean so that it was ready for her sons and grandsons all the time. Though it was barely a few days for the gathering, she never complained about the hard job.

When her third child A Shun finally decided to move out with his wife and children, A Xi was truly heart-broken and cried many times. In the same vein, Inxi spent a couple of days playing Chess at the temple.

"Why don't you stay? We can still get by. We will leave you all the property and the house too. You can invest and manage them to your will. I won't interfere with it." Inxi had tried everything to make him stay.

“Only by growing up in the countryside would the children be happy. I can take care of the children for you, and Shiu-chu can still go out of town and work as a seamstress,” A Xi said.

It appeared very hard for A Shun to make the final decision. The whole plan remained unresolved until A Shun became injured because from falling off his scooter on the 50km way between the village and where he worked. In the end, he still left, moving to Qianchen, leaving behind such a beautiful house in the countryside.

“Dad, I could barely live off the little bit of farmland and the coconut orchard. There is no room for modernized farming. In addition, we are short of money to buy more. I would rather work hard in the city than spend my life here going nowhere,” said A Shun. “In the city, the children will have a better chance for a good education. Dad, if you are willing, we should sell off the land and move to Kaohsiung. Even a betel nut stand in the city won’t be worse than this.”

Such words have been mentioned when the eldest and the second sons tried to move out. Indeed, life in the city was stressful as both husband and wife had to work. However, growing up in the country, they were in the habit of hard work. They enjoyed work. A Jong wrote a letter once that he was happy during the day because of work, but after work in the evening he felt bored, not knowing what to do. They therefore liked to work all day long. A Jong’s wife sold vegetarian dishes, which was a great success. She was once in a while in need of A Xi’s help. As for A Shun’s wife, she got a small plaque outside the house, reading, “zipper change, alteration of clothes and patches!” She earned roughly ten to twenty thousand per month. If they otherwise worked on the farm, how long would it take for them to make such a sum of money? It was true that they harvested thrice per year, but alas agricultural products were worth nothing.

The picking of beans was the only chance A Xi had left in the village to make some money. During the picking, a sea of multi-hued beach umbrellas would sprout up all over the bean fields. Groups of old men and women along with children would harvest the beans off the stalks, drag them under the umbrellas before perching on the stools and begin shelling the beans from their pods. The workers were paid in the afternoon by the weight of beans shucked upon handing over their beans. It was a very satisfying feeling. A Xi loved this job and would often go out to the fields when

the sky was just dimly lit, cut down enough stalks for the entire day, then sit under the umbrellas shelling beans and chatting with the other villagers.

“A Xi! You’re a lucky woman! Your children send you money every month, why would you deprive others of this opportunity to make money?” Fong-jin, a fellow villager, would always make fun of her when working on bean shucking.

“Forget about it! Don’t tease others. You live in such a modern mansion, with a husband paid salary monthly! I don’t see that stopping you from shucking beans?” A Xi retorted good-naturedly.

Picking and shucking beans may not be heavy work, but it was still conducted under the sun and had to be done in a hurry. There were instances of old men who went into heat stroke, or a woman might have her own grandson die of suffocation when she was expected to take care of the child.

“It isn’t worth the time and effort,” so everyone said. Once there was a chance of bean picking, groups of villagers showed up. It was of great pleasure to have a chance to earn some money, but most important of all, the elderly found it more fun to work with others. They even felt happier to work on the farm than attend a product launch. In the latter case, they might receive some small souvenirs but instead lose a large sum of their money due to dishonest merchants.

Only on the eve of her children’s possible return would A Xi stop from thinking of making money. She would devote herself to cleaning the house for her children, though they did not return in a couple of weeks.

Cai-sheng, the fish merchant, drove his small pick-up into the field and stopped in front of her.

“Fresh catches, today! Oh, yes, they are fresh! Won’t you buy some tasty fish for the children and grandchildren at the weekend tomorrow?”

Cai-sheng flipped open the tarp on the pick-up truck, revealing some ten boxes of fish, chilled with shredded ice. He brushed aside the ice to show the fish underneath.

“This Spanish mackerel was freshly caught, see? It’s still dripping with blood! Would you like one piece or two pieces? I’m sure your grandchildren would love it!” he said to sell his wares.

“Hmph! It’s bad enough they don’t buy fish for us, and they want me to buy fish for them! We’re just two people, one piece would last us two days!” A Xi said. But after a while, she still ordered two pieces.



“How much per jin<sup>16</sup>?” she asked.

“One liang for 16 dollars. Cheap isn’t it!”

“What? One liang for 16 dollars? I can’t afford such prices!” A Xi said in surprise, then said, “I won’t have any, then.”

“But it’s so fresh! Don’t mind the price! Who would I sell it to if not you, now that you’re so rich?”

“I don’t have any money! Stop your tongue-wagging!”

“Who doesn’t know that Inxi has sold the mountainside farm for over 10 million dollars? Who else would you call rich?”

“When did we sell the mountainside farmland? Who did you hear this from?” A Xi was truly surprised, now. No wonder the old codger was acting weirdly in the morning, talking about becoming rich, and talking as if it were up to him! Judging by that comment it seemed that he had not yet sold the land. Besides, she didn’t believe that the bit of land they owned was actually worth NT\$10 million.

She had only just sent away the fish seller before she saw the trail of black smoke heralding the return Inxi’s old scooter. The old codger looked younger by at least ten years after getting a haircut and a shave and was positively glowing with joy. He had a string of pig-intestines in his hand and two bottles of beer.

“My--- Someone’s rich.” A Xi said in surprise.

“Made some money, for sure.” Inxi replied, looking happy.

“You really sold our mountain-side farm?”

“How did you know? Who told you?”

“Well, did you or didn’t you!” A Xi became increasingly nervous

“Oh, not yet! Have to consult with you first, no matter how rushed the matter is, don’t I?”

“I’ve invested blood and sweat into those mountain fields, and the coconut grove wouldn’t be as large now if I haven’t put at least half the amount of work into it! If you dare sell off that land without my assent, we are going to have words!”

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<sup>16</sup> In Taiwan, as well as in China, *jin* refers to a weight unit. For further understanding, one pound = 0.7 *jin*, and one *jin* in Taiwan is composed of 16 *liangs*, while in China, one *jin* is of 10 *liangs*.

“That’s right. That’s just right! Chu Fu-mei is quite the shrew. She could pinch one leg off a fly, if it dared fly in front of her! Dare I go behind your back to sell land? I still want to live, mind you!”

A Xi was however in no mind for his antics and was very serious.

“How has the rumor of the land sale gotten around?” she asked. She didn’t even know what he wanted to sell. Was it the six fen<sup>17</sup> of mountain farmland by the foot of the mountain? Or was it the one jia of land on the mountain top. Or maybe both. It was very shocking news to her.

She has worked half her life on these lands and mountain slopes, and they were part of her life now. How could she not be shocked when for no reason part of her life was to be sold? Though the lands did not bring them wealth, they had fed and clothed the family for several decades!

The owner of the land from which Inxi rented was very much worried after the implementation of the 375 Land Rent Adjustment Act. According to law, “Those who farm have the right to own the land.” If that was the case, the owner would lose all of his family’s ancestral lands. The six fen fields for rice growing, harvested twice per year, were located near the main watering canal and hence they were considered the best of all. For this reason, the owner asked Inxi to give up the right for renting, and for the compensation Inxi would have the six-fen mountain land together with a one-jia slops of the mountain. At that moment, nobody agreed upon this proposal. His parents ironically claimed that this exchange was unfair like gold for dross. However, A Xi was entirely on the side of her husband. She empathized with the land owner’s plight. Meanwhile, she felt happy to get such lands without paying anything. Over the years, they had dug canals, moved earth and stone, all to see the joys of growing rice paddies on the hillside. It was their legacy they planned to leave for their children to take over. How did rumors of the land sale get out?

“I was in the coconut orchard that day when Lee Yung-ping, the notary in town, accompanied some men and walked along the mountain path, pointing and talking. As we were acquainted with each other, he came over to chat with me and wanted to know if there were hill-side lands for sale. I asked in a casual manner if they were

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<sup>17</sup> Here *fen* and *jia* are area units. An acre equals about 0.42 *jia*, where one *jia* equals 10 *fen*.

interested in the coconut orchard and told them they could have it for one million per fen. He asked if I was certain, and I laughingly nodded. I was joking of course. They left after huddling around, whispering to each other. That's how the whole story started." Inxi said,

"Of course that's impossible. One million for one fen mountainside land? They aren't crazy!" A Xi said with a laugh. "That they didn't curse you on the spot shows how polite they are."

"The thing is that there really is someone crazy that wants to buy it! Notary Lee came to see me yesterday to ascertain my intentions on selling the land. I find it difficult to refuse such an offer."

"How can it be? You won't make that kind of money even if you produce coconuts for 100 years. I don't believe it."

"They don't even want our coconuts! They just want the rights to the land. They maybe want to build a mansion or something in the future. Prior to that, we can still collect coconuts. But they want the entire piece of land."

"Including the nursery patch?"

"That we're not selling!"

"Who are 'they?'" A Xi said as she glared at her husband, her face filled with confusion.

"Some large corporation from out of town. They've been buying up lands and forests and mountains all around. I hear that the notaries have already become rich by getting commission fees," Inxi said. "The call this morning was from Notary Lee, inviting me over to the office to sign the contract and get the money."

"Are you going to sell the land?"

"Oy! It's ten million! You old cow, you! We won't make that kind of money even if we work all our lives. What has that bit of mountainside land produced? Are we going to leave it to the children? You've seen how they are! No one will have it and they treat it like a burden."

"Now they know what it's worth. I don't believe they won't take it. I bet they'll be fighting over who comes back to take it. We won't be able to keep them near unless we keep the land. Don't you always want them to come back, too?"

“It’s impossible to expect them to take over the land and keep it. The land is what’s worth the money! They know this very well. Sooner or later they’ll sell it. If that’s the case, why don’t I sell it first and enjoy that wealth with you,” said Inxi.

“Once I have money, we’ll see if those children will be too busy to come home. We don’t have to rely on them; I’ll become “Sam-bak-gung” myself!”

A Xi was no stranger to the story, “*Sanjin* yesterday, Sam bai the next.”<sup>18</sup> The tale of Sam-bak-gung told the story of a poor man who relied on picking up scraps and doing odd jobs to pass his days. Everyone called him the “sam-gin-bak,” and even the children of the village looked down on him. At New Year, the man had asked the butcher for a piece of meat. He was boiling the meat in the water to offer it to the ancestors when the butcher’s wife came over and took it away. However, just after midnight, the man’s son returned home, who had become well off. As no time was left to find the requisite three sacrifices, the man and his son made offerings of coins and bills, while all the other families made their customary offerings of fish and meat. On New Year’s Day everyone attempted to pay him the best wishes. It seemed that everyone called him Sam-bak-gung (the third grand uncle) and from that day on nobody called him the “sam-gin-bak” any longer. Ah! What a glorious mirror of life, to be rich! Inxi understood the old codger’s feelings, but she found it hard to agree on the sale. She had always believed that these possessions would be inherited from generation to generation.

“There’s still the six fen of land that is worth more. We’re already leaving them too much,” Inxi said, his expression turning dour. “You womenfolk, please don’t occupy yourself with children. Spare some room for your husband.”

Watching the old codger stride with irritation into the living room, A Xi was lost at sea. To think of the mountainside, the familiar paths and creeks, the mountain rocks and the coconuts, she felt her mind twisted into a jumbled knot. She had spent half her life on the mountains, and she was truly loath to turn over these familiar lands to

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<sup>18</sup> “Sanjin yesterday, Sam bai the next, ” is based on Mandarin Chinese. However, in the story, the proverb seems better to be traced back to Hakka. In Hakka, this proverb goes “Sam gin yesterday, Sam bak the next.” Sam=three, gin=jin, bak=bo (uncle). Note in the Hakka tradition, people show their respect to their ancestors by providing *sam sen* (three kinds of offerings like chicken, duck, pork, etc., and/or fish.)

others. No wonder the crows were cawing in the morning. They truly do herald ill fortune! Ten million dollars meant nothing to her. She just didn't understand why his husband cared so much. All of a sudden, she wished to have her children by her side. Tomorrow being the weekend, she should call them and tell them all to come back home. She believed that this time they would not find any excuse of being too busy to be home.

Yet, in the living room, Inxi was singing Hakka songs aloud on a Karaoke machine!

Literature Taiwan 1992

Editor's Note: The story has also been collected in the book *The Legend of Sam-bak-gung* published by Laureate Publications in 2001.



## 「丁有傳最後的一個願望」導讀

作為小說家，鍾鐵民被許多人定位為「台灣農村的見證者」（林女程語），不過，我想更應該把鐵民看成「台灣農村發展的見證者」較為恰當，因為他筆下所反映的時代或人物的心理，無不深深烙印者農地的變遷歷史，其中影響耕者與土地之間最為密切者，非「耕者有其田」莫屬了。凡是鐵民小說中人物及土地，鮮少略過這個政策的影響，例如「三伯公傳奇」中的銀喜就是很好的案例。「丁有傳最後的一個願望」見證的就是老農民從無到有，從佃農日夜辛勞所得卻泰半歸於地主的辛酸，到擁有一塊屬於自己的耕地的滿足，那怕土地位於水圳的最末端，灌溉必須要等前頭的地主灌足了水，才輪得到自己的田。饒是如此，雀躍之心，滿足之情，了然現於臉上。這就是鄉村小農最直接的反應，這就是丁有傳的最佳寫照。

丁有傳，正如鍾鐵民小說中的其他人物，都僅僅是個「符號」（借用李喬先生的用語）。因為除了「老農」這個符號之外，我們無法從小說中得知丁有傳的面貌、長相、個性等等有關小說人物的描寫過程。鐵民小說中的人物都是模糊的，並沒有很具體的表徵；至於腳色的性格、心理都落在作者的字行之間，有待作者探出頭來採用判斷式的筆法來陳述、交代、或過場。然而，丁有傳對於土地的執著卻是透過水權使用的爭執而來，這使得小說中的衝突出現在虛幻的夢與實際的現實之間。但全文也由於存在著這樣的良，使丁有傳置身於眾多反對聲中，卻仍然看不到土地對於他的價值已經起了根本的改變。他已經到了退休之齡，兒子都不願留在鄉村跟他一齊耕作，連老妻也置身異國。斯時斯景，即使買下了靠近水圳源頭的肥沃之地，又豈是他個人能經營的嗎？

小說自丁有傳從診所出來開始，一路寫他在得知張樹仁的土地要出售，並且立即付了十萬訂金之後，從此顯得患得患失的心理歷程。然後回敘了丁有傳與這塊地的糾葛緣由，起因於水權的競爭。他招回了三個兒子，原要共同商量如何籌措買地的經費，沒想到三個兒子竟然群起反對，最後他越洋與老婆探詢，意外地被澆了冷水。經過重重的打擊後，他終於清醒，決議取消買地之見。最後的結局是別人以更高的價碼取得了張樹仁的地，丁有傳意外地獲得了

10 萬元的賠償金。這個結局似乎是特別營造的反諷或者是作者有意把情節帶入喜劇收尾。

這篇作品的情節本身並沒有太大的衝突，人物性格不鮮明，在外在與內在的動因更不特別突出之下，整個小說的張力全掛在鍾鐵民「只能關心到我生活的這塊小小的土地」(我的摸索，P.98)的堅持中。在這樣的堅持信念中，讓讀者可以從小說的來回鋪陳，或倒敘或直敘中，間接或直接的引燃了好奇心與持續閱讀的續航力。作者在這些 *picturesque*(全景式)的田園描繪，一幕幕的農村景觀在時空的交會之下，映出小農卑微的理想或夢想，理想的實現方式，那怕只是為了爭個水權或灌溉的先後，都能在他的心靈深處種下悵恨的火苗，而終生不退。



## A Guide to The Final Wish of Ting Yu-Chuan

As a writer, Chung Tie-min has long been considered as a “witness to the Taiwanese farming villages,” although I feel that it would be more appropriate to define Chung as, “A witness of the development of Taiwanese farming villages.” Regardless of the time portrayed or the psychology of the characters, most of his writings were intended to record the change resulting from the two policies of the government, namely, (a) the trajectory of changes to farmland, and (b) If you farm on it, it is your own land. This is best reflected in the character of Ting within the story

Ting had experienced the life of a land serf, toiling day and night only to see half of his hard work turned over to the owner of the land. He experienced the satisfaction of owning his own piece of land, even though its location meant that he had to wait until all other landowners have taken their fill of the water to begin watering his field. In spite of this fact, he felt content and happy, and the emotion was directly portrayed on his visage.

Like other characters in Chung’s novels, Ting Yu-chuan was simply a “symbol,” (borrowing the usage of Mr Lee Chiao). Aside from portraying the symbolic old farmer, we were unable to get more information on Ting’s visage, looks or character. The characters in Chung’s novels were all vaguely described; there were no clear features, and the characters’ mental state and temperament were all buried within the lines of the author’s writing, waiting to be unveiled at the author’s discretion.

Ting Yu-chuan’s obsession with the plot of Chang’s land was inseparable from the right to use water, which is main conflict of the story between practical reality (his age) and his intention to fulfil his dream. However, he failed to convince his sons and his wife of the importance of owning Chang’s land. In his mind, he believed that it was worth that price, even though no one else did.

The story began with Ting walking away from the clinic. He told the doctor about his upset stomach and headaches, how he felt absent-minded, and so on. His troubles came from his down payment of one hundred thousand dollars to purchase the land of Chang’s, located near the water-source. The land had occupied his mind since he came to own his own land, located at the end of the water channel. Whenever he wanted to water his land, he was forced to wait until all the lands preceding his was

watered, which would take until midnight. More than once he wished that he would buy Chang's land when he was rich enough. Now was his chance.

He summoned all three sons back home with the intent of persuading them to help buy the land. Quite unexpectedly, all three of his children had opposed the scheme. He made an overseas phone call to his wife seeking support, and had also been turned down. He finally realized that the land held no value for him, and he visited the real-estate agent with the intent to cancel his deal only to be told that someone else had bought Chang's land for a higher price. Ting received two hundred thousand dollars due to Chang reneging on the deal.

The ending seemed to be an intentional evocation of irony, or the author's conscious effort to end on a comedic note. The story itself is quite plain, destitute of a strong narrative or memorable characters. Its dramatic tension is hinged on what Chung himself put thusly: "I can only be concerned about the small piece of land on which I live." (p98, *My Trials and Errors*) This belief aside, there was no strong conflict in characters, nor was a smooth narration, either directly or indirectly. It is the back and forth narrative, the interchanging moments of the past and the present, that prompts the readers to maintain their interest in the story and keep reading.

Through the author's portrayal of the picturesque countryside, we are presented with the character's realization of his ideals. Even the smallest of things such as the priority to use water, was sufficient to instill within his soul the embers of a deep lasting anger that would not die out, for the rest of his life.

## 丁有傳最後的一個願望

十萬塊錢將要被消訂沒收，這件事情對一生儉省的丁有傳的衝擊實在夠強大了。他已經有三個晚上失眠，剛剛還到鍾內科去打針拿藥，鍾醫師開玩笑的說他像失戀，老頭子還失戀會笑死人，但沒情沒緒，胃痛失眠血壓高，不是失戀的模樣嗎？

「老人家啦，衣食安樂，年輕的由他們自己去打拼，不要去煩心了！」

鍾醫師顯然當做他是為子女生氣。他只笑笑沒有解說，一向精明的丁有傳如果因為失算要被消訂十萬元，傳出去見笑就大了。

「最近沒有去唱山歌嗎？」鍾醫師的建議是多唱歌聊天，胃痛就能好了。

只要十萬塊錢不損失，什麼胃病高血壓全都可以好。真是活讓走衰運，那天巡田水會正好碰到葉阿清。阿清噴完農藥正在圳口清洗噴鎗和手腳。他一邊抹著肥皂一邊指著圳邊張樹仁的田說：

「你知道嗎？有傳哥。耕田真會做死人。阿仁哥前幾天入院了。」

「呃？什麼病？」

「聽他兒子說是肝硬化，現在一家人都在醫院照顧。像他那麼拼，什麼都要自己來，一噴農藥就要一整天，全都是毒呢！」阿清奮力地抹著肥皂，臉上手上脖子上，全都是厚厚的肥皂泡沫，一遍又一遍地沖洗著，拼命要把上面附著的農藥完全清除掉。

「嚴重嗎？」

「大概是吧！聽說這塊田想要賣哩！」

田再多也沒問題

阿清的消息最令丁有傳震動的就是這句話了。當天下午他找到張樹仁的兒子阿寶探問他父親的病情，同時求證賣田的事，結果阿清沒有說錯，連樹仁哥自己都同意賣一塊田來應急，張家在鎮東鎮南都有田，兒子全進了工廠，誰也不願意留下來，他們都知道，雖然爸爸有兩甲多土地，但兄弟分家後每人五分多，是不足以養家活口的。

丁有傳第二天就在土地代書宋金華處付了十萬塊錢訂金答應買下雙甲水那四分土地。約定星期一早上要簽約付頭期款。這就是使他血壓高升要找鍾醫師打針的原因了。

雙甲水那塊田在山谷平原上頭，小水圳的水頭處，土質好又厚，最令人羨慕的是灌溉方便，再乾旱的天氣也都有水可以蔭田。丁有傳家的田卻在水圳下游，沙質土壤不藏水，為了水稻灌溉常常要利用晚上撿人家的水尾，從前就常想，如果能買下張樹仁這塊地該有多好！特別在七月水稻秧苗剛插下去，需要足夠的水來浸禾頭，以及中秋節後菸葉栽植過要澆水的時候，他和老妻梅英常要整夜不眠的來回巡視，怕別人家把水截走、怕水圳漏水、怕田埂崩塌。他恨自己家的田不在水頭，也恨樹仁哥父子爭水時的蠻橫無情，他在樹仁哥他父親手下吃了不少虧。

「總有一天，我也可以耕作水頭田地。」丁有傳從很小時就有了這種說法。能買下張樹仁的田，這倒是從來沒有夢想過的事。所以和阿寶講定價錢也付了定錢那天，他覺得全身血液都沸騰起來了。為了和張樹仁分圳水他痛苦了一輩子，怎麼想得到臨老終於把這塊地買下來了呢？他突然變得年輕起來，以前他一個人和老妻就要耕兩甲土地，靠一條牛一張犁。現在他有了鐵牛和插秧機，如果再添一部割稻機，多耕兩田都沒有問題，何況是小小四分地？

那天他翻土特別順，作綠肥的豆苗藤甚至連一次都沒有纏到犁齒；晚上跟土龍下棋，連贏三盤，贏的土龍莫名其妙。只是買田會遭家人反對，是他沒有想到的。

他把三個兒子都召了回來。還有一個最小的阿宏在加拿大定居，沒有通知。電話裡他只說是令他最高興的事要與兒子們商量，二媳婦還以為是爸爸生日，買了個好大的蛋糕回來。

「買田？爸爸一生做田還做不累嗎？我們有兩甲多地，已經夠讓你辛苦了。」二子阿金驚愕的說：「還要再買田地？」

「阿爸，我說過乾脆不要再待在鄉下了，我們輪流來照顧你和媽媽。不要再做田了。」二媳婦熱切的在旁邊幫腔：「像現在，媽媽在加拿大，你一個人在鄉下，做那麼多田已經夠累了，還再買田，不太好吧！」

「張樹仁的田不一樣，那對我是特別的，是……」丁有傳發現很難讓這些年輕的孩子瞭解他的感受。早年的艱難歲月，老二阿金老三阿封這兩個已經沒有經驗到的，他們的生活富足舒適，但也使他們把一切的方便舒服當做應該的權利，也因此不像大哥阿宗，常存感恩之心。

昨天叫他們回來，丁有傳就先碾好了米，每人一袋。整年孩子們在外面吃的米，全是家裡碾好了給帶去的。有米就能活下去，從他懂事以後有多少年，三餐是米少蕃薯簽多，很難得吃到白米飯。如果碾好了米叫他們帶，阿金有時還嫌煩哩！

「現在飯吃得少，要不了多少米，外面叫就有人送，很方便啊！」

吃過苦的就不同了。大兒子阿宗到家脫下鞋襪後立刻就到田裡去了。丁有傳知道，他還沒有翻完的二分多田，到中飯前就一定被阿宗翻平了。開耕耘機阿宗比他還好，曾經有一段時間，他真希望阿宗一伙人回來耕田，總得有人接續下去啊！大家不回來，祖宗的神位都將沒有人點香了。

丁有傳騎摩托車到田裡時已經近午，果然阿宗工作結束，正在水圳口沖洗鐵牛，收拾了工具準備回家。父子倆個就蹲在田頭荔枝樹濃蔭下聊天。

「你記得張樹仁伯麼？」丁有傳取煙自己先叨了一枝，也給阿宗一枝。阿宗接過後掏出打火機先給父親點了煙，然後自己點上。他深深吸了一口，很舒適的朝天吐氣。

「我記得他。有一次我看牛，在三甲水溪裡和阿元牯他們玩昏頭了，兩隻牛都掙脫了綁，到他田裡去吃掉大片稻苗，還在稻田中打滾沐浴。差一點讓他把我們的水牛給宰掉了。」阿宗回憶起來，神情充滿愉悅，沒有一點因為錯事受罰而憤怒的樣子。丁有傳也想起那回的事。張樹仁到他家吵了半天，結果賠了兩包尿素，幫助他補回禾株才罷休。阿宗還因此被他狠狠打了一頓，那時阿宗已上初中，為此氣了很久。也是他最後一次責打這個兒子了。

「還有一次晚上，我好不容易把圳水從上游一路分下來，到我們這裡所剩已不多，好在各家已經分定講好了。然後我們都在伯公壇聊天，四個人中只有我最小。就是那個樹仁伯，他開始講鬼故事，什麼女鬼生兒子啦，山魃吃人心啦，把我嚇得躲在伯公壇神桌下不敢出來，連風吹聲和螢火蟲都怕，沒想到他

們三個大人把我的水都偷去分掉，第二天還好意思笑我沒有注意水圳漏水呢！」

阿宗仍然愉悅的敘述著。他應該成為一個好農夫的！丁有傳心中暗暗的想著。

「他的爸爸以前也一樣嚇過我呢！」丁有傳關懷的笑了：「不過，他狡猾我比他還狡猾，他偷了我的水以為我不敢出來，等他一轉身回去，我把整圳水全引過來，氣得他跳腳。」

「他家的田在水頭，灌溉簡單得多了，根本不必要玩手段。」阿宗說。

「他們就是愛嚇人。」丁有傳說：「我們水圳長，一路到水涵口圳水已經很小，所以要蔭完全部田地要好久。常常他一來就把水截走了，我們只蔭了一半便沒水了，於是工作又要重頭再來。我幾次差一點和他們打架。」

「現在好在開了大圳，灌溉不會再有問題，我們跟他們一樣好。」阿宗欣慰的說。

「他們那塊田要賣。樹仁哥生病住院了。」丁有傳說：「我已經決定買下來，我想那塊土地想了一輩子。」

「那是一塊好田地！」阿宗兩眼發亮，但喜悅的神情只一閃便又低下頭吸著煙，避開了父親的眼光，過了片刻他才試探的說：「那要不少錢啊！我們有錢去買田嗎？」

「我正為這件事找你們回來商量。這塊地買下來將來也是你們的，這麼好的田放棄了可惜。」丁有傳說：「你們兄弟每個人出二十萬，連外國那個四個人就有八十萬，我身邊還有三萬，不夠的一半拿土地去抵押借出來，辛苦幾年，雙甲水水頭那塊地就是我們的了。」

「要兩百多萬哪！」阿宗驚嘆的說，聲音都顫抖了。

「一分地五十五萬，大概是行情價。登記和稅金等也要十幾萬。不可能再講價了。」

「貸款那麼多要怎麼還哪！」

「每個月付利息，可以分七年、十年或者十五年來償。」

「每個月還是要幾萬塊錢利息口也！我們負擔得起嗎？」阿宗憂心忡忡的吸著煙。

「我打算讓你們兄弟分攤利息，每個人每個月五仟塊就好。本金我自己來還。」丁有傳胸有成竹的說：「我原本打算明年不種菸葉了，現在決定再種幾年。辛苦一季菸葉有五十多萬元的收入，我一個人除了煙錢差不多沒有開支。我估計五年一定可以償清債務。」

「爸！我一個月薪水兩萬出頭，阿秀在成衣廠日夜加工也不過一萬多。幾個孩子又要學費又要補習。加上房租、應酬，我真怕每個月五仟錢負擔不起呢！」阿宗說：「現在這兩甲多地你一個人做已經超量，我不到假日又不能回來幫忙。我看還是不要好！」

「我一直希望你回來，多那麼一塊好田，你回來已經足夠好好經營，不會比你在外面差吧！耕田你在行，為什麼不回來？」

「現在回來也困難。孩子都在學校，我們回來變成他們要寄宿，他們寄宿的費用合起來比我們全家人的生活開支還要多。」阿宗為難的說：「其實我也常常想，做工難得出頭天。但是目前不做不行，再過幾年孩子畢業了，我也差不多可以退休了，那時我一定回來。所以，爸，維持現狀就好了，不要再買土地。」

丁有傳還想再說服阿宗，媳婦騎著摩托車來叫吃飯了。他嚥下了剛到嘴邊的話，心中也開始懊惱。

午飯時丁有傳壓不住心中的不悅，先說教了一頓，再申明已經決定買田的事。

「哎呀！爸，你為什麼要付那麼多訂金嘛！」老二阿金先叫了起來。

「可以要回來嗎？」老三阿封也開了口。

「一下子給十萬元，太多了。」老大阿宗說：「給訂金前為什麼不先跟大家商量？」

「人家的田不會等著賣給你，不是我問得快還輪不到我哩！」丁有傳氣鼓鼓的說：「老實說，這個價錢已經太便宜，不付訂金人家肯嗎？」

「可也不要一下子就十萬哪！」阿宗不以為然。

「兩百多萬的買賣，十萬塊錢訂金不算太多。給得太少，人家反悔時你也無可奈何。現在人買土地，很多當場就簽約的，以免夜長夢多呢！」

「老四跟媽媽知道嗎？」阿宗無奈的問。

「我晚上就打電話到加拿大去告訴他們。」丁有傳說。

許多人都說丁有傳有福氣，早年他卻不是幸運的人。他父親去世時他還沒有出生，在媽媽肚子裡只有四個多月。上面有兩個姊姊，所以他出生後親人都很高興，說他父親有傳人了，乾脆就都叫他有傳。父親沒留下什麼遺產，有幾分圃地種蕃薯，還有半邊伙房可以安居。十六歲時他就壯得可以做任何大人做的工作。靠兩個姊姊的幫忙，他們租了現在耕種的那片土地，努力開墾，把原來荒涼的沙圃小坡地改成單季水田，開圳引水。田主阿庚伯也一直很照顧他們。那時的日子是很艱困的，光復後曾經三餐吃蕃薯，配蕃薯葉。耕者有其田的實施使他有了自己的田地，在地主阿庚伯苦苦求，他曾不顧親人反對還了一甲多地給地主。其實他當初租的荒野，還阿庚伯的則是上好良田。那是母親、兩個姊姊和他及老妻血汗開出來的，所以他不覺得對阿庚伯虧欠，這使他心安理得。事實上阿庚伯還真感激流涕，直到他過世，兩家一直來往親密。

忠厚必有好報應。大家都說丁有傳好心才有今天。說他子孫滿堂，子女賢孝。還真受人羨慕呢！

丁有傳這個時候心情不好；連孫子們吃飯時都寧靜許多。吃過飯分完蛋糕，留下兒子們不敢走，其他連電視都不看，各自到自己房間裡午休去了。

「買田也是投資，將來還是會增值的。」丁有傳想起代書的話，仍想說服孩子。

「要投資土地就要買房地產，買農地有什麼用！」阿金說。

「我們這個地方山清水明，風景那麼好，將來有錢人一定會來買地蓋高級別墅。賺了錢不來住鄉下，都市又髒又吵怎麼能生活得爽快嘛！」丁有傳信心十足。「我為你們投資這塊地，一定不會錯。」

「兩百多萬！」阿金呻吟的說：「這筆錢」：「這筆錢給我去做股票，三年恐怕就要千萬以上了。」

「我只要你們一個人出二十萬，下個禮拜天給我，這樣也辦不到嗎？」丁有傳逼著問。

「我要標會，但也要月初才行。」阿宗說：「二十萬可以做到。」

「不行，我的一點錢全在股票上，一時也拿不出。」阿金說：「爸，乾脆我們來投資股票，快得多了。」



「阿封，你呢？」丁有傳臉色發黑了。

「我根本沒有錢，房屋貸款每個月都逼得我要死！阿美簽大家樂也輸了一些錢。」他無奈惶恐的說：「日子過得土，買田我沒有能力。我放棄好了。」

丁有傳連脾氣都無法發。孩子們並沒有幫他解決問題，簽約的日子每近一天，他的心情就沈重一點。兄弟們的結論是：把訂金多少要一點回來：爸爸年紀已大，本來就要養老了，何苦再買田地來增加工作？兄弟誰回鄉來耕田？將來退休以後再說！

老朋友們全都聽到了他買張樹仁的田，道喜的聲音中卻不免夾了些搖頭歎息，或是不以為然的音調。在老伯公壇唱山歌的那群更加露骨了，竟然在山歌中加入了取笑他憨笨的語意，弄得他十分不快。尤其是王爺壇常跟他下棋的土龍，恭喜他買田哈哈大笑之後，居然信心十足的連宰了他三盤棋。

直覺告訴他，這筆買賣是合算的。也不知道一生謹慎的他為什麼會那麼衝動的決定，一次就拿了十萬元給樹仁哥的孩子去應急。即使大家都笑他傻，他仍然覺得自己沒有失誤。六十多歲的人還借錢買田，而子孫中沒有一個種田的，看起來是有些憨。但那是雙甲水張樹仁的田呢！

丁有傳忽然思念起老妻梅英來了。他越感到內心空虛無依，也就越感覺到老妻的重要。離開梅英已經有半年多，平日忙田裡和果園的工作，晚上又有山歌班和王爺壇那一群棋友。他原來並不覺得老妻離開他的身邊有什麼不安。怎麼忽然就變得孤單起來了哩！

實在也捉摸不清女人家的行事。在那麼遙遠的外國，周圍全是言語不通形容不同的洋人，僅僅是因為兒子需要媽媽，要媽媽幫他們看孩子和照顧家庭，這個老太婆竟然可以飛過半個地球，也不怕孫單寂寞，高高興興去當個老保姆。

兒子媳婦都上班，留在家裡連電視都看不懂聽不懂，雖然衣食豐足，丁有傳卻不以為是享什麼福。夏天還可以一個人出去走走看看，冬天裡雪花大片的落，開門就有膝蓋高的雪堵著，讓他這個勞動一生的人覺得像坐牢獄。而老妻逗逗孫子整理屋子，居然其樂融融。丁有傳半年前就一個人飛回台灣來了。坐在鐵牛上顛簸翻田讓他感到實實在在，即使做農事所獲不多，他卻覺得生活有味。不停的勞動生產本身就是目的，他從來沒有想到自己的年紀。

為什麼大家都說我老朽呢？我那裡不如從前了？丁有傳傷感的搖著頭。老妻留在加拿大替兒子看家，所有的子孫全在外面，他一個人住鄉下，田裡家裡有那一樣他沒有做好的？

咱古早的願望

通過衛星的國際電話接通的時候，是兒子的聲音，告訴他雪已融他要他過去。兒子的聲音透著喜悅和盼望。

「爸，你掛掉電話，我撥過去，我從這邊打，電話費比較便宜。」

電話再響起來，那頭是丁有傳的老妻梅英在講話了。

「老猴子，你三餐可有煮來吃？身體平安口麼？……」

聽到老妻的聲音，丁有傳突然感到一陣淚動，泫然欲涕的悲情在胸腔中翻騰。人好像也脆弱了起來。

「妳，回來台灣吧！」他說。

「你怎麼啦？身體不舒服嗎？」梅英的聲音立刻透出緊張來了。

「不是。我要買張樹仁的田。」他說。

「買什麼田？」

「張樹仁的，妳知道吧！」

「雙甲水圳頭那筆。張樹仁死了嗎？」

「沒有啦！在住院，聽說是肝有問題。」

「你好好的，買田幹什麼？」

「是張樹仁的，妳不想嗎？」丁有傳有點急：「妳從前不是也說過賺了錢要買他的田嗎？」

「啊……那是氣頭上的話啊！」梅英在電話那頭笑起來：「張樹仁也不可能賣田！」

「我一直是很認真的。而且現在他的兒子要賣田。」

「哼！那個張樹仁，實在想不到他的田也會賣……」

丁有傳知道老妻一直就恨張樹仁。在鄉下地方上，樹仁哥家是殷實富有的。雙甲水的那一筆田只是他眾多產業的一部份。只因為它扼在水圳咽喉，居水尾田的丁有傳夫婦便經常受到阻難，也多次差一點打了架。

為什麼那麼迫切的相要買這筆田呢？那只是丁有傳的一個願望。這使他想起了很多過去的歲月。

他娶梅英的時候，他們的田還不是自己的，雖然已經開成了水田，可以蒔大冬禾，但是泥水屬於沙質能吃不水，又在水圳尾端，要撿別的水尾，偏偏用水又多，幾乎天天都要引水，碰到多日天熱不雨，他和梅英就要日夜不停的巡走，巡田裡漏洞，巡水圳漏水，和上游田主講好話打商量。就是張樹仁給他們的麻煩最多，最不講理。

「別以為你開闢了一點田就很了不起了。也不知羞，又不是你們自己的，做人家的大憨狗。還爭水，爭水幹什麼，割了禾全是別人的。」

張樹仁當著梅英的面這樣對他冷嘲熱諷不止一次，他知道梅英比自己還要更恨他。她也怕丈夫與人家動手，所以每次放夜水她都要跟著，尤其是她知道張樹仁也蔭田水的時候，更是這樣。

後來耕者有其田讓他們買下了自己的田地，張樹仁仍舊常常盛氣凌人，從來沒有把他們放在眼內。爭水，張樹仁的田佔盡了地利，這是他們無可奈何也是最咽不下氣的事。

「將來賺錢給人家看，我們可以到別處買更好的田地。」丁有傳發誓。

「把他的田買下來，有什麼了不起？」梅英也曾經發狠地賭咒。

這些，全是些陳年的老事了。後來水利會修了大圳，灌溉不必再搶水，彼此不再往來。

「喂……老猴子！」老妻電話那頭的聲音很柔和：「你還在恨樹仁哥嗎？」

「沒有，早就淡掉了。」丁有傳思索了一會兒說：「並不是恨他才買他的田。」

「唔！我想我瞭解。那是我們的一個願望。古早時代的願望啦！是不是？」

「妳還不想，我們一起再來拼一拼！」丁有傳有些興奮。

「你還真是不死心啊！」梅英笑著說：「你真是想要都要得到嗎？……」

丁有傳出身貧苦，寡母帶著兩個姊姊和他，能掙到今天的日子，靠的就是他那股蠻勁。其實他的母親也是那麼堅強的人。他們想要有田種，就租了荒地

硬闢成水田；他想要有好住宅，就建了現在全家二十幾口人都容得下的大伙房。農機有了，現代化生活的設備有了，子女的工作有了，甚至希望有一個不再捏泥卵的後人，都有么兒很爭氣的留學外國，還當了外國大學的教授。他發覺他的願望、他想要的事情全都一一的能夠實現。

「老婦人家！」他得意的叫著梅英：「當年我立志追妳到手，妳看，妳不是乖乖成了我的老婆了嗎？我們想多子多孫，我們不是生了一群嗎？」

那時梅英是莊中的美女，家世好又能幹，家裡田裡粗細工作無不擅長，想娶她的人太多了。張樹仁的小舅子就是一個，恐怕這也是樹仁哥後來一直對他們不友善的原因之一呢！

那個時代想要娶誰就要靠媒人，怎麼樣求一個有份量的媒人去遊說，成功的希望就大了。丁有傳論家世、經濟各方面都不可能配得上，所以他一邊靠媒人也一邊靠自己。別人都呆坐著等回音，他卻想盡辦法去直接追求，唱山歌，送殷勤，甚至幫忙挑水。同村裡男男女女本來大都相識，不至拒人千里，接觸的機會多也就有交深的情誼。雖然還沒有到達戀愛的程度，最後他還是被接納了。

「很少人像你臉皮那麼厚的。」阿梅說。

「不要誣賴人啊！我一生行事堂堂正正，當時想嫁給我的也不只是妳一個人哩！」

「夠啦！老猴子。」梅英笑著：「那田，算了。為一個過時的夢，還有必要嗎？」

「可是？那塊土地絕對有價值。」……」

「你有那麼多錢嗎？」

「沒有，我們可以借。」

「孩子們想不想？」

「不想。」

「那麼，我們買田給誰？」梅英仍一貫的明快：「要賺錢要靠他們自己去了。我們今天還圖什麼？莫再想買田，過來這裡好了，再半個月就放暑假，你來帶我回家去。我好想家！」

丁有傳掛了電話才想到忘了提訂金的事。放棄雙甲水張樹仁的田？這是多令人痛苦的決定啊！拋開實質上的利益不談，那畢竟是多年來的一個願望，可能還是他這一生最後的一個願望呢！

丁有傳知道自己還是有能力可以不顧一切去做。今年他六十五歲，到七十歲還有五年，只要低下頭像牛犍一般的再耕作五年。何況想到即將被消訂的十萬元。他心痛不已。

十萬塊錢可以夠他乘飛機到加拿大去，再帶老妻回來呢！便宜了張樹仁，到頭來還要幫助他醫藥費。看來真是前世欠了他的債！

好在沒有聽代書宋金華的話付二十萬！他終於死心要放棄後，又開始慶幸起來。

從鍾醫師那兒打針回來後他覺得精神輕快許多。肚脹頭暈全都隨著消失了。要活得命長就不能樣樣做絕。

第二天他騎了摩托車上代書處。要放棄也要光光明明，讓要賣的及早另找買主，不要耽誤人家。他還沒有進門，宋金華代書就在裡面大叫起來，聲音顯得有些興奮和激動。

「有傳伯，嗨！我正打算要去找你。剛好你就好了。」

「有什麼事嗎？」

「是啊！張樹仁哥的田他不賣了。」

「嘎？不賣？」丁有傳吃驚的反問：「為什麼？他病好了？」

「事實上，我聽說是他賣給別人了。」

「豈有此理，誰去買的？」

「聽說是外面的財團，祁阿六代書牽來的買主，傳說要在雙甲水那邊山區投資興建遊樂區，這兩天買了好幾家的田。你沒有聽到嗎？」宋金華說：「樹仁哥的田就是他們買去了，每分一百萬，說是想把全部山谷區的土地都攬盡。你那塊地在外緣山下，更有價值了。」

「可是土地我先訂了，阿寶仔怎麼可以欺騙我？」丁有傳反倒顯得十分生氣了。

「他願意賠償違約金，我們實在沒辦法。」宋金華拿出兩張支票放在桌面上，一張是他原先開給阿寶的訂金，另一張是阿寶賠償的，面額十萬元整。丁有傳有些手足無措，實在太意外了。

「那天我暗示你訂金付二十萬，就是怕這樣。如果是我一定付五十萬。」宋金華無奈的說：「外面的財團來炒土地，再也沒有人買得起田來耕種了。」

「農地買去也不能做什麼呀！」丁有傳奇怪的說：「這都是上好的水田。」

「那些人有的是辦法。聽說是發行股票的財團，印紙賣錢，反正錢多得沒地方使用。買些土地放在那裡也沒有損失。」宋金華說。

「那麼好的水田，他們有能力來耕種嗎？不耕不就荒掉了？」

「嘿！休耕地還可以申請補助，每甲地有兩千斤穀的補償，你又不是不知道。反正他們怎麼都不會吃虧的。」宋金華也憤憤不平。

這個結果是怎麼也想不到的。宋金華送他到門口時還安慰著他，並保證等他發現有好買賣時一定先通知他。

口袋裡放了兩張十萬元的支票，丁有傳茫茫然的上路回家。心中夾雜著些安慰慶幸，和深深的哀傷失意。這最後一個願望，他知道是永遠不能再實現了。

但是再想想，放棄一個夢想還賺了十萬塊錢，我有什麼好怨歎的呢？去接老妻的旅費有人送了！丁有傳相當看得開，擇期到兒子那裡去玩一個痛快吧！他想。

誰說我丁有傳不是精明的人？他忽然飄飄然起來。車到叉路口，他毫不猶疑地轉向王爺壇。他知道土龍這時一定在泡老人茶，他有信心今天可以痛宰他三盤棋。

## The Final Wish of Ting Yu-chuan

The news that the one hundred thousand dollars would be confiscated had dealt quite a strong blow to the conservative and frugal Ting Yu-chuan. He suffered from insomnia over the news for three nights, and he had just returned from Chung's clinic after receiving a shot and some medicine. Dr. Chung said jokingly to him that he looked like he had just broken up with someone and that it was quite embarrassing for an old man to suffer from breaking up. His symptoms, low spirits, stomach pains, insomnia and high blood pressure, suggested his breaking up with someone.

"You're an old man, and should not worry too much about your children. Leave them to their own devices," Dr. Chung said, obviously taking his condition to be due to Ting's worrying about the children. Ting gave a polite laugh and didn't bother to explain himself. If it came to be known that the shrewd Ting was to lose his advance payment because of miscalculation, he would become a laughingstock in town.

"Have you gone singing lately?" Dr. Chung suggested that his stomach pains be cured by singing.

Ting was of the position that as long as he did not lose the one hundred thousand dollars, his illnesses would disappear. Ah, it was rotten luck to have met with Yeh that day when he was making his rounds in the fields. Yeh had just finished spraying pesticide and was cleaning the equipment, as well as washing his hands and feet, by the ditch. He pointed to the fields belonging to Chang Shu-jen by the irrigation ditch while lathering soap and said, "Hey, Yu-chuan! Did you know farming can be really dangerous for your health? Chang was just hospitalized a couple of days ago."

"Oh? What has he come down with?"

"I heard from his son that it was cirrhosis of the liver. His whole family is over at the hospital taking care of him. He simply works too hard, wanting to take everything into his own hands. Take spraying pesticides, for example; he would spray the fields for an entire day. It's very toxic!"

As he spoke, Yeh vigorously lathered soap onto his hands, face and neck until there was thick foam. He then rinsed it off, only to repeat the process, desperate to rid himself of any residual pesticide.

"Is it serious?"

“I guess so. I hear that they are going to sell this plot of land!”

That one sentence was the only part of Yeh’s conversation that moved Ting. He visited Chang’s son, A Pao, and asked after his father’s condition, seeking also to confirm the rumors of land selling. Yeh turned out to be right after all, as Chang himself agreed to sell a piece of land to cover the immediate expenses. The Chang family had land both to the east and south of the town, but the sons all worked in the factories and did not wish to stay here farming. They knew that while their father had two *jias*<sup>19</sup> of land, once distributed among the brothers, they would each receive only five *fens*, which was not enough to sustain a family.

Ting immediately visited the real-estate broker Sung Chin-hua the next day, placing one hundred thousand dollars as part of the down payment for the purchase of the four *fens* of land near the Shuangjiashui area<sup>20</sup>. Ting and Sung arranged to meet the coming Monday morning to sign the contract and pay the rest. This was the reason why his blood pressure spiked and he had to visit Dr. Chung.

The land at *Shuangjiashui* was located on plains atop the valley and was upstream of the irrigation channel. The soil around there was thick, and the quality fair. The best thing about the particular plot was the ease of access to water, allowing the owner to irrigate his fields no matter how dry it was. In contrast, Ting’s fields were downstream. Not only was the water retention rate poor, due to the sandy soil, Ting often had to wait until late night to fill his plot with water after others had finished filling their fields. It had long been his dream to possess Chang’s lands. The thought was especially prevalent during July when the rice shoots were first placed in the fields and needed copious amount of water, and after the Mid-Autumn Festival, when the tobacco plants needed to be watered after being planted. He and his wife, Mei Ying, often had to patrol the field throughout the night, afraid that someone would divert the water from their fields, or that the irrigation ditch would leak, or that the channel would collapse. It was at such times that he hated the fact that his lands were not located upstream, and also hated how Chang would be so truculent and ruthless

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<sup>19</sup> Here *fen* and *jia* are area units. An acre equals about 0.42 *jia*, where one *jia* equals 10 *fens*.

<sup>20</sup> *Shuangjiashui*, literally, means where two rivers meet. Note that *shuang* = two, *jia*=river, *shui*=water. The term here should be pronounced in Hakka.



when fighting over water supplies. He had been put to disadvantage many times when dealing with the Changs.

This background made Ting's essential goal in life the possession of the fields at the upstream part of the irrigation ditch. However, it was beyond his expectation to actually own Chang's family land. Once he had paid the price, the blood in his veins nearly boiled with excitement. He had suffered a lifetime over the issue of splitting the water supply of the irrigation ditch with Chang, and had not even dared to dream that in his old age, he would be able to buy this plot of land. He felt at least ten years younger. He and his wife had worked two *jias* with just a ploughshare and an ox. Now he had a tractor and a seeder, he felt confident of working another two *jias* if he had a harvester. A small plot of four *fens* would not be a problem at all.

On that day, he felt everything he did on the farm ran quite smoothly. The bean vines used for fertilizer were done, and he even beat Tu three times at chess in the evening. Nevertheless, he never suspected that he would face opposition from his family to buying the land.

He called his three sons back home, but not the youngest one, who lived abroad. He said over the phone that he wanted their opinions on an essential issue. His second daughter-in-law even thought it was his birthday, and brought back a large cake for the affair.

"Buying more land?" His second son, A-Chin, was surprised at the news. "Aren't you sick of farm work, having done it all your life, Dad? We also have more than two *jias* of land, and it should be more than enough. Why are we buying more?"

"In my opinion, we should move away from the countryside, Dad, and we'll take turns caring for you and mother. Stop farming," his second daughter-in-law said. "Mother's currently in Canada. It's quite tiring to work so much land by yourself. It's not really a good idea to buy more land."

"But Chang's land is different. It has a special meaning for me, it's ---" Ting found that it was difficult to express his feelings to these youngsters. Both A-Chin and his third son A-Feng had not experienced the early years of difficulty. They had lived in comfort and in relative wealth so that they saw such comforts and convenience as rights. They were not like their eldest brother A-Tsung, who was mindful and grateful for what had been provided. When he called them to come home yesterday, he had already prepared for each a bag of rice. The rice the children ate all year around came

from home. One could survive with rice. As far as he recollected, he had eaten rice mixed with yam since he was born until he had his own land. Now even though he had rice milled, his son A-Chin sometimes complained about the bother.

“We don’t eat a lot of rice these days, and the little we need could be delivered with a phone call, it’s very convenient,” he said.

A-Tsung, who had been through the difficult years, was different. Immediately after arriving home, he had taken off his socks and shoes and went to the fields. Ting knew without a doubt that the two *fens* of land that he had not yet cultivated would be finished by A-Tsung before lunch. A-Tsung handled the cultivator better than he did, and for a while he had truly wished that A-Tsung or any of his sons would come back and take up farming. Someone had to continue the business. Besides, if none returned, who would light the incense and pray in front of the ancestors?

By the time Ting arrived at the fields on his scooter it was nearly noon. It was as he predicted; A-Tsung had already cultivated the rest of the land. He was just washing the tractor by the ditch, and was preparing to head home once he gathered the tools. Both father and son crouched under the shade of the Litchi trees near the front of the fields, chatting with each other.

“Do you remember Uncle Chang?” Ting asked, taking out a pack of cigarettes, fished one out for himself, before offering A-Tsung another. Taking the cigarette, A-Tsung took out a lighter and lit his father’s cigarette before lighting his own. He took a deep drag and spilled the smoke skyward.

“I remember him. There was one time I was tending cows near the Sanjiashui creek, but I was too involved with playing with Yuan-ku and others. The two cows got out of the harnesses and grazed off a huge patch of rice shoots, as well as tumbling around in his field for a mud-bath. Haha, he was so close to killing our water buffalos!” A-Tsung looked delighted at the reminiscence and did not appear to be angry for being chastised for his wrongs.

Ting remembered the incident as well. Chang had come to wrangle over the issue until he agreed to compensate his losses with two bags of fertilizer, as well as replenishing the amount of lost seedlings. Ting remembered that he gave A-Tsung a severe beating over the issue. A-Tsung was in junior high at the time and held a grudge over the incident for the longest time. It was also the last time that he beat A-Tsung.

“Oh, there was that one night when we were bringing water down. There wasn’t that much left by the time we got here, but all the families had agreed how we were dividing up the supply of water. I was the youngest of four and we were talking when Chang started telling ghost stories, like female spirits having children, or mountain spirits gorging themselves on human hearts, and the like. The stories scared me so much that I hid under the altar table. Even a slight wind blowing or a flash of fireflies would make me think of the ghosts. It was the last time that the three adults cooperated to divide out the water. They had no shame about laughing at me when I didn’t notice the water had entirely leaked out.”

He would be good farmer, Ting thought wistfully as he listened to A-Tsung recounting the story with mirth.

“His Dad used the same trick on me too! But I one-upped him in wits; he thought I wouldn’t dare come out after he stole our supply of water, but once he turned his back and went home, I brought the water from the entire irrigation channel to our fields. Ho, he was livid!” Ting said with a hearty laugh.

“His field is located upstream of the ditch and has a much easier time irrigating his fields. He didn’t really need to play those tricks,” A-Tsung said.

“They just liked to scare children. Our irrigation channel is quite long, and by the time the water gets downstream it’s only a rivulet, which of course takes longer to completely water the paddy. Often times he would come and instantly hog all the water, and our farmland is only halfway watered, meaning we had to restart all over again. We almost got into a few fights over the issue.”

“It’s a good thing we made the channel larger. Now we’re as well off as they are and there should be no more problems with irrigation,” A-Tsung said in relief.

“They’re selling that plot of land because Chang is sick and hospitalized. I’ve decided to buy it; I’ve wanted that plot of land all my life.”

“Oh, it’s a good piece of land!” A-Tsung said, his eyes lighting up, but the expression of joy only lasted a moment before he lowered his face while puffing on the cigarette. After a while, he said hesitantly while avoiding looking towards his father, “It would take quite a bit of money. Do we have that kind of cash to buy the land?”

“That’s why I brought all of you back. If we buy the land now, it would belong to all of you. It’s such a shame to give up such a good plot of farmland. I was thinking

that each of you would provide two hundred thousand, including A-Hung. That would take us up to eight hundred thousand, while I still have thirty thousand in cash. We can make up for what we lack by borrowing money using our land as collateral. After that, all we have to do is work hard for a few years and that upstream plot of land will be ours.”

“That’s over two million!” A-Tsung said in a quavering voice.

“Normally fifty thousand per *fen* is reasonable. And it would take at least one hundred thousand for taxes and registration. It’s almost impossible to have a further bargain.”

“How are we going to pay back that much in loans?”

“Depending on the monthly interest rate, we could pay back the loans in seven, ten or fifteen years.”

“That would still mean tens of thousands in interest. Can we actually afford it?” A-Tsung said, worriedly sucking at his cigarette.

“My plans are for you and your brothers to cover the interest, let’s say around five thousand per person each month. I’ll take care of the actual loan,” Ting said confidently.

“I originally planned to stop planting tobacco next year, but I think I’ll keep planting tobacco for a few years. If I work a little harder, I think we could rake in around five hundred thousand each season. Besides, I don’t have any cost save for smoking. By my estimates, we could pay off the loans within five years.”

“Pa! I’m only making twenty thousand a month in salary, and A-Hsiu makes around ten thousand, working around the clock at the garment factory. The tuition and cram school fees for the children, aside from the rent and expenses for socializing, I don’t think I can handle an additional five thousand per month!” A-Tsung said. After a while, he added, “Moreover, the present farming is far above your workload. I can’t help out until the weekends. I think we best not!”

“I have always hoped that you would return. With that plot of land, there is no problem for you and you won’t be worse off than you are doing outside. You’re good at farming, why don’t you come back?”

“It’s difficult to come back at the moment. The children are all at school, and if we returned they would have to board up at school. The combined fees would exceed the living expenses of our entire family.” A-Tsung said, slightly abashed. “I’ve been

thinking, really, that it would be hard to have a future as a laborer. But right now it is impossible not to work. Once the children graduate in a few years, then I should be able to retire, and I'll definitely come back then. So Dad, let's just stay as we are now. Don't buy any more land," A-Tsung said.

Ting wanted to persuade A-Tsung, but his daughter-in-law arrived then on a scooter, calling them home for lunch. He swallowed what he was about to say, but inside he was vexed.

Over lunch, Ting was unable to tamp down his temper. He made clear his decision to buy the land.

"But Dad, why did you pay so much on the down payment!" A-Chin was the first to say.

"Can we get it back?" A-Feng said soon after.

"It's a bit much to hand over one hundred thousand at once," A-Tsung said. "Why didn't you discuss it with us before you gave the down payment?"

"Other people won't wait to sell you their land, if I hadn't asked when I did, who knows when I would get to make an offer?" Ting said in a huff. "To be honest, this price is quite reasonable. Do you think they would have agreed if I hadn't paid the down payment?"

"But you didn't have to put down one hundred thousand all at once," A-Tsung said, evidently in disagreement.

"This is a two million dollar deal; paying one hundred thousand is not too much. If you paid any less, it would be too late to regret should they renege. A lot of individuals actually sign the contract right then and there to prevent any change from happening."

"Do A-Hung and mother know about it?" A-Tsung said forlornly.

"I'll make a call to Canada tonight and let them know," Ting said.

It had been recognized that Ting was lucky, but he had not always been the apple in Fate's eye. When his father passed away, he was not yet born, only a four-month-old fetus in his mother's womb. Before him were two older sisters. His birth encouraged his mother and relatives, because it was believed that his father finally had a son to inherit the name of the family. He was thus named Yu-chuan, literally, there was an

heir.<sup>21</sup> However, he was left without much land, only a little for yam-planting, and a portion of it for housing. At 16, he was strong enough for adult work. With his two sisters' help, he rented the plot of land they were now working. By way of hard working, the sandy barren hill was turned into a one-season field after they dug a channel for irrigation.<sup>22</sup> The owner of the land was quite supportive. Those were difficult days. During the period when Taiwan was occupied by Japan<sup>23</sup>, they survived barely on yams. The implementation of the policy that farmers would own the land gave him his own land. Under the owner's pleas, he agreed to return the owner more than one *jia* of land, though most of his relatives tried in vain to stop him. The land he rented was barren, while it was fertile when it was returned, under the efforts of the whole family. He felt he owed nothing to the owner, who was greatly obliged to him all his life.

A proverb has it that an honest man would receive his dues, and everyone said Ting's current prosperity, an extensive family with many grandchildren, was his reward for being a good man.

However, for the moment, Ting was not in a good mood, as was perceived by the grandchildren, eating silently. Distributing the cake all around after the meal, everyone, with the exception of his sons, scattered to their rooms, not even staying to watch television.

"To buy farmland is also investment; its value will grow in the future," Ting said, making another attempt to persuade his children.

"One should purchase real-estate for investment; what use is there to buy farmland!" A-Chin said.

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<sup>21</sup> *Yu-chuan* literally means having an heir. *Yu*=to have, *chuan*=inheriting. In the Chinese tradition, a male or a son is usually considered to be the only lawful heir to inherit the name of a family.

<sup>22</sup> One-season refers to the fields that can produce rice once a year. In the same vein, two-season means producing twice, while three-season for thrice. Most fields in southern Taiwan are of three seasons.

<sup>23</sup> Taiwan was colonized by Japan from 1895-1945. In that period, most people were barely on the verge of surviving. Most rice was sent to the frontiers.

“This place commands a very good view, beautiful mountains and crystal-clear water. The rich want to buy land here and build their high-end mansions. How would they enjoy life in that dirty and noisy city area after making money? Of course they would come to live in the rural areas. Listen to me, investing in this plot of farmland will not be a mistake,” Ting said with great confidence.

“Two million.” A-Chin said with a groan. “If I had that money in stocks, I’d have at least ten million within three years.”

“I’m only asking each of you for two hundred thousand by next Sunday. Can’t you even do that?” Ting said, pressing the issue.

“I need to get together with the mutual aid association<sup>24</sup>. Two hundred thousand is within reason, but it can’t be done by next month,” A-Tsung said.

“I can’t do it. All of my money was put in stocks and can’t be liquidated in such a short time,” A-Chin said. “C’mon, Pa, we should just invest in stocks. It’s much better.”

Ting’s face darkened with displeasure as he turned to his third son. “How about you, A-Feng?”

“I don’t have any spare money; the loan on the house is almost killing me every month. Besides, A Mei lost a little money on gambling,” A-Feng said, not with a little trepidation and unease. “I can just about scrape by, but that’s about it. I have to give up on buying the farmland.”

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<sup>24</sup> Mutual aids were a specific kind of financial method for the poor. In the past decades, they were quite popular in Taiwan. Each participant paid his own share from which s/he earns some interests. For example, there are ten participants, each paying 100, and then the total will be 1000. The first 1000 will belong to the one in charge of the aids. For the next round (per month, week or year), each participant has the right to provide a sum, say, 200, for competition to win the privilege to get the next sum. The one who calls the greatest sum will be the winner, and the owner of the total. However, each participant at the second round merely pays 1000 minus the sum called. For instance, if 200 is called, then each participant needs to pay merely 800. The mutual aids are of a very good idea, because the one in need of money doesn’t pay much interest, while the one who doesn’t need money earns better interests.

Ting couldn't be angry any more. His children had not been able to solve his problem, and with each day passing day, it was closer to the due date. He felt a great pressure. His children had come to the conclusion that they should strive to obtain as much of the down payment as possible. Father was quite old and should be enjoying retirement, instead of increasing his workload by buying additional farmland. As for which of the brothers would return and take up farming, well, that would be another issue to be discussed after retirement!

Old friends who have caught wind of the news that he was buying Chang's farmland offered their congratulations while masking their disapproval with sighs or with a shake of their heads. The group of friends singing songs with Ting was more open in their criticism, adding words to songs making fun of him.<sup>25</sup> He was rather unhappy. His Chess partner Tu laughed ironically at him by beating him three rounds.

Intuitively, Ting believed the purchase was a good deal. He just couldn't understand, as he was habitually cautious and conservative, why he had paid the one hundred thousand so rashly. Even though most friends considered him stupid, he insisted his decision was right. As none of his sons was willing to come back to take up farming with him, it appeared somewhat silly to purchase land at this age. But, mind you, that was Chang's farmland.

All of a sudden, Ting Yu-chuang missed his wife, Mei Ying. The emptier and more insecure he felt, the more he realized how important she was to him. It had been half a year since her departure. With the routine work on the farm and meeting friends in the singing group, he never felt uneasy with his wife's absence. But now it seems that he felt quite lonely.

He couldn't fathom what went on in women's minds. Just because their son needed her help with care of their children, the old woman happily flew half-way around the world, without fear of loneliness, of being in such a distant country, surrounded by physically and linguistically different foreigners, just to play nanny!

When their son and their daughter-in-law went to the office, she was left home alone, unable to understand a thing on the television. While she lacked nothing in

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<sup>25</sup> In the traditional Hakka songs, only the melodies are fixed, while words can be impromptu. That's why words trying to stop Ting from buying the land can be embedded in the songs.



food and clothing, Ting Yu-chuan did not consider such surroundings to be enjoyment. In the summer, he could still walk about and look around, but in the winter, when snowflakes fell in droves and the roads were blocked by knee-high snow the moment one opened the door, he felt imprisoned. And yet, his wife felt completely at home playing with her grandchild and cleaning the house. Feeling uncomfortable in Canada, Ting Yu-chuan flew back to Taiwan by himself six months ago. Sitting on the tractor and feeling the sway of the machine, he felt grounded in cultivating. Even if he didn't make a lot out of it, he liked the life on the farm. In his mind, keeping working was the basic goal of life, without so much regard to the age.

Why did everyone say I was old? In what way am I less than I was? Ting Yu-chuan shook his head sadly. His wife was in Canada taking care of the house for his youngest son, while all of his other children and grandchildren were out of town. Was he the only one left alone staying in the country?

On the phone came his son's voice, telling him that the snow was over and hoped he would visit again, in a tone of great expectation.

"Dad, you should hang up. I'll make the call from here, it's cheaper."

When the phone rang again, it was his wife on the phone. "Old Monkey, have you cooked for yourself? Are you alright?"

Hearing his wife's voice suddenly moved him to tears. A sense of sadness roiled up within his breast, making him frail. "You should come back to Taiwan," he said

"Are you alright? Is there anything wrong with you?" From her voice, he could immediately tell that she was worried.

"No, not at all. I'm buying Chang Shu-jen's farmland."

"What farmland?"

"Chang Shu-jen's! You know which one!"

"The one by the Shuangjiashui creek? Is he dead?"

"Of course not! He's in the hospital; some sort of liver problem."

"Why are you buying farmland?"

"Well, it's his land! Didn't you want it?" Ting Yu-chuan became slightly agitated. "Didn't you say before that once we make some money we are going to buy it?"

"Ahh... Oh, that! That was down to anger." Mei Ying laughed on the other end. "It was impossible that Chang Shu-jen would sell the farmland."

"Well, I was always quite serious, and his son actually wants to sell the farmland."

“Hmph! That Chang Shu-jen! I didn’t expect that he would actually part with his farmland.”

Ting Yu-chuan knew that his wife always hated Chang Shu-jen. In the countryside, Chang’s family was considered quite wealthy, and the farmland near Shuangjiashiu was only one of his many properties. Due to its location at the throat of the channel, the Ting family at the end of the channel had many a time faced challenges from Chang Shu-jen. On several occasions, a fight nearly ensued.

Why was he so determined to buy this plot of farmland? It was Ting Yu-chuan’s wish. It reminded him of the past years of harshness.

When he married, they didn’t actually own their farmland. Though it was already a paddy field and could plant rice in winter, he had to water it every day. Since his land was at the end of the channel, it was not easy to get enough water. On hot dry days, his wife and he had to take turns taking care of the water. They were sometimes forced to deal with those whose lands were located at the beginning of water sources. However, among those owners, Chang was the most unreasonable, bringing them too much trouble.

“Who do you think you are? The land is not your own, mind you. Don’t be silly. What are you fighting over water for? Even if you make a harvest it would go into someone else’s pocket.” Chang had said such things to Mei Ying’s face many a time, and Ting Yu-chuan knew that Mei Ying hated Chang even more than he did. She was however worried that her husband would get into a fight, and so she stayed by his side every time they made a night-time water run, especially on nights that she knew Chang must also make the run.

Even after the policy allowing them to own the land, Chang had not changed his domineering attitude and still looked down on them. Chang took the advantage of watering due to the location of his land. To this, Ting was helpless at all.

“If I ever get rich, I’ll show him that I have better lands,” Ting swore.

“We’ll buy out his land, no matter how wealthy he may be.” Mei Ying said in anger.

All this disappeared in history. It had been unnecessary for them to compete any more for water since the public ditch was constructed. However, the hate and anger seemed to have rooted, for they were never friendly to each other.

“Well, Old Monkey. Do you still hate Chang?” her voice was soft on the other end of the phone.

“No, it’s faded really. It’s not hate that is driving me to buy his land,” he said after giving it some thought.

“Hmm. I think I understand. It was a wish of ours once. It was just an old wish, right?”

“Well, do you still want to? We could make a run for it together!” Ting Yu-chuan said, sounding a little excited.

“Well! You just don’t give up, do you! Do you think you have owned what you want? Ever?” Mei Ying said with a laugh.

Ting Yu-chuan came from a poor family. His widow mother, along with his two elder sisters, was able to achieve what they had today due to his tenacity. His mother, too, was a strong woman. They wanted a field to farm, so they rented a plot of barren land, turning it into a lush rice paddy; he wanted a better house, so they built the large huofang they lived now, accommodating all 20 people in the family. They had the land for farming; they had what they needed for modern living; their children all had jobs. They even got their children free from working under the sun on the farm. His son became a professor, teaching abroad. It seemed that he had made most of his dreams come true.

“Old woman,” said he happily, with a laughter, “Once I was determined to make you my wife, and lo, did you not become my wife? We wanted a gaggle of children and even more grandchildren, and did we not have many?”

Mei Ying had been one of the beauties in the village, and not only did she come from a good family, she was also a very capable woman, in the field, in the kitchen or in the household. Young men at that time tried in every way to win her attention. Chang’s brother-in-law was one of those wooers. Her decision to marry Ting constituted the background that Chang was not friendly to them.

It was a time when people depended on matchmakers. A good matchmaker played a very significant role. Ting Yu-chuan, however, was unable to find such a matchmaker for him. In addition, his poor background in finance and family was an obvious disadvantage. However, he made every effort to attract her attention. He helped with chores, with carrying water, and he sang good songs to her. People in the same village

were not so unfamiliar with each other. When he got more chances to be with her, he was accepted, though not yet to such an extent as to be in love.

“Very few people are as thick-skinned and shameless as you were,” Mei Ying said.

“Whoa, don’t blame me now. I am what I have been, disciplined and hard-working. Moreover, you weren’t the only person that wanted to marry me, you know.”

“That’s enough, Old Monkey. Forget about the land. It’s not necessary to pursue faded dreams,” Mei Ying said with a laugh.

“But... that piece of land is definitely valuable...”

“Do you have that much money?”

“No, but we can borrow.”

“Do the children want to?”

“No, they don’t.”

“Then who are we buying it for?” Mei Ying asked, as straightforward as ever. “If they want to make money, they should rely on themselves. What are we still short of today? Stop thinking about the land, come on to Canada. It’ll be summer vacation in half a month. Come and take me home. I really miss home!”

Ting Yu-chuan only realized that he forgot to mention about the down payment after he hung up. Giving up Chang’s land by the Shuangjiashui Creek? Oh! What a painful decision to make! Apart from the actual benefits, it had been a long-time wish. It may be his last wish in his lifetime!

Ting knew that he was still capable of going ahead with the deal, regardless of the cost. He was sixty five years-old now. If given another five years, he was merely about seventy. All he had to do was bow his head and work like an ox for five more years. Besides, just thinking about the one hundred thousand dollars that would be confiscated was painful!

One hundred thousand dollars was enough to buy him a plane ticket to Canada, and enough for the return trip for both him and his wife. Oh well, Chang should count his blessings that I’m covering his medical bills. I must have owed him something fierce in a previous incarnation. It occurred to him that, after deciding to give up the land, he was lucky not to pay two hundred thousand as the broker demanded.

Leaving Dr. Chung’s clinic, he felt much better, the symptoms of a distended belly and dizziness disappearing. One would be unable to live to a ripe old age if one did not take a step back at certain times.

The next day he hopped on his scooter to the broker's. In his mind, he had to be dignified even if he gave the land up. He had to inform the broker so that he could find a new buyer. No sooner had he stepped into the broker's office, however, did the broker cry sharply out. "Hey, Uncle Yu-chuan. I was just about to go to see you. It's a fortunate coincidence that you're here."

"Is there anything wrong?"

"Oh yes! Chang will not sell his land anymore."

"What? Not selling his land?" Ting Yu-chuan asked in surprise. "Why? Has he recovered?"

"In fact, I think he sold it to someone else."

"How could he! Who bought it?"

"I heard it was some big conglomerate from out of town. Chi A-liu was the middleman, and it's rumored that they want to invest in a theme park in the mountain area by the Shuangjiashui creek. They've bought quite a few pieces of land over the last couple of days. Haven't you heard about it?" Sung Chin-hua said. "They had purchased Chang's land, as well, offering a million per fen. They said they wanted to buy all the land in the valley. Your piece of land is right by the outer edges of the mountain and is even more valuable," Sung said.

"But I reserved the land first! How could A Pao cheat me like this?" Ting Yu-chuan instead appeared quite angry.

"A Pao is willing to pay the indemnity for violating the contract, but we really have no choice," Sung said, placing two cheques on the table. One of the cheques was the one he made out to A Pao as the down payment, and the other one, also for one hundred thousand dollars, was from A Pao as the indemnity. Ting did not quite know what to do. Events outpaced his expectations yet again!

"I was afraid that this might happen, which was why I hinted for you to pay a down payment of two hundred thousand. If it were I, I would have put down five hundred thousand," Sung Chin-hua said somewhat resignedly. "Now that conglomerates are coming to buy land, no one would be able to afford to buy land for farming."

"They can't do anything with farmland, though. These are top-tier paddy fields." Ting said, somewhat puzzled.

“Oh, they have their ways, they do. It’s said that the group prints paper for cash. They sell stocks. Anyway, they have more money than can be consumed. It did them no harm to buy land and leave them there for a long while,” Sung Chin-hua said.

“Such good paddy fields.. Are they capable of farming it? Won’t it be wasted if it’s not farmed?”

“Ho! They could apply for government subsidies if the farmland is fallow. Not like you don’t know, but every jia would earn them 2,000kg of grain. They won’t lose anything in the end, ” Sung Chin-hua said indignantly.

No one could have expected such results. Sung Chin-hua tried to console Ting as Sung walked him to the door, promising that he would be notified first if there was another good deal.

With two cheques for one hundred thousand dollars each in his pocket, Ting got on his scooter home, still somewhat dazed. He was mixed with feelings of sadness and happiness. It was clear to him that this was his last wish in life, which could never come true.

But on the other hand, he had given up his dreams for an additional one hundred thousand dollars. What more should I complain about? Someone provided the travel expenses to bring his wife home. Ting soon got over the entire ordeal. I should have a schedule for the trip to my son’s and enjoy it.

Who said that Ting was not a shrewd man? He suddenly felt quite smug. At the intersection, he turned towards the Three King’s temple without hesitation. Tu Lung was without a doubt making tea at this moment. Ting was confident that he could beat Tu Lung in chess for at least three rounds.

## 「約克夏的黃昏」導讀

小說，從另外一個角度而言，就是寓言故事。寓言最大的特點是敘述觀點(point of view)的寬容度高，常常使用動物或其他非人類的觀點。「伊索寓言」中，舉凡狐狸、獾、貓等等都能自由自在地敘說自己的故事，而作者的用意並不在於故事本身，而是著眼於故事背後的道理。美國作家傑克倫敦(Jack London 1876-1916)著名的小說「野性的呼聲」(The call of the wild)就是敘述一條名為巴克(Buck)的犬的故事，從狗的角度來看人性，有時更見真實性。

「約克夏的黃昏」是從一隻約克夏種豬的觀點，冷言旁觀台灣農村的興衰變化與滄桑，訴說著無數農民的無奈、感傷、與落寞，同時也自然地融入了人性的貪婪、狡猾、投機、涼薄。正如客家諺語，「富人莫斷書，窮人莫斷豬」，貧窮小農往往利用廚餘湯汁與屋家附近的空閒地方種出來的地瓜葉，來養頭豬，無非是另一種存錢的方式。等到豬肥可賣之時，能有一筆可觀的收入，可以應付急須的用度(如孩子的學費或產婦的營養品)。後來，養豬慢慢成為農莊家家戶戶的主業或副業，這時為了爭取時效，為了有更大的獲益，逐漸揚棄本土的豬種，而改用國外進口的種豬作為繁衍下一代的利器，這是英國約克夏種豬(公豬或豬哥)進口的由來。

故事從村長的電視節目開始。單調而沉悶的新聞報導，並沒有特別的吸引力，倒是從電視節目帶到村長的描寫，逐漸把讀者引進故事的情節中。主人是非常平凡的小農，學歷不高，對於農事並不熱中，又不善於機件器具，於是投資種豬事業。但社會對於「牽豬哥」這個行業的看法評價不高，幸好他不在乎，而能堅持做自己。故事開始時，作為農村兼職的養豬已經開始式微，種豬的出勤次數降低。回想初入行的時候，一天出勤至少四次以上，家家戶戶的豬舍一再擴建，路旁閒談無非是豬圈擴充的前景與藉由養豬而能供給孩子念大學的故事，然而世事無常，人心澆薄，人工合成飼料取代了湯汁廚餘後，本錢倍增，而豬價大跌，人人開始抱怨，開始拆豬舍、賣母豬。更要命的是，政府接著開放進口冷凍豬肉，自己的行情更是雪上加霜，慘不忍睹。如今，主人賣走了不少種豬，留下我，且不說是否與感情有關，但是赴屠宰場看起來是早晚無可避免的事了。

「約克夏的黃昏」充滿了嘲諷、戲謔的語氣，卻又同時染有深深的憐憫，使整個作品很有張力。既是同情農人的傻氣可愛，養一窩豬，行情好的時候，樂呼呼，但行情大跌之時，捶胸頓足，驚慌忐忑，道盡小農卑微的極限，他們永遠不知道什麼時候豬價會好，更無從知道何時豬價會崩跌。他們都盡力做好個人份內的事啊，卻難脫貧困，日日憂慮。從這個面向來看，似乎更可感覺作者對於鄉村農民的悲天憫人。

法國著名的短篇小說家莫泊桑(Guy de Maupassant, 1850-1893)認為小說創作的藝術，在於透過鮮少的語言，表現生命力，不論這種生命力是在與大自然的苦難搏鬥，或是與艱辛的生活小節拉拔。就這方面而言，鍾鐵民的「約克夏的黃昏」堪稱為一篇極致的小品。



## A Guide to Yorkshire Twilight

To a certain extent, a fiction is kind of fable. The characteristic of a fable lies in its flexibility in the adoption of point of view in creation. That's why a lot of fables was written from the perspective of an animal, such as foxes, cats, and the like, a tendency which could be observed within *Aesop's Fables*. A fable's story is not usually the principal focus, instead the essence lies within the moral lessons implied within the story. In the field of animal-based fiction was Jack London's well-known novel, *The Call of the Wild*, in which the dog Buck played a key role. The nature of human beings was given detailed narration from Buck's point of view.

*Yorkshire Twilight* was written from the point of view of a Yorkshire boar, who had experienced the decline and fall of the agricultural society, was quite familiar with farmers' helplessness, pain, and loneliness. Since most of the inhabitants of the small village were Hakka, the story's narration not only describing the lifestyle of the Hakka, but also their greed, shrewdness, and cruelty. As the Hakka proverb says, when one is rich he should not stop studying; and he should not stop raising pigs when s/he is poor. The poor farmers usually fed pigs with leftovers or vegetables planted around their house. In so doing, raising pigs became an alternative method of saving money. When the pigs were old enough to be sold, the additional income generated could help the family pay for what is needed, such as children's tuition or the fees for childbirth. Gradually, raising pigs had become an indispensable income for farmers. In order to be more profitable, pigs were imported from abroad, which gradually took the place of native pigs. This formed the general background for the Yorkshire narrator of the story.

The story began with a TV news broadcasting, which was dull, annoying, and said nothing of interest. From the TV, the focus shifted to the narrator's owner, who was an ill-educated farmer, disinterested in farming, and possessing little aptitude for machinery or mechanics. He then invested on the business of pig-breeding. At that time, as it is now, pig-breeding was considered a sordid business. However, he was quite devoted, and cared not a whit about what others thought of him. At the time when the story began, the pig-breeding business was on the decline. The narrator's errands were reduced in number of turns or times. To recollect, when he started with

his job, the average of errands is about 4 to 5 times each day. Almost every family tried to expand their hog-pens to keep more pigs. More often than not the gossips along the streets centered on everything concerning pig raising. One said that she felt indebted to pigs keeping, which helped her pay for her children's tuition. Another said that he could get married due to pig keeping. However, good times never lasted. Day by day, chemical pet food (food pellets) was adopted as a substitute for leftovers, causing ever increasing overhead costs. Meanwhile, the prices for pigs fell sharply, causing some farmers to become bankrupt. People began to tear down pens and stopped buying more pigs. Now the owner sold out most of his boars, with the narrator being the only one left. Whether it was due to the narrator's marvelous performance in his job causing him to be the last one could not be known. Nevertheless, one thing for sure was that he (the narrator) was doomed to be killed in one way or another.

In *Yorkshire Twilight* the author's sympathy for the farmers was colored with irony and sarcasm. The inferiority of farmers could be seen, in both their simple naïvete from raising many pigs when they fetched a good price, and their helplessness and fears when the market crashed. They tried their best to live their lives and bear their lot, but more often than not, the situation outpaces their knowledge and is far beyond their control. They could not help but face the music, live a life of poverty and be incessantly worried of what the future may bring. Through such a portrayal, the short story presented the inherent conflict of Man's humbleness and their fear of the future.

As evident in the works of the famous French writer Guy de Maupassant, the art of short stories was to show, with brevity of words, Man's attempt to live, whether through hardships posed by natural means (non-human beings) or the difficulties of Life in making ends meet. Viewed from this perspective, Chung Tie-min's *Yorkshire Twilight* is nothing short of the finest writing.

## 約克夏的黃昏

「冷凍豬肉試銷歐洲成功。台糖公司表示，第一批順利運達荷蘭鹿特丹自由港，該地超級市場肉商等，對這批冷凍豬肉的品質、包裝、規格等，都非常滿意，認為臺灣冷凍豬肉外銷歐洲頗有前途，可以為臺灣養豬戶帶來新的希望。……」

隔壁里長伯家客廳裡電視機每天報告新聞，往往正好是我輩進晚飯的時候。由於我輩吃食時咀嚼的聲音相當響亮，所以新聞內容一向聽不分明。其實里長伯的電視聲音經常開得很大，只是我平常對電視節目很挑剔，除非是張麗明唱歌那種嬌嬌的聲音或是什麼的，我就寧可把腳伸得直直讓自己舒服地入夢。這段新聞所以能在我全心品嚐晚餐的滋味的當兒，突然刺激我的神經，引起我的注意，當然是因為它談到了豬肉外銷的消息，這件事與我關係重大，甚至可能決定我們事業的存續。新聞就這麼多，接下去是波蘭政官鎮壓工聯的消息，與我無涉，於是我又專心大嚼進食。感謝里長伯，給了我們些許生活上的樂趣，尤其在這段慘淡生活中間，日子相當乏味。我知道，待會兒晚餐過後，又有哭哭鬧鬧頗對我輩胃口的連續劇故事可以解憂排悶了。

說起里長伯這個人，我私下以為他還相當古道熱腸，只是有點「沙鼻」愛人家奉承，本人也有點愛「膨風」，此外，村子裡只要有人找他蓋章或出證明什麼的，他從未拒絕過，而且還常常指導那些戴笠子的人怎麼去鑽漏縫，領取些許災害或建設補助費，或是逃漏些許田賦水租什麼的，所以逢年過節，也時常收到一些閩雞香腸啦之類的禮物。像他這樣精明又能經常惠而不費的服務村人，連任三次可就不算什麼稀奇的事情了。至於我們有幸能被他老人家關心到，最主要原因是我們的屋舍正接著他家客廳的後壁，這也是我能經常欣賞到他家電視節目的道理了。不過，比較遺憾的是里長伯對我們緊鄰他們客廳的事，嘖有怨言。此外，臨街路屋簷底下他家「里長辦事處」的小小招牌，又總被我們這邊「第一強」的大招牌擋著，而「第一強」三個大字底下大隻通紅的

大肥豬，活神活現，嘴巴正對著招牌上「里長」兩個字，里長伯出入經過，只要抬頭看到，必定皺眉怒目，咬牙切齒，這是我出勤時親目所見，絕非造謠。

其實對里長伯提出的意見，我們頭家倒也從善如流。原來我們這邊招牌上寫的是「中國第一強」五個字的，掛了半年左右，使得每一個經過門前的人都忍不住大笑，收到廣告效果有多大就不必說了。那時節我剛出道，每次出入看到這面招牌，便深驕傲。後來里長伯忍不住終於找頭家理論，甚至還勞動了分駐所裡年輕的警察先生也出面，三方面經過多次商議，招牌上就只留下目前「第一強」三個字了，旁邊「胎胎十二，隻隻順利」的小字不變。

我們這種行業，自古便常遭人賤視，直到今天，我還偶而聽到別人說「媒人錢，豬哥米，吃了沒好死」之類的話。當然這些話都是背著我的頭家說的，人家不把我當人看，當著我的面，什麼話都說得出來，有時真的很傷感情。實在的，我們這位頭家不是我們自己吹牛，公道正直，說他會「沒好死」我就不服氣。

雖然說我跟頭家只有幾年時間，但由各方面聽來的資料綜合起來，對這個人也有相當的了解。頭家姓古，只有國民小學的學歷，因為沒有唸初中，所以結婚得特別早，二十三歲當兵服役的時候已經有了一個兒子，三年服役回來又添了一個女兒，以後隔年一個，生了兩男兩女才結紮不生。頭家祖產水田他分得二分多，勉強可以糊口。只是孩子越大生活負擔越重，農業收益既低，要負擔孩子學費和現代物資生活，自然要另謀生計了。

我不知道這頭家為什麼會選上這一種行業的。孩子拖累著要想進加工區去做工，確有行不通的理由，農村又沒有工廠可以做工，有人買鐵牛車或併裝車兼營搬運工作，也有人養肥豬養魚養鴨。頭家先代並沒有人做過這種行業，所以當他決定要投資掛牌時，整個家族除了頭家一個人外，全都極力反對。頭家父母是早已不在了，據我的前輩轉述，他那位嫁給有錢人家的大姊吵得最厲害，幾乎要與這不長進的兄弟斷絕姊弟情義的地步。據說爭吵的聲音之高，驚動了半條街。那種盛況我很遺憾沒有躬逢，不過，對目前這塊招牌，頭家那位姊姊確實很當作是家門的羞辱。我聽過她一再的勸告頭家把它給取下來。

「我們家雖然窮，但是世世代代也清清白白的。你要牽豬哥我不能反對，可是這種事也值得掛招牌來宣揚的嗎？名揚四海很光榮嗎？也不怕人見笑。」

「農會有畜牧部，專門替人家人工受精，牛和豬都照樣做，怎麼沒有人笑？」頭家反問。

「人家獸醫，你能跟人家比？人工受精至少不必牽豬哥到處去丟人，比你高尚多了。」

「人工受精的工作就比我高尚了？妳有沒有去看過人家怎麼做的？哦！他們做的就高雅啦？」

這樣吵過幾次，頭家始終還是掛著招牌。我跟頭家合作時，頭家事業正處在黃金時代。雖然開始時有些生疏，不過，以我工作的性質而言，要說不能完滿達成任務，那真有負造物的苦心了。

似乎我應該說明一下自己的身份，以便世人了解我這奇特的一生。文雅的說，我是一隻純約克夏種公豬，專司傳宗接代。謝謝！請莫見笑。

嚴格說起來，作為一隻公豬，我這一生確曾風光過一段日子。那時頭家業務進展得十分順利，在他的經營下，我們成員增加了，有幾隻與我一樣，都是坐過大海輪飄洋過海從歐洲英國或瑞典來的，每一隻都身價非凡。頭家下了這麼大的本錢，卻也取得了客戶信心，附近幾個村莊全都他的地盤，光我一個，最多時一天出勤四次，頭家更是整天跑個不停。照料我們日常生活的是頭家娘，也是一個身材高壯的女人，據說與頭家原是田鄰，從小便是青梅竹馬的交情。或許是早婚的關係，她十七歲就嫁給頭家，十八歲就當媽媽，現在雖然才三十幾歲，在外面讀書的兒子就比她還要高。我喜歡看她的笑臉，聽她的腳步聲。過去，每當她端著塑膠盒，在我的食槽裡敲一個雞蛋給我加餐時，我就立刻明白，又有勤務要出，然後我便站在門邊等頭家來趕我上車。雞蛋的滋味實在太美好了，含在口裡時那種涼涼的、芳甜的感覺，回味起來都讓我全身舒暢，口水直淌。那樣風光兒的歲月過了兩年多。後來我發覺到吃雞蛋的次數越來越少，甚至連出勤務也不再有了雞蛋可吃了。然後我們的飼料份量減少，原來一升的減到半升，最後三餐也改成了兩餐。於是我必須成天處在饑餓的狀態中，整天想著食物，幸好自來水是自動流入水槽的，供應無缺。也不知道是不是營養不良影響了我的視覺，我總覺得這兩年來頭家娘笑容越來越不容易見到，對我們越來越不耐煩，似乎看上去，她整整有五十歲那麼老了。

近一年來，我出勤的次數不多，兩三天難得有一次。原來的伙伴像隔欄的藍瑞斯和巴布谷兄弟被出賣到鄰村大養豬場去服務了；與我同時進來的盤克夏老兄，老早被送進罐頭工廠；如今只剩下我和杜洛克二口，其中我年歲最高，體型最大，頭家幾次對我搖頭，那眼光親切中含有憐憫、憂傷，看來，我能再工作的時間也不會太長了。

我真是熱愛我的這份工作，不說工作本身的這份樂趣，它更使我感到生活的意義；繁衍族類！生命中還有比這件事更重要更神聖的嗎？

我還清楚記得我第一次出勤的情景，當然，那已是多年前的老事了。那戶人家姓朱，住在村子外面遙遠的山麓底下，是一座獨立的家園。開始我聽頭家稱呼他朱哥朱哥的，還以為與我輩同類呢！

朱家在小山坡頂上，有小路蜿蜒通到山腳的產業道路，頭家每次都用摩托三輪車改裝成的鐵籠車把我拖到山底坡前，然後趕著我一同步行上坡去。朱家的房子是由刺竹穿鑿搭建而成，竹籠壁敷水泥，再用石灰粉得白白的；屋頂蓋油臘紙，雖然簡單，卻也清清暢暢。豬舍在居屋後面，一邊是竹叢，另一邊有水溝盤繞通過，我喜歡那兒的環境。

「哎喲，阿朱哥，又蓋了新豬欄了啊！」頭家驚訝的讚嘆著。可不是嗎？在刺竹搭建的豬舍後面，聳立了兩間磚柱紅瓦的新豬舍，比主人的居舍更顯得氣派呢。

「嘿嘿！沒有地方關了，只好再蓋兩間。」阿朱哥有點不好意思的笑著，好像偷吃被大人捉著的孩子一般。

「養肥豬還是添買母豬呢？」頭家笑嘻嘻的問。

「嘿嘿！婦人家說，人家買豬仔回家去養大還要賺錢，反正閒著，豬仔就留下來自己養。」阿朱嫂是個高高瘦瘦的婦人，夫妻就兩個人住在這裡山寮下，如果不是有一次我們湊巧大年除夕來這裡，我還不知道他們一家老老少少有十幾口人哩！阿朱哥有兩個兒子在高雄加工口區做事，媳婦也都在工廠做工，只有一個女兒在臺北讀大學，聽說在寒假暑假一定回來陪伴老人，平時兒孫全不在身邊，好在有這許多豬要照料關心，不然豈不寂寞死了？我看阿朱嫂跟她餵的豬喃喃的說著話，好像那是自己的子女一般，看得我又嫉又羨，所以她餵的豬長得快，要說我輩是沒有靈性的蠢物，我是絕不贊同的。

「啊呀——，古錐仔。你趕這隻豬哥來，才這麼小有效嗎？」阿朱嫂對我稍嫌薄弱的身材似乎信心不足，不斷的前後打量我。

「妳不可小看了這隻約克夏啊！我花了一萬多塊錢托人從外國進口呢！今天第一次趕出來，半年多了，應該夠熟了。」頭家為我辯解。

「嘿嘿，原來還是處男哩！」阿朱哥笑著。

「可要有效才好。」阿朱嫂遲疑了片刻，終究還是承認了我的身價：「看外形還不錯，後臀圓圓的大概肉長得夠厚吧！」

「包管胎胎十二，隻隻順利。」頭家說：「是那隻本地種新母豬嗎？我們去看看。」

如果以我的審美觀點來看，這隻本地種母豬實在醜陋不堪，肥額大耳，彎脰垂肚，從側面看過去，就活像一個大凹字。全身烏皮黑毛髒兮兮的，而且滿臉皺紋。據說選購這種母豬，面孔越醜越好，如果這個條件確實，眼前的這隻母豬可以稱得上是上上之選了。

「你看這是桃園種的還是美濃種的呢？」阿朱哥站在竹欄干前，右腳踏在欄干上，用下頷指著問。

頭家打量著，提起母豬耳朵，再拉上尾巴，母豬正是暈陶陶的時節，除了低沉的唔唔輕吟外，連一動也不動。

「看樣子是桃園種，後臀肉多。」頭家說。

「希望能像我那條母豬一樣好，每胎都十五六隻，豬仔又白又長。」老人企盼的說。

我繞著竹圍欄干來回了兩三趟。雖然說對手模樣難看，但是空氣中似乎有著某一種氣息，也可能是母豬身上發出來的氣味，讓我深感緊張焦躁，全身血液都快沸騰起來了。腦子好像有一股什麼力量在驅使著我，讓我深深覺得有著重大的任務非得完成不可，這是我過去從未有過的經驗。

「來來，豬哥，把這個先吃下去。」阿朱嫂端著一個金屬水杓，裡面赫然有兩個敲開的雞蛋，連仁帶殼，這是從家裡出來前，頭家娘剛給我吃過的，以前我還不知道有這樣美味的東西呢！雞蛋使我的注意力稍稍從母豬身上引開了，我三口兩口便吞下了兩個蛋，還舔乾了水杓。

「對，好好吃下去，才是好豬哥。」她笑盈盈的說。

我發覺阿朱哥先是一怔，隨後像想到什麼好笑的事情一樣，呵呵的笑得好開心。

「走吧！我們去喝一杯茶，讓牠休息休息，調養好氣力，比較保險。」阿朱哥說。

確實，在爬上這條山坡，走了好長一段路程之後，我有些心氣浮躁，腿部痠痛。真想躺下來小睡一場。

「這兩間豬欄蓋得真好，比你住的房子還要舒服呢！」頭家指著磚造新豬舍笑著說：「應該蓋間樓房來住了吧！」

「呵呵！我小女兒這次回來嘮嘮叨叨唸了好幾十遍，豬比人住得好。豬可以賣錢，人賣不出去呀！呵呵。」阿朱哥說：「洋種白豬要沖洗，要講衛生，大家都在養，要想賺兩個錢哪，只好投點資本啊！」

「是啊！將來賺了錢就蓋樓屋。」

「算了，我們兩個老骨頭還住什麼樓屋，這些孩子將來沒有一個會再回來耕種這一田地，有本事讓他們在外頭買去。」阿朱哥說：「我們啊——住慣了穿鑿屋，涼爽又通風呢！」

這兩個老人真是好主顧，兩年間每隔三兩個月我們總要爬一次他們屋前的山坡，吃阿朱嫂兩個雞蛋。甚至，他們還指明了要我來服務哩。所以，我真不願意看到這麼好的老人遭到不幸。上一年秋天，我們最後一次見到他們，豬舍除開那頭本地母豬外，全都空了。豬價慘跌，把養豬當作副業來做的農家，沒有一個不虧大本的。

「這隻老本地母豬賣也沒人要，你又不能不養牠。」阿朱嫂依舊不忘我兩個新鮮的雞蛋：「我二媳婦要我到高雄去幫她看孩子，她進工廠一個月可以賺幾千元，補貼生活也好。養豬虧損了十幾萬呢！」

這以後便沒有再見到這兩個老人，也沒有聽到任何有關他們的消息，不養豬了，阿朱嫂好像忽然老了十多歲，滿臉的寂寞無聊。我希望她能到高雄去照顧孫兒，也希望她的兒孫能像我輩兒孫一樣帶給她希望和歡笑。

像阿朱哥夫妻這樣的人我在這短短一生中見得太多了。事實上由我們村莊輻射出去鄰近的幾個村莊，我所見過的人，無一家一人不是這樣勤勉勞苦又節儉的。我四個月大時被送離英國，在那裡我從父母叔伯那兒得到的印象中，從



沒有想到有人類會像這裡的人這麼拼死工作操勞的，我所見到的那些人，比此地的人真是舒服太多了。有時候我與頭家出勤回來得太晚，頭家馬達三輪車都開燈了，我還可以依稀看到路邊夜幕中戴著笠子的人影在田野裡趕工。他們又是這樣的簡樸。我聽過一頭本地種母豬說過，早期在她祖母的時代，人們為了讓家中飼養的豬可以更快長大，他們三餐煮飯時，把煮成半爛的米粒糟粕撈起放進蒸籠爛乾了吃，把精華的飯湯留給我輩享用。生長在這兒的我輩子孫，真是太有福氣了。就是今天，像阿朱哥嫂這樣，豬欄蓋得堅固通風，而本身卻住得簡陋的情形，還是處處可見的。這兒的氣候溫暖，物產又豐富，差不多年年都風調雨順，像這些人這樣勤苦工作，要是不能富足，那真是沒有天理的事啊！

養豬作為家庭副業，在這個地區已經是天經地義的事情，只要你不是太懶，不管有錢人家或是窮人家，沒有不餵幾條豬的。從前的豬吃蕃薯藤加米糠、飯湯，如果不算工錢可以說是全賺的，而人工又是利用早晚和午休時間，不礙正事。莊尾友得伯母每次都要跟頭家談到她的運氣好。

「我就靠兩條母豬，供給我兩個兒子讀大學。」她的神情充滿驕傲：「真是奇怪，每次在註冊前便有一批小豬仔可以賣，先後十幾年，不然，這一點田地，那得有這麼大筆的現金給他們註冊呢！」

友得伯母兩個孩子都是師範大學畢業的，兒子媳婦全都在中學教書，她家新樓房蓋得十分氣派，可是她不顧子女反對，一直仍養了兩條母豬，每次也都是頭家載著我來。不過，友得伯母現在雖然有錢，卻小氣得要命，從來捨不得給我一個雞蛋或半升飼料，她所養的又總是矮小的本地種母豬，我最不喜愛。而且，完工太早她還要鬧半天跟頭家爭論個不休，非要他再補一次，若人人像她，我可慘了。

當然，像友得伯母那樣養豬的時代已過去。從飼養餵料改為合成飼料後，成本大大增高，究竟有多少賺頭呢？有一次我聽到頭家與鄰莊老農談過。

「扣掉豬仔本錢和飼料醫藥，每隻賺五百元便很好了。辛苦餵養到四五個月大，每個月工錢只有一百塊錢。」

從前餵養蕃薯藤時，每戶人家養個三四隻豬很平常，改餵合成飼料後，要想有工錢只有多養多餵，要多餵養就只有再添蓋豬欄作大投資了。於是家家戶

戶幾乎全都有了一兩間新起的紅磚豬欄，他們不嫌錢賺得少，只要勞力可以換取金錢，不管如何的微不足道，他們都認為值得，想想這些人們，也太傻了。

我輩子孫昌盛，固然是我輩運氣，為整個農村帶來歡樂與希望更是我們的驕傲。豬仔生下來不滿一個月就有買主搶著購買，母豬的口數明顯的日日在增加，頭家最是神采飛揚了。於是蓋瑞斯、巴布谷、杜洛兄，幾種大家喜愛的品類，頭家都不惜重金進口，四鄰八莊可以說是沒有不知道頭家大名的。「第一強」的招牌豈是隨便掛得的？包管胞胎十二，隻隻順利。頭家號稱品種比改良場還要齊全，真的，連厚皮大耳、笨拙醜陋的本地種公豬都可隨時為客戶提供服務。

那時可說是我們事業的黃金時代，我可也做過好漢了，一天出勤四次根本不算一回事，頭家更是從早到晚馬不停蹄。想想這些光輝的日子，我常自豪一生不為虛度，得意起來連肚子也會忘掉饑餓呢！

好景突然結束，事前連一點預兆都沒有。我渾渾噩噩的只覺好像清閒許多，直到鮮雞蛋供給斷絕之後才發覺事態嚴重。為什麼忽然之間所有的母豬不再「走生」了呢？原來是小豬仔賣不出去，主人家不想讓母豬再生育。這對頭家和我而言，真是大災禍啊！

看來，我們的事業即將結束，再也無法挽救了。那天，頭家載著我從一個偏僻的山區回來，在莊口碰到阿文哥，以前的一位重要客戶。頭家停下來跟他聊天，兩個人都憂思百結，如喪考妣。

「很難再做下去了。連飼料錢都賺不回來。」頭家說：「你還有多少母豬呢？」

阿文哥專養母豬，很風光了一陣子，我們原來每個月都要到他那兒去一兩次，他在鄉公所做事，家裡還耕田養豬，是很有見識的人，頭家一向跟他很談得來。他戴了頂舊鴨嘴帽，渾身泥漿，大概耙田剛回來。

「沒辦法，我出光了，目前一隻都不剩。」他苦笑著說：「我還算脫手得快的呢！莊背劉喜志哥你知道吧！差一點被大豬咬死了。」

「啊——？沒有餵飽咬了他嗎？」頭家驚訝得大叫。

「嘻嘻，不是啦！是差一點破產了。」

「唉！你看，沒有一點轉機嗎？」頭家問：「落價也有漲價的時候呀！」

「外銷突然停掉了，老靠國內市場，目前所存的毛豬口數還可以供應一年。」阿文哥說：「差不多小養豬戶都出光了。你要堅持下去嗎？」

「我不相信每個家庭都肯放棄這個副業，不養豬他們還能做什麼呢？」頭家沉重的說：「我要不把家產全部投資下去就好了！還可以縮腳得快。」

「情勢總會好轉的，以前不是也這樣起起落落嗎？政府也總會想出辦法輔助農民的，雖不知道這些戴笠帽的沒有一點競爭能力，不保護他們行嗎？」阿文哥安慰頭家。這話也令我大感安心，不景氣總會有過去的時候，我輩子孫豈能滅絕，人類總得餵養我們的，但願頭家堅持下去，只要前途有望，一天吃兩餐也可以忍受。

「豬價總要再回升的。」頭家肯定的說。

豬價在低盪了一年多以後，突然又高揚起來，外銷又稍稍打開了市場。這對頭家和我應該都是好機會，但是想不到，情勢跟以前完全不同了。

「貧窮莫斷豬，富貴莫斷書」，這是從前常常由一些老農口中聽到的諺語。無非就在鼓勵窮苦的農人，不要懶惰，養豬可以致富。可惜這種理論再也無法說服小農戶們，上次的經驗帶給了他們太多的痛苦，越辛苦越養得多的人虧得越慘，他們可再也不肯魯莽冒險了。想想也是啊，養得滿欄肥豬，賣又賣不出去，宰也不能宰，誰敢動刀便是犯法，於是低聲下氣求豬販子來購買，怎麼避免被奸商痛宰呢？

「幹他娘，賣一次豬就好像被割一層肉。」有一次我聽到一個客戶與頭家談天的時候憤憤的罵著：「我們還不夠瘦嗎？」

貧窮人家不再養豬了，現在養豬的完全是有錢人家，他們把養豬當作事業，他們有足夠的資本可以渡過低價時的危機，他們直接進口飼料原料，他們直接出口外銷。豬販子拿他們沒有辦法，甚至他們聯合起來可以控制整個市場，養豬而到了這種地步，真可以抬頭挺胸了。業餘的農戶憑什麼去爭享這一杯羹呢？

頭家「第一強」的招牌不意也砸在這種情勢下，真是異數。小養豬戶不再養豬，大養豬戶又不需要我們，他們各自有自己的種豬，頭家要不關門看來也不行了。所幸一些中小型養豬場，在自己的種豬不敷用時，仍然不忘我們「第一強」。加上鄉下人慣吃黑豬肉，很多人專門養黑豬供應本地市場，而黑豬又

是大養豬場所不願意飼養的，這仍然歸屬一些拾剩餘利益的小農戶來作副業，雖然盈餘不多，好在他們也易於滿足。於是我們的事業繼續又拖了一年，只是成員大減，而且對頭家來說，這行業也由正業轉成了副業。

盤克夏老兄在本地區的生命舞台間是永遠退開了。自日據時代他的族類被引進之後，與本地桃園種和美濃種母豬所生雜交第一代號稱改良豬，在這片土地上縱橫半個世紀，在我族約克夏到來之前，提供本地區大部份肉類。此後，在我族約克夏與藍瑞斯母豬雜交第一代L Y競爭下，盤克夏不得不引退。現在，漢布夏，大約克夏又要取代我族生存的空間了。甚至連大肚紅毛的杜洛克老兄也來擠軋。目前農村所零星飼養的黑豬，便是杜洛克老兄與本地種母豬合作所生結晶，也都滿足了農村需要。想想我族子孫在本地區繁衍的盛況，悲哀中不免又感到驕傲自豪。雖然最後難免挨受屠殺之苦，但生命能得延續不是仍然很值得嗎？

頭家為什麼還養著我，與其說我還有什麼利用價值，我想勿寧是基於感情的因素。我在頭家事業開始發達時與他合作，好長一段相處的日子，也為他賺了不少鈔票。不過，這種關係也已經如黃昏太陽一樣，飼料聽說又要漲價了。

外銷市場打開，冷凍豬肉出口，是不是對頭家有起死回生的作用呢？我不敢想像。頭家娘這幾天給我的飼料特別多，是不是希望我多長幾斤肉？頭家看著我搖頭，那眼神代表了什麼意思？算了，想多了心亂，作為一隻公豬，我想這一生也交代得過去了。還是聽聽里長伯家的電視愉快。是誰在鬼哭神嚎的拉長了嗓子唱歌？是蔣廣照還是柳聞症？似乎還是張麗明的聲音甜美！這個女人為什麼還不出來？

## Yorkshire Twilight

*“The trial sale of frozen pork to Europe was successful. According to Taiwan Sugar Co., the first batch has successfully arrived in Rotterdam, Netherlands and met the qualification of local hypermarket meat vendors in terms of quality, packaging and size. The vendors believed that frozen pork exports to Europe from Taiwan may have a future, and may bring about new hope for Taiwanese swineherds...”*

The television from the borough warden’s house next to us blared out the daily news, usually right around the time when we ate dinner. As we usually chewed loudly when eating, it was not easy to make out what the news was saying. The TV was actually loud every day. However, I didn’t pay much attention to it. Unless it was the soft crooning singing of Chang Li-ming or the like, I would prefer to lie down, stretching my legs out, and allow myself to drift off into a comfortable sleep. That this piece of news pricked my nerves and caught my attention while I was fully devoted to enjoying my dinner was because it was concerned with pork exports. Such news was directly relevant to me and was especially important, for it may affect the continuation of my business. There was only that little snippet about the news, and the subsequent item was about the Polish government cracking down on its workers unions, which had nothing to do with me, so I gave dinner my full attention again.

I was indebted to the borough warden for the little pleasures in life, especially over this particular period of gloomy and dull living. I knew that shortly after dinner, that soap opera - with its crying and hubbub - we liked so much would soon be aired.

Speaking of the borough warden, I personally thought that he was a quite considerate and ready-to-help man. He loved to be flattered, and was inclined to boast. Nevertheless, he never refused to help others, whether it was to have a document stamped, or to provide certification documents. Moreover, he constantly directed illiterate farmers to the nooks and crannies of the law, teaching them how to apply for disaster relief funding, or construction subsidies, and even told farmers how to escape from paying some of their water or land taxes. It was small wonder that the borough warden often received gifts like sausages or smoked chicken and the like over the Lunar New Year period. It was not, accordingly, unexpected that a man like

him, smart and able to aid the villagers with little cost, had been elected and successfully re-elected for three consecutive terms. As for why we were fortunate to come to the attention of the old gentleman was due to our house being directly connected to the rear-wall of the gentleman's living room. It was also the reason why we were able to enjoy his television.

Unfortunately, the borough warden was of full complaints about our intimate connection with his living room. Furthermore, he was always unhappy with the fact that the sign of our business overshadowed the plaque reading, 'Borough Warden's Office' on the side facing the street. To boot, the mouth of the large reddish pig painted under the words, "The Best," on our sign was pointing right at the words, "Borough Warden." He would always frown and glare at our sign, gnashing his teeth and silently fuming whenever he went out or came in and saw the sign. This was far from a rumor, for I witnessed it with my own eyes.

To tell the truth, my boss quite took to the Borough Warren's suggestions. Our sign had once written, "Best in China" and had been hung outside for half a year. Everyone passing by couldn't help but guffaw, resulting in great efficiency in advertising. At that time, I had just started working at the company, and was terribly proud of our sign whenever I came in and out. One day the Borough Warden simply couldn't take it anymore and had a chat with the boss. The young policeman down at the station was invited for the talk. After discussion and discussion, all three parties arrived at the conclusion that "The Best" was left on the sign in addition to the small prints, "A dozen per litter; smooth delivery guaranteed."

The business our company ran seemed to have won no great respect since days of yore. To this day, the saying can still be heard: "Matchmaker's money, Breeder's bread; partake of either, no good end shall come." As was often the case, this was spoken of my boss behind his back. I was not treated like a human being, so these curses were spoken to my face, which was a pity. As far as we were concerned, my boss was an honest person, and I was quite unhappy to hear that my boss would "meet no good end."

Although I've only been working at the company for a few years, I believed I knew him enough based on all the sources I'd collected. His family name was Gu. He only graduated from elementary school and married early, as he had not attended junior high school. By the time he served his mandatory military service at the age of 23, he

already had one son, and after three years of service, he had another daughter. For the next two years, he was responsible for another son and daughter before he underwent a vasectomy. Gu inherited two fen of fields, and it was barely adequate to support the family. With increasing costs due to the children's education, the little benefits out of farming forced him to find other means to make both ends meet.

I had no idea why he chose this particular profession. It was true that with children he could not work in the city. In the village, he found no other working chances. It was also the case that some villagers bought a scooter with a carriage to double as a hauler, while others turned to raising pigs, fish or chickens. The boss's family had been opposed to the investment from the beginning, as the family had never worked in the trade before. According to my elders, as the boss's parents had passed away early on, his eldest sister -- married into a wealthy family -- had strenuously opposed the idea and had even threatened to disown him as a brother. Rumor had it that the ruckus caused from the disagreement had been heard half-way down the street. Unfortunately I could not tell more about it, for I was not present. However, the boss's wealthy sister always considered the current sign to be a disgrace to the family and kept trying to persuade the boss to take it down.

"Our family may be poor, but we have a good reputation and integrity over generations. I can't sway your mind on raising boars, but must you hang a sign up to advertise such a thing? Does it bring you glory to be known for such? Have you no shame!"

"The Farmer's Association has the division of animal farming to breed animals artificially, for both pigs and cows. Why isn't anyone laughing at them?" the boss asked.

"They're veterinarians; you're nowhere on their level. Artificial insemination at least does not require one to walk around leading a boar; it's classier."

"And artificial insemination is classier than what I do? Have you seen what other people do? So what they do is more elegant than what I do?"

Despite many arguments, the boss kept the sign. When I first started working for him, his business was at its zenith. Although I was a little rusty at my job at the beginning, the nature of my job was such that if I couldn't succeed at my job, then my existence would have been a true let down for the Creator.

I should take the chance to give a brief self-introduction to the readers. From a better perspective, I'm a boar, of the Yorkshire breed, attempting to help breed future progeny. Thank you kindly to refrain from laughing.

Speaking seriously, I have seen the glory days as a boar when the boss's business was on the rise. Under his management, our comrades grew in number, some of which were of my breed, all coming here by shipping overseas from the United Kingdom or Sweden. Each cost a lot. The boss made such a great investment for the purpose of winning the trust of his clientele, which spanned across the nearby villages. To the best of my memory, I would run 4 errands within a single day, while the boss seemed to be everywhere at the time.

It was the boss's wife that took care of us. She was large of frame and was quite tall. It was said that she was the neighbor of the boss and they had grown up together. Perhaps it's the early marriage that made her become a young mother. When she married, she was 17. At 33, her eldest son was even taller than she was. I liked to see her smile and listened to her footsteps. Whenever she gave me an egg, I knew I was expected to do my duty. After the meal, I would stand obediently by the pen and wait for the boss to take me out. Oh, egg simply tasted delicious. Swirling it around in the mouth, savoring the coolness of the white, I felt, ah, it's enough to make my mouth water. Those days lasted for two years and more and then I noticed that I would be getting eggs less and less often, and sometimes I would not even receive an egg even when I was on duty.

What followed was that all went downhill from thence. The amount of food was first reduced to half a liter, and then the three-meal schedule was cut down to two meals. I was forced to be hungry most of the time, thinking of nothing but food. Thankfully tap water was automatically provided. I don't know whether my perception of the Madame was affected by malnutrition, but I had the nagging suspicion that over the past two years it was increasingly rare to see Madame smile. Further, she was more and more impatient with us. It almost seemed as if she had aged to 50 years old.

In the last few years, I hadn't had many chances to work, sometimes with not even one opportunity cropping up every two or three days. My previous neighbors -- Landrace and the Babcock -- had been sold off to the large pig farm in the neighboring village, while Old Berkshire, who arrived the same time as I did, had



been delivered to the canning factory. Only Duroc and I were left, with myself being the senior resident of greatest caliber. Judging by the eyes of the boss, which reflected the sorrowful feelings mingled with pity, I knew that there would not be much chance left for my job.

I truly love my job dearly. Putting aside how enjoyable the job was in and of itself, it made me aware of the true meaning in life -- the propagation of the species! What other job was more divine or holier than this?

The memory of my first errand was still so vivid to me. Of course, it's all old history, going back a long time ago. The family which purchased my services was surnamed Chu, and lived at the foot of the mountains a little way outside the village. At first, I was confused when the boss had called the client "Chu ko! Chu ko!" and thought him to be a distant cousin of mine.<sup>26</sup>

The Chu family was housed on top of a little hill, and the boss would always drive me to the foot of the hill in his motorized rickshaw then lead me up to the Chu residence on foot. The house was built from thorny bamboo and a layer of cement applied to the outer wall, with some lime mixed in for a whiter color. The roof was covered by a piece of oiled wax paper. The house was simplicity itself. The pigsty was at the rear of the house, with a grove of bamboo sprouting up beside it and a small water ditch wending past the sty. I liked the environment.

"Oy! A Chu Ko! You've built a new pig sty, have you?" The boss said, his surprise evident in his tone. There, behind the pigsty made from bamboo, were two new pigsties, complete with brick supports and red shingles. It was even classier than the owner's house!

"Heh, heh. Ran out of space to keep them, so I had to build two more," A Chu Ko said, slightly abashed, like a child who had been caught red-handed by parents with his hand in the pie.

"Are you raising pigs or looking to buying sows?" The boss asked with a grin.

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<sup>26</sup> A boar is called Chu-ko in Chinese. Since the client's surname is Chu, he was called Chu Ko (Ko= brother) to show he was very closed to him. However, to the Yorkshire, he would be confused because of the synonym.

“Well, the woman-folk said since we’ve nothing to do, we might as well raise the piglets ourselves. After all, others that bought piglets have to try and make money while raising them,”

A Chu’s wife was a tall, thin woman. Had we not, by chance, visited the Chu family on Chinese New Year’s Eve, I wouldn’t have guessed that they had more than ten members in their family! Both of Chu’s sons - and their wives, too - worked in the export processing plant in Kaohsiung, while one daughter was studying in college in Taipei. It was said that she would return to keep the old folk company every winter and summer vacation. It’s a good thing that the Chu family has so many pigs to raise and care for, otherwise they would have been quite lonely, seeing as how their children and grandchildren were away most of the time!

I was deeply envious of the pigs at the Chu farm, for I saw with my own eyes how A Chu’s wife talked to her pigs as if talking to her own children. It was for this reason that her pigs grew fast, and why I staunchly disagreed that we were stupid beasts completely devoid of intelligence.

“Oh ho! Sweetie, this boar is rather small! Are you sure it can do the job?” A Chu’s wife said, running her eyes over my somewhat skinny frame skeptically.

“Don’t underestimate this Yorkshire! I’ve spent over 10,000 just to import him from overseas! This is his first errand, and I think he’s ready now that he has been here for half a year,” the boss said in my defense.

“Ahh, still young and green, I see!” A Chu Ko said with a laugh.

“He’d better be effective.” A Chu’s wife hesitated a while before finally recognizing my worth. “It has a good form, and rounded buttocks, indicative of thick flesh.”

“A dozen a litter, and smooth delivery guaranteed,” the boss said. “Is that the new sow? Is it of local breed? Let’s have a look.”

From my own point of view, the local breed was quite ugly, a fat forehead, large in the ears and a rotund, spilling gut of a belly. From the right side, it looked like an upside-down horseshoe. It was black of skin, filthy and had a face full of wrinkles. People in this area liked to pick out the ugliest of all. This was indeed the case with the one that I saw.

“What do you think? Is it from the Taoyuan breed, or the Meinong breed?” A Chu Ko asked, indicating the sow with a nudge of the chin while resting his right foot on the railing.

The boss peered at the sow, and then tugged at the sow’s ears and tail lightly. The sow was in heat, and aside from issuing a slight snort, it budged not a whit.

“It should be the Taoyuan breed. It has meatier posterior” the boss said.

“Sure wish it would be as fruitful as that other sow; that one gave me 15-16 piglets per litter, each of them white and healthy,” the old man said hopefully.

I circled around the bamboo railing two or three times. Despite the ugly appearance of this particular lot, the air was brimming with a certain odor, a smell that might have originated from the sow. It made me anxious, restless, as if the blood in my veins were all a-boiling. Something in my mind seemed to be driving me, egging me on, and leading me to the feeling that there was important work that must be done. It was an experience I’ve never had before!

“Come, come, little pig. Eat this first.” A Chu’s wife came over to me with a metal baler, in which were two cracked-open eggs, complete with the eggshells. Madame had just fed this to me prior to leaving the house, and it was a delicacy I didn’t know about before! The allure of the eggs drew my attention away from the sow for a short while as I gobbled down the eggs, even licking the baler clean.

“Yes, gobble them down, like a good little chu ko!” A Chu’s wife said with a big smile. I saw that A Chu Ko did a double take, and then began laughing heartily, as if he realized something funny.

“Come on! Let’s have a cup of tea, let it rest a while, get its strength back. It would be safer that way,” A Chu Ko said.

Truthfully, I did feel somewhat out of breath and some pain in my legs after walking up the hill for so long. I could do with a little nap.

My boss pointed at the new pigsties and said with a laugh, “These sites are very well built, better than your actual house! You should have made it into your house!”

“Haha, my daughter was grumbling about pigs having a better house than man. Well, pigs could be sold for cash, and men can’t! Ha!” A Chu Ko said.

“Besides, imported white pigs need to be washed, and more attention must be given to sanitary concerns. With everyone raising one, one has to pay more if he wishes to make more,” he added.

“Hear, hear! You could even build a multi-story house once you make money.”

“What would we do with a multi-story building! None of the children will be returning to farm on these lands, let them buy multi-story buildings out-of-town if they are able to. We--- We’re used to the old house, where it’s cool and breezy!” A Chu Ko said.

The two elderly people were very good customers, and even made a point of designating me over the others! Over the next two years, we would have to make the climb to their house every two to three months, and I would be fed two eggs by Miss A Chu.

I truly did not wish any misfortune on such good folks, but last Autumn -- the last we saw them -- all of the pigsties were empty, with only the sow of local breed still living there. The pig prices fell sharply in a few years. All the farmers raising pigs had lost a great deal of money.

“No one would want this old sow even if we were to sell it, and we can’t just leave it,” A Chu’s wife said while feeding me two fresh eggs.

“My second daughter-in-law wants me to go to Kaohsiung and take care of the children; she makes several thousand a month working at the factory, able to subsidize their income a bit. We’ve lost tens of thousands on raising pigs!”

I haven’t seen the elderly couple ever since, and have not heard anything about them. A Chu’s wife seemed to have aged at least ten years once they stopped raising pigs, with loneliness and ennui writ large on her expression. I hoped that she would go see her grandchildren in Kaohsiung and that they would bring her as much hope and laughter as my children have.

I’ve seen too many people like the Chus over my short life. In fact, all the people in villages around here were hardworking and frugal folks. I had never met such hardworking a people as those here in England, which I left behind at the age of four months. Sometimes, my boss and I returned very late after a particular job. When he turned on the headlights of his rickshaw, I could still see in the dark figures wearing their bamboo hats still working on the farm. The life they had was quite simple. I once overheard a story that those people’s grand-mothers would cook rice in steamers and eat that as food, while giving the pigs the best soup and rice. Ah, it is lucky to be pigs here. Just as reflected in the Chu family, they would rather build their pigsties with

better and sturdier materials than their own house. For the time being, there were still many villagers who acted exactly the same as the Chu family.

The weather was warm, with ample local produce and resources, and very few natural disasters. It would not be natural if those farmers did not become wealthy. It was quite natural, however, for those farmers to keep some pigs, no matter how rich or poor they were. Pigs in the old days were fed the vines of sweet potatoes, rice bran or rice in soup, which were part of their produce. They cost nothing. Accordingly, the money they got from selling pigs was entirely additional income.

Just like what Auntie Yu-te said to my boss, "I managed to support my two children to study at college simply by the two sows that I kept." So proudly she said. "It is strange that every time when I have to pay the tuition fees then I find some piglets available for sale. It has lasted more than ten years. Otherwise, I would not have been able to raise such a large sum of cash for them," she said.

Both of auntie Yu-te's sons had graduated from the normal university system, and both her daughter-in-laws also taught in middle schools. Her new house was quite imposing, but despite objections from her sons and daughter-in-laws, she still raised two sows around the house, and had the boss drive me there every few months. However, though she was well-off, auntie Yu-te was quite stingy. She even refused to provide me with eggs or other nutrition. Her sows were short and small local breeds, which I didn't like. She would always ask to have one more if I finished too early. Were everyone like her, I would have quite a tough time.

To be sure, times had changed. With the arrival of synthetic feeds, the average overhead of raising pigs has greatly increased. As for how much one could make off of a pig, the dialogue I overheard between my boss and an aged farmer might be an indicator.

"Deducting the actual cost of the piglet, feed and medicine, I can earn 500 per piglet. However, it takes about 4-5 months, which means that I barely earn 100 per month."

It was common for every family to raise at least three or four pigs, back when pigs were fed with sweet potato vines. With synthetic feed, if one wanted to recoup their investment, they would have to raise more pigs, and to raise more pigs they would have to build more pigsties.

So it was that nearly every family in the village had at least one, or more often two, brand-new brick pigsties. They didn't care how little they could earn. In their mind, it was worth their while if they could earn a little bit more. I was impressed by the naiveté of these farmers.

I am lucky to have a great number of progeny, which brought happiness and hope to the entire village. For some time, some new-born piglets less than one month were hot in the market. They were the targets of many buyers. The number of sows was visibly increasing day by day. My boss was then the proudest man and was known throughout the village. He spent more money importing Landrace, Babcock and Duroc and other kinds that everyone wanted. Our sign, "The Best," lived up to its name; a dozen a litter, and smooth delivery guaranteed. My boss claimed to have more kinds of pigs than the farm animals division, and even provided the clumsy, ugly local breeds for the job.

Ah, that was the golden age of our business. I was a stud, servicing four different customers a day. My boss was always hurrying us off somewhere else. I was very proud of the past glory, and often told myself my life was complete. If you got me going, I could even persuade my stomach to forget about its hunger!

The sudden end of the good days came without any hint. In a haze, I felt as if I suddenly had much more free time than usual, and it was not until the Madame stopped supplying fresh eggs that I realized that events had taken a drastic turn for the worse. Why were we not walked out on our rounds anymore? It was because the piglets could not be sold, and the owners no longer wished to breed sows. This change was a major catastrophe for both my boss and me!

As it was, there seemed no way to save our business from a decline. That day, my boss carried me back from a distant location. He met A Wen, an important customer in the past, at the entrance of the village. A Wen was wearing a baseball cap and was covered in mud; it seemed he had just come back from the field. The boss stopped to chat with him, as A Wen was very well learned, and the boss found him most agreeable for a conversation. Now both of them were worried about the recent development.

"It'll be very difficult to carry on. I can't even earn enough to cover the money I spend on feed." said my boss. And then he asked, "How many sows are you still raising?"

A Wen worked at the township office, though his family made a living off raising pigs and farming. A Wen was known for his good skill at raising sows, and for a period of time he did very well for himself. We used to visit him once or twice every month.

“Nothing we can do. I’m out, having sold the very last one,” he said with a bitter smile. “I’m considered lucky, having gotten out so quickly. You know Liu Hsi-chih? He almost died from being bitten by a large pig.”

“Huh? Did it bite him because he did not feed it?” my boss said in surprise.

“Haha, no, no! He just very nearly went bankrupt.”

“Ah. Do you think there’s no chance of turning the tables? If there’s a price drop, it stands to reason there must be a time when it rises.”

“The sales abroad have suddenly stopped; we would be able to provide our own stock of pork for at least a year, just off of domestic needs. Almost every family that has raised pigs has sold out. Are you going to tough it out?”

“I don’t believe every family gave up on this job. What else can they do apart from raising pigs?” the boss said heavy-heartedly, and then said, “If only I haven’t sunk everything I owned into this. At least I could have pulled myself out quicker.”

“Things will get better eventually. It’s always been up and down before, hasn’t it? The government will do something to help the farmers. After all, we the farmers aren’t competitive at all, and are in bad need of protection.” A Wen tried to comfort my boss, which also made me feel calm. Depression would pass. We won’t become extinct. Human beings could not do without us. I just hoped that the boss stays committed; as long as there’s hope for me, I could live with two meals a day!

“The pig price would eventually bounce back,” my boss said, sounding sure of himself.

About a year or so later, the pig prices did indeed rebound. The market for exports had opened up slightly, as well. It may have been a good opportunity for both my boss and me, but it never occurred that the situation was entirely different.

“The poor should not stop raising pigs, and the wealthy should not stop studying,” was a Hakka proverb of wisdom, suggesting that we could not be lazy and that raising pigs helped us to be rich. However, such wisdom could not persuade farmers to raise pigs any more. The former experience hurt them too greatly. The more they invested, or the more efforts they made, the more they suffered. They did not want to take such

risks any longer. To some extent, they were right in that they could not sell the pigs which occupied their pens. The Law did not allow farmers to kill pigs for pork. The only alternative left for them was to ask pig merchants to buy them out. It was inevitable that they would be shorted out by some merchants without scruples.

“Damn them, every time I make a sale it’s like having another layer of flesh peeled off of me. Are we not poor enough already!” I heard a client complain with my boss once.

The poor were no longer raising pigs. That task has now fallen to the wealthy, who treats the raising of pigs as a profession. They had enough capital to survive the crises of dipping prices, to directly import feed and to export the pigs. The price on the market was under their control. Dealers found no way to bargain and farmers found no role in the new business.

It was a surprise that boss’s reputation of the “Best” had fallen to such circumstances. With individual farmers ceasing to raise pigs on a small scale, and the larger farms possessing their own boars and sows, it was inevitable that my boss’s business would come to an end. Fortunately, some of the medium to smaller pig farmers would still need our services when their own boars and sows were over-worked. It was due in part to the villagers’ preference of pork from local pigs. Usually, local pigs were not so competitive so they were not raised in big farms. A gap emerged, which provided some farmers with chances to raise local black pigs. Although the profit was tiny, it was good enough for farmers as a side job. In this way, our business lasted for another short while, which became my boss’ side-job.

Before we Yorkshires were imported, most of the pork market was divided into two parts. One was from Old Berkshire, and the other from a new race, resulting from a mixed breed of Landraces and Yorkshires. However, Old Berkshire has exited the local stage for good, being unable to compete with a new-born race, the first generation of LY, progeny of the mixed breed between Yorkshire and Landraces. Now it seemed that another new race from the marriage of the Hampshires and the American Yorkshires was inclined to take the place of Yorkshire. For the moment, most of the black pigs to be seen in the villages came from the marriage of Duroc and the local breed. Giving the matter some thought, I felt a burst of pride for being able to give birth so many children to satisfy the need of Taiwanese farmers over the past few



years. Though it is a sobering thought that their ultimate fate of going under the knife is inevitable, was it not still worth it for life to continue on? As for why the boss is still keeping my company, I would like to think it's because the boss likes me, rather than the thought that I am still worth something to him. I had been working for him for a long time, not to mention I've made him quite a bit of money.. The relationship however is like the setting sun, as I hear that th price of pig feed is about to go up again.

Rumor had it that the price for feed was on the rise. The market for the export of frozen pork was opened. Was this good news for my boss? I could not say. In the past few days, the Madame fed me more. Was it her expectation that I would grow in weight? My boss shook his head while looking at me. What would that glance mean? Stop worrying. As a boar, I thought I'd done my job well. It might be happier to listen to the TV from the borough warden's house. Oh! Whose caterwauling was that? Was it Chiang Kuang-chao or Liu Wen-cheng? In my mind, I still thought Chang Li-ming's voice was the sweetest! Why hasn't the woman step onto the stage yet?