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# S T A R

A sweep of sea breeze skimmed the island, driving away the heat that had survived the day. The evening was quiet; the whole island was wrapped in a blanket of misty darkness. A myriad blazing stars, seemingly brighter here than elsewhere, alone sparkled in the deep blue sky. The sun, people were accustomed to bragging, supplied the island with an especial splendour in the day, and the stars, an exceptional radiance at night.

Gradually all the electric lights went out. A few buildings, scattered here and there, protruded in the darkness, shielded by innumerable luxuriant trees. Spiral roads stretched lazily downward, corkscrew fashion, from the cliff-shaped summit to meet comparatively busy streets at the foot of the hill. Most of the shops at the time had been closed for the day. The roads extended further toward the lund, along which stood several hotels, mostly three-storey structures. From within those new-style

windows issued bright electric rays, beating upon the sea.

The sea lay under a cloak of black, tranquil and seemingly asleep. Some ten or twenty small junks, unhired at the moment, were moored in a row alongside the bund. Only a few lonely electric lamps dimly lighted the wide, deserted, and slightly wet stone pavement. Several boatmen were dozing on the bow of their boats, waiting for fare.

Suddenly a rippling and sculling sound from afar broke the stillness of the sea; it was a small craft coming nearer and nearer towards the shore. The drowsy boat skippers by the bund stirred, looking with intense interest towards the moving object. Moved by the incoming currents, the moored boats, too, began to frolic lightly, up and down, right and left. As the newcomer drew near, the idle boatmen rose to their feet, and manoeuvred their craft to a new line-up to make room for the arriving craft.

A lanky youth, wearing a white cork hat, climbed ashore in a few long strides. After putting on his student uniform, which he had been carrying on his arm, he silently wended his

way towards the interior lanes, buttoning up his coat as he walked.

On the second-floor verandah of a comparatively big hotel along the bund a French window suddenly opened, and the shadow of a man emerged. He, too, was youngish, dressed in an open-collar shirt, with a pale long thin face and wearing an abundant crop of dishevelled hair.

He was leaning against the verandah-railing, his eyes riveted skyward, scanning, with a feeling of intimacy, the numerous stars in the firmament. "These stars have not changed a whit, except that they have grown a little brighter," he mumbled. He felt irrepressible emotions surging within. Still gazing at the stars, his lips murmured someone's name. He could feel a mist coming over his eyes. His hands grasped hard at the cold cement support on the rail, trying harder to check his tears. A knock at the door had eluded his ears, and not until the room resounded with footsteps did he wake up from his reverie.

The visitor was the lanky youth who had just disembarked from the small junk, his white cork hat in his hand and a smile on his almost

triangular face The two stared at one another for a while; finally it was the host who hurried over and gave the guest a warm hand-clasp, greeting him in staccato:

“Chia-chen . . . at last you have come. You have no idea . . . how long I have been waiting . . . to see you. Everywhere I have inquired . . . for news about you . . .” So genuinely happy was he that tears brimmed his eyes. Slowly he withdrew his hand. Chia-chen, however, was not as overcome by emotions as his host, though he was probably just as glad to see him. “I’ve received your letter, and for ages I have wanted to come to see you,” he replied calmly. “I’ve also read about your arrival in the papers. Chih-liang, so you’ve become a famous writer, eh?”

Like a needle it pricked Chih-liang’s heart, that last remark of Chia-chen’s. His brows knitted slightly, unable to tell whether Chia-chen had made that dig intentionally. But seeing Chia-chen’s face still conspicuous with a grin, with no trace of intended malice, he said half-reproachfully:

“Is it nice to start a conversation by being

sarcastic? I thought, you see, that you had already forgiven me after all these years."

"Well, aren't you now a well-known figure?" Chia-chen defended himself good-naturedly, still grinning widely. He gave Chih-liang a friendly pat on the shoulder, while his eyes scrutinized his face.

"You know, you haven't changed much," Chia-chen observed, in the tone and manner of an old man talking to a boy. "Except a little thinner . . . a few more wrinkles on your brow. I've heard your name mentioned here and there, and read your literary masterpieces. But often I have wondered how on earth you could have written such stuff."

"Don't let us just talk," Chih-liang quickly broke in, for at the mention of his writings, his face uncontrollably turned red. "Let's sit down on the verandah, what do you say?" And without waiting for Chia-chen to answer, Chih-liang moved a chair outside. Thus circumstanced, Chia-chen had no other alternative but to leave his hat on the table and help move another chair to the verandah.

They sat down, both convinced they had

much to talk about, yet momentarily not knowing where to begin. Both looked towards the opposite shore; it was a vast expanse of darkness, with only flimsy shadows of a few desolate islands. Their eyes could not see the bustling town from where they stood. The sea remained calm and serene. They lifted their eyes skyward, and the stars seemed to be the only active elements in the quietness of night, each twinkling brilliantly. For some time it was the stars which held their gaze.

Chia-chen was first to redirect his gaze from the stars to the dreamy expression on his friend's face. "Chih-liang, what's on your mind? I have never before seen you in such a pensive mood."

"Oh, nothing," Chih-liang returned blankly. Then turning his face around and eyeing Chia-chen, he changed his tone: "How cruel you people have been! Not one single word from you all these years. No doubt, you've been unusually busy, but it wouldn't take much time to drop me a few lines now and then, would it?"

"Well, I really don't blame you for the way you feel," Chia-chen remarked in his habitual



composed manner, smiling an honest smile, "but what's the good of correspondence? You see, we be ong to totally different worlds. You have steadily continued your climb up the ladder of success, while I've been in the rut, so to speak." "What rot you're talking." Chih-liang retorted gently. Every word from his friend's mouth, though uttered without malicious intent, had hurt. Sadness clutched at his heart while his mind wandered back to past years.

"You see, Chia-chen, the past still lives vividly in my mind. Not for one moment have I forgotten you two. It's I who have been forgotten, or else all the letters I have sent you wouldn't have remained unanswered."

Seizing Chih-liang's psychological mood, Chia-chen argued that tru'y they had not, ever, shoved him to limbo. "Besides," he added, "you are not the type that can be easily forgotten. In addition to your voluminous writings which we frequently see in various periodicals and magazines, your name is practically on everybody's lips." Then hurriedly, he put in a word of explanation—he wasn't teasing him, every word was gospel truth.

“But what price fame . . . writings?” Chih-liang was quick to philosophize with a sigh, his face one of melancholy. He turned away to look at the stars, lest his face might betray his mental restlessness. His heart became too acrobatic to be easily pacified. Finally no longer able to maintain his self-restraint, he abruptly turned around again and asked Chia-chen point-blank: “How is Ch’iu-hsing? Tell me, how is she?”

Chia-chen was, for a while, visibly startled by Chih-liang’s quavering voice and lachrymose expression, but later he understood. Well did he know that Chih-liang and she were once friends of quite intimate standing, but thought he had long accepted that as but a closed chapter in his life. Only now, being a witness of his agitated mood, was he convinced that the memory of Ch’iu-hsing was still working havoc with Chih-liang’s heart. He found himself in a most miserable dilemma, anxious on the one hand to let his friend into a secret, yet on the other hand sympathy for Chih-liang got the better of him, reinforcing his decision not to tell.

Finally, instead, he simply said, consolingly:

"She's fine. We see one another a good deal. After all, what's the use of still moping over her?" He grinned, a grin which he knew was artificial. Chih-liang said not a word, merely staring absent-mindedly at the sky.

"Could you take me to see her?" Chih-liang blurted out suddenly, without turning his face. He had gathered all his strength to keep calm, but his unsteady voice was no false testimony to his uncontrollable emotions.

"Why not?" Chia-chen replied frigidly, after weighing the question, then added in an enforced chuckle: "But it would be better for you, as well as her, that I rather not."

"You must," Chih-liang insisted, almost in an entreating tone, staring at Chia-chen with pleading eyes. "Don't you see I have got to see her? I have so much to say to her. Don't you see that I've come all the way just to see her?" He was no longer what he had pretended to be, his sham bland indifference gone. His eyes sparkled with excitement, anxiously expecting a reply. ❀

"Don't you worry, old boy! She'll come to see you," Chia-chen said after some hesitation.

Then he rose to his feet, paced the floor, absorbed in thought; then he stopped and leaned against the railing, his back to the sea and sky, showing in good measure the lankiness of his body.

"You really think she'll come?" Chih-liang inquired, evidently greatly relieved, yet somewhat doubtful. "Where is she, where is she now?"

Chia-chen told him she was on the opposite shore, and said: "You see, we came together."

"Then why didn't she come here with you?" Chih-liang wanted to know, his heart burning so as if it were about to pop out. And in a trembling voice, he asked: "Has she got all my letters?"

Chia-chen nodded assent, and explained that just now she was occupied. "That's why I came over here alone. I can assure you she'll come to see you. Perhaps tomorrow, or the day after."

Chih-liang leaned back on his chair, contented. Intense elation added lustre to his flushed face, on which also appeared a self-satisfied smile. He gazed dreamily at the sky, unmindful of Chia-chen's sedate eyes focussed on

him. But what he saw at the moment was not the glittering stars, but memories of their past—his and hers.

“Has she changed much?” Chih-liang asked chattily, awakened from his day-dreaming. But without awaiting Chia - chen’s answer, he continued: “I still remember how she looked, her cherubic round face, her bright shining eyes, her willowy eyebrows, her exquisitely chiselled nose. And when she spoke, how clear and melodious the tone! You remember, Chia-chen, that we used to nickname her ‘wasp’ because of her slender figure and slim waist?”

Chia-chen listened quietly; several times he wanted to laugh, to sigh, but he remained a master of himself. The mention of the word “wasp”, however, was the last straw; he just couldn’t control himself any longer, and laughed out loud. Still laughing, which incidentally served as a mere shield for the multiple feelings rising in him, Chia-chen remarked: “I suppose you couldn’t say three words without a professional touch. It sounded to me as though you were writing a novel, which should have been saved for your admiring readers.”

Having said that, he looked towards the sea which was placid and calm. From the bund came laughing voices. Three young girls—of the *artiste* type—all dressed in jackets and long trousers, each of a different colour, were coming ashore from a junk. Swinging their silk parasols, they laughed and talked while they made their way towards the interior lanes. Chia-chen grinned, a little sadly, and turned round to look at Chih-liang.

Not a whit discouraged by Chia-chen's remarks, Chih-liang continued to paint pictures in his mind's gallery, and being a novelist he knew how to build a background and weave a plot with himself as the central figure in an imaginary future life. The possibility of its realization was not his business, for the moment at least. Suddenly he said to Chia-chen, not without pride: "I know she'll come."

The situation had become a little odd, Chia-chen felt, and his mind was troubled. He had not expected to find Chih-liang in such a state of mind, much less his longing for her. He had always thought that Chih-liang had been happy in his work and life. While fighting the idea of

pouring cold water on Chih-liang's head, he nevertheless could not forget the real motive of his visit. Should he now pour out to his friend what he had planned to tell? He weighed the question thoughtfully while slowly measuring his steps towards his chair, and sat down.

"Chih-liang," he finally broke the silence, his voice composed as usual, "tell me, have you been happy all these years?"

"Why do you ask me such a question?" Chih-liang was startled. His perplexity mounted as his eyes found the seriousness that hung over his friend's countenance.

"Just answer me yes or no," Chia-chen pressed the question. "Have you really been as happy as your writings make you out to be?"

Chih-liang nodded, and answered slowly: "I suppose so."

"But I have a feeling you are not telling me the truth," Chia-chen quickly retorted. And seeing Chih-liang was going to interrupt, Chia-chen gesticulated to him to hold his tongue: "Wait till I finish. Not that we haven't taken a great interest in your welfare. Do believe me, we've practically devoured everything you

wrote, and incessantly inquired of people news about you. But the truth is: you and we have been drifting further and further apart with the passing of time."

"If that was so, it couldn't be helped," Chih-liang could no longer remain silent. "You see, I had never agreed with your philosophy of life. I had to go my own way." Chih-liang could not have spoken his mind with greater sincerity, and he pronounced every word with considerable physical energy, as if only thus could he drive home to the listener's mind what he had to say.

Chia-chen made no immediate comment. He just stood up, biting his lip. Again he leaned against the rail. Meanwhile, Chih-liang's elated face gradually turned into one of plain worry.

"Haven't you realized something is lacking in your writings?" Chia-chen asked. "You just said that you had to follow your own course, your own road. But what road was it, do you know? Your books are chockfull of philosophy and beautiful phrases which make you out to be wiser than you really are. You are a success yes, in the eyes of your readers. Only we, your old



friends, know there is something sadly wanting in your life. That is why I have come to see you."

This, indeed, was like a bolt out of the clear blue sky, coming as it did from his friend. Every word, which he loathed, was now ringing in his ears, knocking also, as it were, at his heart. He shot Chia-chen a painful glance, and suddenly felt the huge shadow of his friend casting a heavy load upon his being. His heart in tumult, he struggled to his defence:

"You still misunderstand me as you have misunderstood me all along. The reason why I sailed a different course from yours was not because of fear of sacrifice. On the other hand, haven't you yet realized that all the sacrifices you have made were not of the useful type? If we can do something that's more worthwhile, there is no reason why we shouldn't. That was why I elected to tread my own road . . ." He was now too overcome by emotion to continue.

Chia-chen, who did not seem to have been moved by Chih-liang's speech, said dryly: "You think then that your readers understand you more thoroughly than we do? Don't fool yourself.

I comprehend your way of thinking like an open book. You would say . . . everything should be allowed to develop in its natural way . . . it would be wrong to push it by human force . . . knowledge is the most powerful thing in life, and ignorance should be eliminated. That was why you left us to embark upon a literary career, wasn't it? Everywhere you've been preaching your philosophy, but the result? Now, even you yourself have turned a renegade to the philosophy in name yours. You have been only running circles around your pretty, high-sounding phrases, with a void in your heart which I can detect. Your literary works dress you up to be happy and jovial, but I can read between lines the gloominess, misery, sadness and hopelessness which is part of you. It's no use arguing with me. Just tell me in plain words whether you crave something which you haven't got."

Chih-liang listened attentively. At times he had wanted to break in. Now his face became crimson red, looking a little mad, for he had a feeling that Chia-chen was once more "pulling his leg". But later his flushed face turned wan,

misery written all over it as if he realized that the secrets buried deep down in his heart had been but an open book to his friend. He screwed up all his strength to steady himself, unwilling to have Chia-chen sense that his mind was only a jumble of thoughts.

“What business is it of yours to drag all this nonsense out?” Chih-liang finally exploded, no longer master of himself. “And after all these years? Perhaps you thought I would be easy bait for your oratorical trick, but you are wrong.” He jumped to his feet, darted into the room, pacing the floor listlessly. Then out he came again, and leaned against the rail by the side of Chia-chen, his eyes staring at the sea.

All the while Chia-chen had not moved an inch, seemingly unaffected by Chih-liang's restlessness. In reality, however, he shared Chih-liang's mental agony. Only of different stuff was he made, not easily permitting trifles to ruffle his temper. If he had felt badly, he had kept his emotions within the innermost receptacle of his soul. The only visible difference was his slightly knitted brows.

“Chih-liang,” he called intimately. Chih-

liang, evidently finding himself weak-willed to meet his friend's penetrating gaze, turned his head away. "I'm not here to pick a quarrel with you," Chia-chen said gently, his hand resting on Chih-liang's shoulder in a brotherly manner. "Believe me, we are still your friends, taking just as great an interest in your affairs as we always have done. Well, I've got to run along now, and you may rest assured that I shan't be a nuisance to you from now on."

Those words filtered into the cockles of Chih-liang's heart, and he was greatly touched. His thoughts leaped back to years before when he and Chia-chen and Ch'iu-hsing were together like brothers and sister. Only later had his outlook in life undergone a metamorphosis, and he had been unwilling to keep step with Chia-chen and Ch'iu-hsing when they made up their mind to transplant their lives to a new city. He had then sailed a different course—that of a novelist. New environment and new friends had widened the gap between him and them, and at times he felt he had totally forgotten them. No, that was only what he thought, for in truth she had never been out of his mind, her image gradually

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looming so large that nothing he did could banish it from his mind. That image had even drawn him to where he was now standing.

Now he wasn't dreaming any more. It was real. Chia-chen was there with him, telling him news about her. Chia-chen's face and voice carried him back in memory to past associations, and he considered his meeting with Chia-chen an event to be treasured. But now he was harping on leaving and not coming back, which knocked realization into his head that he should not let petty arguments stand in the way of revived friendship. Perhaps, he reminded himself, he had given the interview a bad start; he had even forgotten to ask him how they had been getting along.

Thus reasoning within himself, he pluckily grasped Chia-chen's arm, and said in an almost repentant and imploring tone: "Chia-chen, you can't go away like this. I won't let you. Forget everything I have just said, will you? You see, I wasn't exactly in the right mind. Let's sit down and talk to our heart's content; I can put you up here for the night. Now tell me, how has the world been treating you? and

her? You know, I was much interested in her, and I still am." His voice had never been tremulous as it was now. He punctuated his remarks now and then with a moaning note, as if words were the only outlet for the pent-up loneliness that had accumulated in his heart these past years.

Chia-chen made no reply, and neither did he make any move to depart. He remained in abject reticence; a far-away look came into his eyes. It wasn't the sky he actually saw, but Chih-liang's sunken countenance. In his mind two thoughts were in conflict. Finally coming to himself, he said, placidly:

"Chih-liang, there is something I must tell you. She and I are now living together."

Chih-liang stared blankly at his friend, not seeming to understand what Chia-chen was saying. Only after a good while did he say, "Really? I never thought of it,"—his face burning hot. His strength was failing him. He walked about restlessly, and slumped down in his chair. "Why didn't you tell me at the beginning?" he mumbled, as if talking to him-

self. He could not muster up enough courage to look Chia-chen in the face.

Chia-chen's observant eyes had not missed even the minutest reaction in his friend: his motion and facial expression. Knowing that his last remark had been a terrible blow to Chih-liang, he fell a prey to indescribable emotions. "I never thought you cared that much," he whispered.

To that Chih-liang made no denial. The stars in the sky were sparkling with their usual brilliance, but to Chih-liang they became suddenly unfamiliarly dull and waning. He seemed to be in the midst of a dream. And worse, what had just transpired before his very eyes was hardly what he would expect even in a dream. Chia-chen's shadow suddenly flashed across his eyes, rousing him from his reverie. His eyes met Chia-chen's sympathetic gaze, and he smiled a sardonic smile.

"Is it still all right for me to see her now?"

"What nonsense!" Chia-chen immediately returned, visibly moved. "Didn't I just tell you she would come to see you? In fact, you are most welcome to stay with us for a couple of

days." He paused, anxious for a reply. But none came, so he added: "You must be awfully tired now. You'd better get some rest. Ch'iu-hsing and I will come tomorrow."

Without further ado, Chia-chen went inside the room, put on his hat, and after a few long strides he was gone.

With mingled feelings of perturbation and helplessness, Chih-liang listlessly watched Chia-chen leave, till there was not the slightest trace of him. He remained motionless

The night was chilly. His room presented a different atmosphere, more forlorn and bare.

All night long, Chih-liang dreamed the strangest assortment of dreams. While he was still in bed the next morning a bell-boy brought him a message from Chia-chen, which read:

"Ch'iu-hsing rang me up early this morning, said she had gone home and couldn't come to see you. I'm going back by the noon bus, and if you wish to see her, meet me at the station."

Appended to the missive was a sketchy chart showing the directions from the hotel to the bus station.



His watch informed him it was already past ten. Without wasting time he jumped out of bed, and dressed hurriedly. Carrying a suitcase, he hot-footed to the bund and engaged a boat, making for the shore across

He knew time was pressing when he disembarked; so without dilly-dallying he called a rickshaw. A good number of coolies flocked about him, all equally eager to pull him, but he had no way to make himself understood as to the place he wanted to go to, for none of the pullers were versed in Mandarin; finally a young student came to his rescue. By the time he reached the station, the bus was already full.

The station was situated on a narrow road, which was at the time under repair. Dust was flying high, and broken pieces of stone were to be seen everywhere. Several tardy customers, carrying light luggage, were standing at the station entrance, while two vacant buses were parked on the other side of the road. There were several food vendors' stands nearby, around which stood small knots of people, busy satisfying their hunger.

With considerable effort Chih-liang squeezed

his way toward the bus, but he was greeted with only unfamiliar faces. He backed down and planted himself at the station, utterly helpless. The sun beat down upon the earth in all its fierceness; it was suffocatingly hot. The strange dialects coming from all directions further depressed him. Beads of perspiration literally rolled down his face, which was beginning to burn, and his lips were parched. Fanning himself with his straw hat was, under such circumstances, of little avail.

The bus started off, leaving behind a cloud of dust which forced him to retreat a few steps for refuge. With great disappointment, he watched the public conveyance move until it turned the corner and was gone. He was about to make his way to the station office to inquire about the schedule of the next bus when he was patted on the shoulder from behind. He turned round and there standing before him was Chia-chen, a bundle under his arm.

“The bus is gone. What are we to do?”

“Nothing to worry about. We take the bus across the road.”

Chia-chen was right. There was no mistaking the fact that one of the two buses parked on the other side of the road—the one in front—was already being gradually filled up. Why hadn't he noticed that? Chih-liang wondered.

Noise and dust pervaded the interior of the bus, and a strong smell of perspiration invaded their nostrils. Apparently used to such mode of travel, Chia-chen was, Chih-liang noticed, quite at home. The bus being now packed full except for one seat in front. Chia-chen let Chih-liang have that only available seat, himself standing by Chih-liang's side.

"These buses here aren't as good as those in Shanghai, I'm sure. You're feeling quite uncomfortable, aren't you?" Chia-chen remarked casually, smiling.

"I don't mind, it's only a matter of a few hours. Only it's stifling hot in here," Chih-liang returned, mopping his face.

Chia-chen explained that the heat wouldn't be so oppressive when the bus was on the move. Soon the conductor appeared, and Chia-chen bought two tickets. In an instant the bus began quaking along the very uneven road.

The landmarks the bus passed were all strange to Chih-liang. By the time it approached the country roads, the bus bumped more vigorously, simultaneously emitting a great deal of noise. Conversation, under such circumstances, was out of the question, so Chih-liang turned his eyes to survey the landscape around him.

Lying under a scorching sun, the road was the colour of pink. Everything was so brilliantly fresh—the trees gloriously garbed in green foliage, the brownish open fields, the clear shining brook. Bearing testimony to an abundant life were the luxuriant banyan trees. So impressed was Chih-liang by these lively surroundings that he felt as if a thin net of umbra was slipping off from his body; he seemed to be passing through a process of rejuvenation as time wore on.

Soon the bus came to a halt. The passengers, after alighting, raced to the river bank like a group of athletes to make the ferry. "What beautiful scenery you have here, and I'm beginning to envy you," Chih-liang said while walking down the stone steps at the river bank, still panting from the effects of his running.

Chia-chen smiled an acknowledgment, and the two jumped aboard the ferry boat

The gorgeous surroundings overwhelmed Chih-liang, who standing on the boat deck together with Chia-chen surveyed the landscape with dancing eyes and a light heart. The river was broad, a vast expanse of foamy water obstructing his view. He could see only a blurred outline of the shore in the distance. Unaccountably, Chih-liang found himself once more mentally active, the image of Ch'iu-hsing quickly coming to focus in his mind's eye. The novelist in him again played a predominant part, but only for a short while, for his mind was soon confused. He looked at Chia-chen, who too was absorbed in deep thought, but whose face was perennially calm.

"Chia-chen, are you happy with her?" Chih-liang asked abruptly.

"With her? Meaning whom?" Chia-chen inquired, as if uncertain of the question.

Chih-liang felt a trifle embarrassed by the counter-question, which he took as intentional on Chia-chen's part to put him "on the spot" so to speak.

"I mean you and Ch'iu-hsing," Chih-liang straight-forwardly qualified, his face a little reddened. "So-so," Chia-chen answered simply, and then added: "Surely we're happy."

Shooting a glance at Chia-chen was all Chih-liang did to write *finis* to the conversation. Soon the boat reached its destination, and the two hurriedly leaped ashore. In a near-stampede the passengers made a rush for the bus, which was already properly parked there, and Chia-chen and Chih-liang were the first two to hop aboard. Their efforts were rewarded with two comfortable seats.

"Life down here is a perennial struggle, see?" Chia-chen observed half-jestingly, and grinned.

They had not the opportunity to talk much before the bus chauffeur started the engine running. As the vehicle continually rocked onward, bearing them closer and closer to their destination, Chih-liang's thoughts instinctively turned to his impending meeting with Ch'iu-hsing. He harboured the hope that Chia-chen would supply him with more information about her, yet at the same time he realized the

unbecomingness of asking too many questions. In fact, he recalled, the few inquiries he put to Chia-chen had elicited only replies of the barest sort, for Chia-chen was apparently deeply engrossed in thought, the nature of which he had no idea. Keeping his mouth shut was, therefore, the only feasible thing for him to do, under which condition he returned to his old hobby of enjoying make-believe contact with her.

While the bus was stopping at one of the main stations, a number of passengers alighted only to be immediately replaced by others. Chia-chen, too, got off to buy a box of cakes, but someone was heard calling him from outside the window as he returned to the bus. After handing the package of eatables to Chih-liang, Chia-chen thrust his head outside the window, and there waiting for him was the middle-aged uniformed station-master.

"Ch'iu-hsing passed through here just a while ago, and told me you were coming by this bus," the station-master said in Mandarin. Then his face brought closer to Chia-chen, he whispered into his ear, his tone most seriously concerned: "Heard any news?"

"The situation hasn't come to the stage of a showdown, in my opinion," Chia-chen replied, his voice equally low.

"The militia after all are not a formidable force," the station-master commented, after looking around cautiously, a little worried. "You people had better be a trifle more careful. If it's true that Wang Kuo-kang has had adequate liaison with his henchmen inside the city, it is almost certain that he will launch a counter-attack."

"I suppose so," Chia-chen half-nodded, his exterior calm as usual. But before the station-master had a chance to continue, the bus started moving.

Chih-liang couldn't help overhearing their conversation. Wang Kuo-kang, he knew, was a notorious bandit chieftain, who only three months ago had been in occupation of the ancient city, toward which the bus was now heading, only to be driven off later by the militia. Ignorant as he was of the present whereabouts of Wang Kuo-kang, he was convinced, by the conversation he had just overheard, that the situation was anything but normal and peaceful.



Suddenly he grew nervous for Chia-chen, but seeing that his friend was his usual composed self quickly allayed his worry.

The wheels of the bus rolled endlessly along the sun-baked red ochre road in a monotonous rattle, and in quick succession the vehicle rumbled through several openings in the hills. Fertile banyan and longan fruit-trees by the roadside flew rapidly past.

The picturesque panorama of the South China countryside—so tranquil, harmonious and radiant—attracted Chih-liang's undivided attention with the irresistible power of a magnet. So intoxicated was he with the seductive beauty of the scenery that all connected with Wang Kuo-kang was now forgotten.

The atmosphere changed to one of hustle and bustle as the bus entered the ancient city. Chia-chen got off first, and Chih-liang followed; the small hand on his watch pointed to the figure four. Four militiamen, shouldering rifles, were performing sentry duties at the station, while two or three uniformed men, stooping, were examining the bigger luggage of the passengers.

Even in the wee hours of the morning Chih-liang was still very much wide awake, sitting solitarily at the desk and making entries in his diary. He wrote:

“At last I’ve seen her. While I’m writing this, my heart still suffers from the after-effects. It’s turning somersaults. At the mere thought of meeting her, as a matter of fact, my heart already seemed at the moment to be on the verge of explosion. Was it ecstasy? Trepidation? Agony? I really can’t tell which. I felt I had completely and utterly forgotten myself, yet at the same time it seemed I was conscious only of myself.

“She hasn’t changed much. No. The same Ch’iu-hsing as I remembered her when we bade each other God-speed. The same eyes the same eyebrows, the same mouth, the same angelic, innocent face. They had frequently come before my sleepy eyes in my dreams during the last year—what I hadn’t been able to dissolve to nothingness day and night the past two months. Today they became a living reality before my naked eyes.

"I'm truly at a loss where to begin. Every sentence, nay every word, seems equally impatient to be the first to see light in this diary. I can't record my thoughts and feelings in cold type in the same stoical manner as I do my novel-writing. Right now, I'm writing about myself; yes, about myself . . ."

A wave of emotion gripped him as the memorable event of the day came rushing back to his mind. Obediently, he laid aside his pen, his heart thumping vigorously. Staring absently at the dimlylit kerosene lamp in front of him, he relived the episode from beginning to end.

From the bus station he and Chia-chen had gone straight to the Women's Association, which was housed in the weather-beaten ancient clock-tower. Looking down from that dilapidated building, one had a clear view of the only "boulevard" in the city and the relatively prosperous-looking shops flanking both sides. Ch'iu-hsing had been leaning against the railing, taking a bird's-eye-view of the city street below. They had marched up the stairs,

then turned into the corridor, and at the sound of their footsteps, she turned round.

She had greeted him familiarly by his name, meanwhile extending her hand, an exhilarating smile on her face. He had almost tripped over himself, hurrying with eagerness to clasp her soft hand. Then he had been speechless, only his eyes feasting greedily upon her—her slender body clothed in a blue gingham cloth gown, her childishly innocent face, and her starry-bright eyes.

“How have you been getting along?” she had spoken first.

While thus immersed in deep recollection, Chih-liang now unknowingly smiled a self-satisfying smile. The room seemed suddenly brightened, as if basking in the warmest sunshine. “She still has the same vibrating, ringing voice,” he unconsciously murmured to himself. “No, she hasn’t forgotten me. She still takes a great interest in my welfare,” the murmur rose to a distinct monologue. These comforting thoughts soon found transcription in his diary, to which he added:

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“Hearing her sweet voice was indeed a benediction ”

The day's happy episode once more came back to his mind. His eyes, he recalled, had been riveted upon her, a lump in his throat. Only after a good long while did he find his tongue, saying in a monotone that he was fine. The loneliness which had been haunting him during the last few years had now miraculously vanished. He slowly loosened his grip on her hand, and said: “What about yourself?”

“Life with me has been most wonderful and happy,” she had replied in childish intimacy, and grinned. Then after scrutinizing him sharply up and down, she had continued: “You're a little thinner. You know, I have read a good number of your novels, which are beautifully written. But . . .” She stopped and suggested they all go inside and sit down.

Cutting through the parlour, they had entered an inner room, which, she explained, was the living quarters for the staff member on night duty. It was a small room and very simply furnished. A bed, a desk, a dresser and

two chairs comprised all the furniture. She asked him and Chia-chen both to sit down: he did so on a chair near the bed, but Chia-chen said he had to go to the Labour Union and asked her to escort Chih-liang home first. In three strides he had left the room.

“Ch’iu-hsing and Chia-chen are devoted to each other,” Chih-liang said to himself suddenly, bringing his recollection to a temporary halt. His voice was tinged with mixed feelings of envy, anger and misery, which, however, evaporated as quickly as they came, as he returned to his reminiscence.

“Have you been devoting yourself entirely to writing all these years?” Ch’iu-hsing had inquired, visibly with great interest, meanwhile pouring him a glass of water.

Nodding an acknowledgment was all he could do, his eyes remaining focussed on her face.

“Everybody agrees you’ve won fame as a novelist,” she had continued in her placid tone, not a whit embarrassed by his concentrated gaze. Calmly she came nearer and sat on the edge of the bed. “Your life should be a very happy one,

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I imagine. Endlessly busy as we were, Chia-chen and I had managed to read most of your novels. Just because you wrote them. But somehow we feel you are a helpless victim of loneliness. Occasionally we discussed your writings, and Chia-chen was positive that they revealed in you something lacking which was essential to life." Chih-liang wrote in his diary:

"She says I'm lonely. She understands. She ought to know. What I crave is affection, love. I have crossed the sea just to see her, hoping thereby to find happiness. But now she . . ." He hesitated a moment, and then completed the sentence: ". . . can't give it me, ever."

Anguish darkened his face. He again laid aside his pen, covered his face with both hands, and by so doing he evidently harboured the belief that he could temporarily forget all about himself. But it turned out to be nothing more than a false hope, for he soon was once more in the depth of reflection.

"Why haven't you answered my letters, including the latest one I sent you not long

ago?" he had asked Ch'iu-hsing, urged on by an irrepressible agony rising in his heart. The question itself was nothing extraordinary, but his tone betrayed an exasperated resentment on his part.

Ch'iu-hsing had looked hard at him, perceptibly surprised, it being beyond her understanding as to what had made him feel so wretchedly miserable. "Chih-liang, is anything the matter?" she had counter-asked him sympathetically, after some thought. "I never thought you had fallen prey to such gnawing infelicity."

An appropriate reply had stood on the tip of his tongue, but he hesitated. "Oh, nothing. I've been feeling swell," he had said baldly, instead.

At this moment, he remembered his diary, in which he continued from where he had left off:

"I didn't tell her the truth. I merely said I had been feeling swell. She probably would never know why I had lied to her. But why couldn't I brace myself up and let



her know what was really troubling my heart? Such weakness!"

Once again he stared into space. In less than an instant the day's event again was parading before his mental eye.

Ch'iu-hsing had made no attempt to force the issue, though cognizant of the fact that he hadn't told her the plain truth. "Several times during the past few years," she had said, introducing a new topic, "I had thought of writing to you. However, I was, as you probably know, always so busy, and furthermore, I had not the slightest inkling as to whether or not you had steered your life through new courses. Hence I was afraid my letters might court trouble. I also knew that correspondence would serve no useful purpose, since we were living in altogether different worlds. No doubt, you have made many new friends, and your life must have been . . . "

A feminine voice calling her from without caused an abrupt interruption in Ch'iu-hsing's talk. She hurriedly rose to her feet, excused herself and left the room.

Left alone, he could hear her voice outside, but not distinctly enough to know what was being said. Her voice had been near enough, yet it seemed to be very far away, as if a wide gap had come between them. For the first time such an unpleasant feeling had come over him, which augmented his unhappiness.

So in his diary, he scribbled:

“A wall seemed to have suddenly risen between us. It was something abstract, un-touchable. But I had the feeling that we could never understand each other as we had understood before.”

Intense anguish seized him. Unable to continue his diary, he closed the book, allowing his recollection once more to get the better of him.

Ch'iu-hsing had returned to the room with a stack of papers, a young girl student at her heels. She made no attempt to introduce her, as she was in a hurry to deposit the papers in a drawer, from which she dug out other papers and handed them to the girl. After muttering something indistinguishable, the girl made her exit.

“Let’s get started now,” she had said to Chih-liang, after hastily rearranging the things which had been lying pell-mell on the desk.

“For your home?” he had asked drily, meanwhile taking up his suit-case.

They walked down the stairs and onto the street, which was bustling with pedestrians, and customers were darting in and out of the shops in an unceasing stream. Big-bellied merchants were to be seen riding past in rickshaws, pulled by muscular youths, while several girls, smartly dressed, were chatting gaily as they walked ahead of them. The city presented an atmosphere of calm, except for some militiamen and policemen posted at street corners here and there.

“I never expected to find you here, of all places,” she had kept the conversation going. “Visitors usually feel a little lost here at the beginning but gradually they will be just crazy about the town. Too bad you aren’t staying here long” By this time they had negotiated another street and were walking along a

quiet, stone-paved road, now nevertheless deteriorated.

"I'm beginning already to like this place," Chih-liang had answered jovously, "and maybe I'll extend my visit." He would have continued to express what his heart was dictating, had not her face turned round at the moment to look straight at him.

"When are you going back to Shanghai?" she had inquired.

"I can't decide just yet. There's business I must attend to."

"May I know what your business is?"

"I'll tell you everything later."

"You are the same old Chih-liang, forever stalling" she had half-chided him, smiling.

Chih-liang had reciprocated her smile, though a little artificially, and said: "You haven't changed either, forever so lovely." Which was something he had long yearned to say to her.

She had smiled in acknowledgment of the compliment, her poise unruffled. But in contrast, his heart had been beating violently.

The side streets had been exceedingly quiet. After traversing two other alleys, they found themselves at the entrance of her home. She rapped several times at the gate, the varnish on which had seen better days. A girlish voice answered the knock, and after Ch'iu-hsing had uttered a few words, the gate swung open. They walked into a rather spacious compound and then into her room.

Chih-liang's eyes fell upon a scene entirely contrary to his expectations. The room was crammed full of antiquated furniture, including a high iron bedstead, a wide bulky desk, and some heavy clumsy chairs. Contributing to the gloomy interior were the inadequate light, and the ill-paved floor with square bricks.

"How on earth could you ever live in a dump like this?" Chih-liang had cried out in utter despair.

"Why not? This has been our home for over a year now," she had replied tardily, after eyeing him in puzzlement, at first seemingly unable to grasp the meaning of his disappointing exclamation.

"I would go mad if I had to live here for a month," he remarked, a painful smile on his wry face.

"I suppose you would, being a Shanghai-lander," she said. "Yes, the room is a bit dark and gloomy, all the light being shut out by that huge tree in the compound. But you see, we spend very little time at home. There's one good point, though. At daybreak there is always a little breeze, and many a bird, happily perched on the tree, sings melodious tunes. And that is the time we usually get up."

"You mean to say you are forever that busy?"

"Yes, most of the time. What's more, seldom do both of us stay at home at the same time. Chia-chen sometimes spends his nights in school or at the Labour Union, and I at the Women's Association. Tonight, for example, it's Chai-chen's turn staying at home." Her tone had been absolutely undemonstrative while she talked, a mute testimony to her unquestioned satisfaction with her mode of living

Chih-liang had looked at her blankly, as if

what she had just said was something incomprehensible. In truth he had understood every word perfectly; only it had made her out to be increasingly more unfathomable as a woman. It had intensified his misery.

"Ch'iu-hsing, why must you remain here?" he had asked with unbending stubbornness. "Now, look here, this horribly ill-lit room, this hopelessly deteriorated furniture, and your strenuous work — all these only sicken and torture you, and make you look older than your age." He had worked himself up so, that he couldn't continue and sank into a chair by the desk.

"I understand what you mean, Chih-liang," she had explained gently, her smiling eyes staring at his emotion-torn face. "But you made a big mistake by likening me to your fictional heroines. They are so warm and suave, so passionately sentimental, and at the same time so conceited—a species only your clever pen can create."

Thus saying, she had gone over to the desk whereon lay several of his novels, and drew out

one of them. Turning over the pages, she had pointed to random passages, commenting in a half-mocking and half-envious tone: "Only they, created to fit in with the kind of life you describe in your stories, can live in Shanghai." Without waiting for further reply from him, she had said that she had to go to the kitchen to prepare supper.

He had offered to help, rising to his feet to follow her. That had been a good excuse to ignore answering what she had just remarked; and it had been something difficult to reply to anyway.

She had hurriedly stopped him, said he needn't bother, and asked him to make himself comfortable, for Chia-chen was coming home soon.

Obediently, he had remained in the room. While heading for the kitchen, she rewarded him with a broad smile, which, it seemed to him, immediately brightened up every nook and corner of the ill-lit room.

Soon, Chia-chen had come home. As usual his countenance was tranquil, but his brows were



wrinkled, which reminded him of the conversation he had overheard at the bus station. He asked Chia-chen if anything had happened.

"Oh, only rumours, but nothing serious," Chia-chen had said, staidly. Then, almost in a whisper: "But I think you'd better leave here sooner than you planned."

"But what about you two?" It seemed the room had suddenly deteriorated back into its old gloomy atmosphere.

"We don't matter. You're a guest, you see, and unnecessarily exposed to danger," Chia-chen had replied in earnest, but still showing no sign of restlessness.

But Chih-liang had been excited, and for a while tongue-tied. "This is only my first day here," he had said in a disguised normal voice, "and I have made up my mind to stay at least a few more days."

Seeing Chia-chen was non-communicative, he had got hold of a book from the desk, and turned over the pages without any intention of reading it. Several thoughts had rushed into his mind at once, one of which found its way to

his tongue: "Tell me, is my being here interfering with your work?"

Chia-chen had been stunned for a moment, but soon regained his composure, and chuckled: "Nonsense. You are welcome to stay as long as you like; only we are rather worried over your . . ."

Chia-chen instantly stopped talking, seeing Ch'iu-hsing enter with the food. He set the table, and Chih-liang helped in whatever way he could. When the food had been all set on the table, Chia-chen lighted the kerosene lamp, and all three sat down to supper.

At this point Chih-liang once more returned to his diary, writing:

"It was just like the good old days, the three of us eating together. We talked occasionally about the past, much of which they remembered well, making me feel I was again living the old life. Somehow, however, I couldn't escape the feeling that I was somewhat different. Many a time I stole a glance at her, and her face absolutely

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had not changed. It was I who had changed. Yes, I."

The word 'changed' saddened him, and finding it difficult to continue his diary, he disappointingly laid aside his pen. Much however as he fought against further thought on the subject, his mental drama once more reasserted itself before his eyes.

Ch'iu-hsing had returned to the Women's Association alone shortly after supper. As if he and Chia-chen had exhausted all materials for conversation, they had found themselves sitting opposite each other across the table, with the kerosene lamp the only thing between them, speechless. Chih-liang's heart had followed Ch'iu-hsing to the Women's Association.

Suddenly Chia-chen had stood up, and said he was going to bed. But Chih-liang hadn't the slightest intention of retiring so early. It was while Chia-chen was making his bed that a knock at the door came to their ears. Chia-chen was out in the compound in three strides, opened the gate and talked softly with the caller, a young

student in uniform. In a second Chia-chen had returned and apologetically informed Chih-liang that he was spending the night outside

“Bad news?” Chih-liang had inquired nervously.

Chia-chen shook his head, and answered in the negative. After saying good-night, he stepped over the high threshold, and left with the student. Chih-liang had followed them to the gate, which he carefully barred before returning to the room.

He heaved a deep sigh, as if fatigued after a tedious long journey, and aimlessly paced the floor for a short while. Apparently remembering some important thought, which seemed knocking at his chest for an outlet, he abruptly returned to his desk, took up his pen, and wrote in his diary with a shaking hand:

“Now that I’ve found her—do easy job at that—I shall never let her go. No, never! I can’t leave her alone here. I must do all I can to induce her to go away with me. I can’t bear leaving her here amidst such

danger . . . I can never go back to my solitary life . . . ”

He threw away his pen with great effort, his brow wet with sweat and his heart thumping heavily. With firm determination, he closed his diary, his palm pressed atop it.

The odour of mosquito incense gradually permeated the room. Only the chirping of the crickets beneath the stone steps under the window reverberated more distinctly in the stillness of the night.

#### IV

As the murky darkness of the night slowly changed to dawn Chih-liang was roused from his sleep by the warbling symphony of birds perched on the lungan trees outside the window. As he was lazily dropping back to slumber, the memory of a pre-arranged appointment with Ch'iu-hsing at the Women's Association for early that morning came back to his mind. He rose hurriedly, washed his face, and by seventy-three found himself at the Clock Tower.

Invigorating refreshing was the morning air and the vermilion walls of the Tower were handsomely adorned with golden sunlight. Though engrossed at the moment in lively conversation with some friends on the verandah, Ch'iu-hsing greeted him with a broad smile.

“Did you sleep well? Lonely?” she asked amiably as she ushered Chih-liang into her room.

Her questions, besides affording eloquent proof of her knowledge that Chia-chen had stayed out the previous night, strengthened his belief that perhaps they had discussed together business of considerable urgency, and he itched to learn something about it, yet he had more than an inkling that she would not confide in him even if he inquired. He did, however, ask the question, and, as was expected, she evaded the essentials in her reply, laconically saying nothing serious had happened. Dropping the matter altogether, she suggested a walk in the park, and Chih-liang took the hint complacently, and said nothing more. Down the stairs they walked together and out onto the road.

Unadulterated with dust was the morning

atmosphere and a gentle breeze softly brushed their faces as they leisurely walked along. The park was quite spacious, but at the moment presented a somewhat desolate appearance.

A number of zigzag paths lay before them, crisscrossing the park. Flanking the various roads, though not quite symmetrically planted, were many lungan trees, from which hung innumerable strings of light brownish fruit amid resplendent foliage. Tall grass in abundance gave a resemblance to a rippling sea of green.

Atop a small mound proudly stood a newly renovated pavilion, its circular columns and balustrades wearing a lustrous coating of red varnish and a monument stood guard at the entrance and of the park. Comforting quietness prevailed.

"You never expected to find such a quiet place here, did you?" she asked, turning her head, while they were walking along a narrow path in single file. The question was accompanied by a visibly cheeky smile.

"Well, one finds quiet spots everywhere," he returned in a matter-of-fact tone, feasting his eyes upon her slim waist.

“Still thinking of going back to Shanghai?” she asked, this time without turning her head.

“Umph!” he mumbled, somewhat excited over the implication of the question.

“How many more days are you going to stay here?”

“I really can’t tell yet,” he said, not without disappointment.

“Did you find life comfortable and contented in Shanghai?”

Why must she always ask him such questions, he thought. So instead of answering, he asked her: “Are you really not thinking of returning to Shanghai any more?”

“I think I shall never step on Shanghai soil again,” she replied, without the least hesitation.

Soon they reached the pavillion and sat down face to face on one of the balustrades, refreshing themselves with lungan fruits, strings of which they had picked from the trees on the way.

“Tell me, Chih-liang, am I not living a happy life?” She smiled, her mouth busy munching a lungan fruit.



"Ah! Only now will I concede you an affirmative answer."

"What about comparison? Happier now, or before?"

"Umph!" was all he said. Once again he felt acutely the weight of loneliness in his heart, and asked:

"Ch'iu-hsing, you just said you might never again visit Shanghai. Why?"

"Oh, it was just a slip of the tongue. No one can really foresee what the future has in store."

Suddenly she directed with her finger Chih-liang's attention to a hill to the east, its summit looking purplish under the glaring rays of the sun. "That hill," she said.

"Lies not more than a few tens of *li* from town, an excellent place for sightseeing and excursion. Now Wang Kuo-kang makes his headquarters there."

"Wang Kuo-kang?" he echoed in dismay. "Only yesterday I heard he was bent on making an assault on this city. Don't you know?"

“Not so loud,” she cautioned, gesticulating. “This is no longer news. He may strike at any moment now, distance being no longer a deterrent.”

“What if he really means business this time?” he asked, uneasily.

Our militia units are formidable enough to give his men a real battle,” she said optimistically. “If he’s nailed down this time, he’s finished once and for all.”

“But what if he should emerge victorious?” he persisted, his distress mounting.

“In that event, everything would be lost. The bandits would just march in through the city gates without let or hindrance, and run amok. Should it happen at night, the chance for us to escape would indeed be slim. That’s why I just said I might never see Shanghai again. Wang Kuo-kang, you see, is notorious for his ruthlessness and cruelty. A friend of mine was one of the recent victims of his executioner’s sword.” Her voice and facial expression were unaffected, as if she were merely relating an old fairy tale.

"That's why I hoped you would leave here sooner," she added, in a tone of considerable concern, which stirred his heart to speedier palpitation.

'iu-hsing, let's go back to Shanghai together," he pleaded in great earnest.

She looked at him with frank surprise, utterly unfamiliar with the meaning of his entreaty.

"Anyhow you can't remain here. I won't let you make a martyr of yourself," he again begged, as if someone at that moment was snatching her away before his very eyes and was on the verge of casting her into an abyss. "A happy life awaits you in Shanghai. You may take up writing or some other work; I promise I will do all I can to make you happy. I can't let you go through this crisis here, it's not worth it." His words seemed to pour out like a torrent, and gave evidence of an eternity of loneliness and repressed love.

"I understand every word you say, but I just can't leave here," she said gently, flashing him an appreciative smile. Evidently Chih-

liang's animated speech had found an understanding heart.

She rose to her feet, cast away the accumulated lungan husks, and sat down closer to him. Holding his hand, she added: "It's not my wish either to leave here."

"Because of Chia-chen?" he asked, sadness darkening his face.

"Not exactly," she said, shaking her head. "It's true I love him, but I love my work just as much."

"There's work to do everywhere—in Shanghai for example. Why must it be this place?" he said enthusiastically, his eyes once more brightening up. A ray of hope seemed suddenly to emerge amidst a mass of dark clouds.

"But I've been happy here, don't you see?"

"Happy my eye! I don't believe you. I don't," he exploded, with mixed feelings of indignation and disappointment.

"Chih-liang, why are you taking such a deep interest only in my welfare when there are also many other of your friends here?" she asked pensively, giving him a pitying look.

"Because . . ." He stopped, looked at her, smiling sadly, and then stood up and heaved a deep sigh.

"Chih-liang, there must be something troubling you. Why do you conceal it from me? I know anyway."

"Do you know that I love you?" he blurted out, his face reddening and his heart beating furiously. Standing before her, he stared at her face with wide open eyes, and unmindful of what effect his daring declaration might have produced, he took her hand in his and sat down at her side.

"Yes, I do. But what's the use?" she said after a pause, her face serene, her hand still in his. "We're past that stage now, and cannot just live on love." Then slowly withdrawing her hand, she suggested that they change the subject.

"But think of me," he obstinately stuck to the topic, albeit in a voice of despair. "I shudder to think of returning to my solitary life, a kind of desert loneliness, fruitless anticipation . . . Oh, you wouldn't understand."

“What difference would it make if I did? Anyway, we’ve lived two different kinds of life which can never harmonize even under the same environment,” she explained, half reproachfully and half sorrowfully. “Soon enough you’ll forget everything you said today, and, more, you are destined to become a great writer.”

He jumped to his feet, came over to her side, and once more held her hand. “Aren’t you going to forgive me?” he said miserably. “How can you poke fun at me now? You still hate me, don’t you?”

“Why should I hate you,” she smiled, “and what makes you think of forgiveness? You ought to know by now that both Chen (short for Chia-chen) and I regard your welfare with the greatest solicitude. Only . . .”

The name Chen stung his heart, while the word ‘only’ hinted at the futility of continuing the conversation in the same strain. He lost heart, and loosening his grip on her hand, he turned round and paced back and forth in silence.

“Chih-liang!” she called. He instinctively

answered and turned around again to face her. "Forget everything, will you?" she implored, "any further thought on this subject will only add misery to your life."

"I guess you're right," he murmured repentantly. He felt as if a screen enveloped his eyes, and though he was now gazing into the far horizon, he could see nothing but the image of her face. "Yes, it's I, and not you, who have changed beyond recognition," he said raising his voice. "Still, don't you realize that the kind of sacrifice you are prepared to make is useless? That hill over there; Wang Kuo-kang; that ill-lit room of yours; your strenuous travail—what's the good of it all? It's only futile self-destruction: something to be forgotten by posterity and benefiting no one in particular . . ."

"I seek no remembrance by posterity," she interrupted. "I am contented with my work, and that's what counts." She threw away the lungan branches, slowly moved over to his side and locked her arm in his. "Let's not talk about this any more."

Then with her finger she directed Chih-

liang's attention to the panorama before them; she said that the streets, houses, and people might be strange to him but she simply adored them with a feeling of attachment that was beyond description. Despite what she had gone through the last time Wang Kuo-kang occupied the city—how cruel he was to the people, and how she had seen him ride in a palanquin to the Temple of Wu to worship Kwan Ti, and that all his bodyguards carried huge executioner's swords—she said she had never given a single thought to the question of personal safety.

“But it's different now,” Chih-liang interrupted. What she had just said, though in a tranquil tone, created in his mind a state of horror, and he thought: “If it were true that Wang Kuo-kang has had liaison with certain quarters inside the city here, the militiamen would be no match for him, and the consequences would be unthinkable.” Pertinaciously he revived his plea that she, and also Chia-chen, should go to Shanghai with him.

Emotions overpowered her. She leaned closer to his side, smiling affectionately. Her



eyes, now moist with glittering tears, sent forth a shining light that seemed to have the immediate effect of cheering Chih-liang's downcast countenance.

"I appreciate your consideration," she whispered, "but being here doesn't necessarily mean exposure to danger. Furthermore, you and I have gone through harder times. Remember?" While still talking Ch'iu-hsing espied Chia-chen and a friend coming in their direction, and she mentioned to Chih-liang that there was an old friend of his approaching whom he would be glad to meet again. "Let's hurry down to meet them," she said. Chih-liang heard her, but remained still until she dragged him by the arm.

The friend with Chia-chen, a middle-aged man with a dark face, almost purple, was a former colleague of Chih-liang, named Wei-teh. The passing of years had not changed him much, except for a few more wrinkles on his broad brow and a few more hairs above his wide mouth which he called a moustache.

"Long have we been waiting to welcome you

in our midst," Wei-teh greeted him, extending his hand. "But why did you choose now, of all times, to pay us this visit?"

Chih-liang was at a loss as to how to reply appropriately to such greetings. He merely exchanged a few words of the conventional civilities. While they talked, Chia-chen moved to Ch'iu-hsing's side and whispered something into her ear without being noticed by the other two. She nodded, excuse herself and hurriedly made her way down the hill. Chih-liang was still conversing with Wei-teh, but at the same time he could not help stealing a few glances in the direction of the departing figure.

## V

Wei-teh, known for his punctuality in keeping appointments, had not turned up for dinner at 6:45 the next evening at Chia-chen's home although 6 o'clock had been the hour agreed upon. Chia-chen, presuming that something must have happened, suggested that they—Chih-liang, Ch'iu-hsing and himself—begin their meal.

Suddenly, before they were half through the dinner, there came a loud knock at the gate.

Chia-chen's guess was correct—the caller was not Wei-teh but a young student. He entered in a flurry, panting breathlessly, and his face was plainly disturbed. Planting himself by the side of the table and casting a fleeting glance at Ch'iu-hsing and Chih-liang, he reported to Chia-chen in the native dialect that Wei-teh wished them to attend an emergency meeting at the school.

“What has happened?” Ch'iu-hsing inquired, also speaking in the native dialect. The situation was none too hopeful, the student gravely replied, and, his mission ended, he excused himself as he said he had to run along on further important errands.

Silence reigned as the three of them finished their dinner hurriedly, and in great haste Ch'iu-hsing removed the dishes to the kitchen. While cleaning up the table, Chia-chen informed Chih-liang that he and Ch'iu-hsing would be out all night, and before Chih-liang had time to reply, Ch'iu-hsing came back from the kitchen and lost

no time in advising him to leave the city tomorrow.

"Is it necessary?" Chih-liang wondered, but the restlessness that hung over her usually calm face told him his fears were justified. Realizing the situation was nearing a crisis, his objection to leaving town began to weaken, yet he knew full well that the others would not flinch from risk under any circumstances; a feeling also came over him that the parting would be unbearable. She was now standing before him once more her calm self, and her appearance gave the impression that nothing really serious was going to happen.

However, Chia-chen broke the silence, and said: Truly the situation looks bad," his face beginning to betray signs of agitation, "both Ch'iu-hsing and I wouldn't like to see you involved in this predicament."

"But what about you two?" Chih-liang quickly rejoined.

"You needn't worry about us," Ch'iu-hsing put in, "so long as you get away from here safely."

Chih-liang stared at her absently, raking his brains for a relevant reply, but his mind was confused. He thought to himself: "Why am I considered as different from them?"

While Chih-liang was wavering in a state of indecision, Chia-chen said to Ch'iu-hsing it was time they started for the school and let Chih-liang have a chance to rest. But no, Chih-liang would not stay behind under any consideration; a little too lonesome, he said, and volunteered to accompany them. Chia-chen acquiesced.

The slate road resounded with the monotonous cadence of their feet keeping in step. It was evening, quiet but not completely dark, and not another soul was to be seen along the road: a quietness that was almost terrifying. The rustle of trees in the wind produced a low hissing sound; crickets, making their homes in chinks on the slate road, chirped dismally to the accompaniment of the barking of dogs in the distance. Ch'iu-hsing was walking between Chih-liang and Chia-chen, but suddenly from one of the side alleyways a black dog sprang out, barking madly at them from behind. They

immediately shifted their positions to single file, with Ch'iu-hsing leading the way and Chih-liang in the rear trying to scare off the cur, but in vain. Soon two other dogs joined in the chorus.

The endless barking in the stillness of the night seemed to fill the air with electricity and increase their feelings of impending danger, particularly Chih-liang's. His heart was leaping vigorously, as if a reign of terror was at hand.

Why do they bark so fiercely tonight?" he asked nervously.

"Oh, they bark every night," Ch'iu-hsing explained. "Only tonight, I don't know why, they make one's flesh creep"

"Naturally, you wouldn't stand for such a thing in Shanghai," Chia-chen said to Chih-liang, "but here it's nothing extraordinary."

A different world greeted them as they came to the main street. The mongrels were no longer at their heels. All around them were jostling pedestrians and the shops were ablaze with lights, with militiamen efficiently patrolling the streets. Many fashionably dressed girls—women of easy

virtue no doubt—were seen riding by in rickshaws. Everything seemed to be going on normally.

All of a sudden the sound of a bugle was heard. Salesmen crowded in the shop entrances, and all activity in the street seemed suddenly to come to a halt to allow a company of militiamen, some 100 strong, march past.

“Is that all?” Chih-liang asked in apprehension.

“Certainly not,” Chia - chen said, “the militia corps is a much bigger force than that. The main units are already at the front.”

The school was housed in what was once an old temple, with the front hall renovated to serve as an auditorium and the flats on both sides as class-rooms. The whole campus was in darkness with the exception of the auditorium which was lighted with a large kerosene lamp. In his deep bass voice Wei-teh was addressing the student assembly.

From the darkness a young woman came forward to meet the new arrivals in the

compound, and without wasting time with conventional etiquette she led Ch'iu-hsing by the arm to one of the many rooms at the back. Around a table were already seated six or seven persons, all with serious faces, talking almost in whispers. On the table stood a small kerosene lamp, its wick turned low.

Into an adjoining room Chih-liang was ushered, while Chia-chen remained with the group at the table. Left alone in semi-darkness, and hearing the muttered conversation in progress in the next room, Chih-liang could not help but prick up his ears. He listened attentively, but the best he could do was to catch a few words here and there; it was impossible for him to learn the subject of discussion and, besides, the muffled utterances were occasionally drowned by Wei-teh's obstreperous oratory in the assembly hall.

Just then a soft feminine voice seized his attention, a voice spoken between the teeth but recognizable as Ch'iu-hsing's. For quite a while she spoke, though the meaning of her address was unintelligible. Shortly afterwards another



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familiar voice was heard, that of Chia-chen, but he seemed to have little to say.

Again he heard Ch'iu-hsing's voice, but despite his attentive ears he still failed to make head or tail of what was being said.

Impatient suspense gripped him as he laboured vainly to fathom the significance of the emergency meeting being held so near and yet so far from him. Only a wall stood between him and the the others, yet he was denied even the privilege of listening to the discussion of the burning question of the hour. One thing, however, he was able to realize: it was that the attitude of the conferees was calm and tense, and that when it came to the question of sacrifice not one of them was a quitter. That indeed was inspiring.

From the poorly lit room he looked out into a wall of darkness. Mosquitoes and other insects hummed annoyingly round him. Alone he sat, sorely depressed and with his nerves on edge. Time seemed to drag, and the conspicuous contrast of the neighbouring room—teeming with life, and with people bound together by a

common cause, equally willing to face hazards and dangers as to attend a banquet—aroused in him a sense of unspeakable shame.

Soon the student assembly was over, and Wei-teh shifted his rostrum to the emergency meeting, which also was adjourned a few minutes later. Before the conference dispersed, Chih-liang had heard Wei-teh, Ch'iu-hsing and Jo each speak once in the order stated. Jo was the girl who first greeted Ch'iu-hsing a short time before when they came into the school, and whom Chih-liang had met once at Ch'iu-hsing's home.

Chih-liang finally heard the door open, and the five conferees filed out past Chih-liang without even looking into the room, as if they had utterly forgotten his existence. Only after a short while did Ch'iu-hsing return and apologize for having kept him waiting so long.

"It doesn't matter," Chih-liang replied almost jubilantly, instantly forgetful of the mental depression. "How was the meeting?"

She told him that there were rumours galore, but there might be nothing to them. She was

standing in front of the table, looking straight at Chih-liang, who stood half-leaning against the back of a chair.

“Promise me you’ll leave here tomorrow, will you?” she said, with a deep sigh.

His demand for an explanation only met with the same reply which had been given him a dozen times before—their concern over his personal safety. He, too, counter-asked a question that had been many times repeated: “But what about yourselves?”

“Ours is an entirely different case, don’t you see?” she explained straightforwardly. “Since we have chosen this place as the field of our work, we’ll have to accept the consequences. We’re not leaving anyway, and we have no complaints to make.” Her eyes danced brightly as she spoke.

Mixed feelings rose within him. Fear, because of his solicitude for her welfare amid such ugly circumstances; and disappointment, because of the manifest dividing line which they had drawn between them and him.

“In that event,” Chih-liang asked, unable

any longer to conceal his growing suspicion that she must have a very low opinion of him, "do you regard me as a selfish and egoistic person? Do you think that I could leave here with a light heart, while all of you are in such a precarious position?" His face reddened with self-inflicted humiliation, his eyes riveted on her face, as if he thought she would evaporate into thin air at the slightest relaxation of his gaze.

"Nobody ever said you were selfish," said Chia-chen who had just come in unnoticed. Chih-liang turned round in astonishment. "You are a guest here, don't you understand, Chih-liang? Safely you came, and in the same way we want you to leave. Besides, what's the use of you staying here?"

"Can't I be of any help?" Chih-liang inquired, hope once more showing in his pleading eyes.

"It's too late now," Ch'iu-hsing said, taking up the question. "You see, we hoped for a long time that you would join us, but not at such a time as this."

The sound of a bugle from the distance reverberated in the stillness of the night.

"It's time you escorted Chih-liang home," Chia-chen said to Ch'iu-hsing. "I'm spending the night at the Labour Union." Both Chih-liang and Ch'iu-hsing assented.

"Chih-liang is leaving by tomorrow morning's train," Chia-chen added decisively, still talking to Ch'iu-hsing, as if he were giving orders. "I'll come to the station to see him off."

"We'll accompany you to the Union. We're going your direction anyway," Ch'iu-hsing said to Chia-chen intimately, her eyes looking at his sober face affectionately. Chia-chen voiced no objection, and Chih-liang tagged along, a mute companion for the time being.

From every dormitory shone a light. Evidently the students were busy packing their things in readiness to go to the country for special work in this time of crisis, as had been arranged at the emergency meeting. Wei-teh had not yet returned.

Crack! The sharp report of a rifle rent the air as they approached the school entrance.

They were taken aback, having no idea where it came from. Dead stillness prevailed everywhere. No more firing was heard, and Chia-chen to ease the anxiety suggested that the firing must have been the result of some militiamen's careless handling of a rifle.

The open field in front of the school gate was as silent as a grave. In the cloudless sky the Great Bear was visible and served as an excellent guide. After cutting through a field, they entered a narrow alleyway, and following this they reached the street where they met Wei-teh and Jo.

"Street traffic has been stopped, and no one is allowed to pass now," Wei-teh gravely informed them. Even Chia-chen's usually placid face became perturbed.

"But I've got to get to the Labour Union, where I have urgent business to attend to," he said excitedly.

"You may be able to get through, but I think tomorrow would be a better time to go," Wei-teh advised him. Chia-chen was tenacious, insisting he must go right then.

"You two had better spend the night at the school, and I'll come to see you tomorrow," Chia-chen said to Ch'iu-hsing and Chih-liang, and proceeded on his way.

They made no attempt to stop him. Ch'iu-hsing watched him go in silence, but suddenly she called him back. Chia-chen halted and turned round. "You take this with you," she said, offering him a flashlight. Chia-chen said it wasn't necessary, and continued walking.

Being a witness to such a scene, Chih-liang could not prevent the tears surging into his eyes. "Why didn't you stop him, knowing he might be walking straight into trouble?" he questioned softly.

"Oh, that is nothing," Ch'iu-hsing replied, "since he has the will to do what he considers is his duty." Her voice was calm, but when her face was turned in his direction, tears could clearly be seen. Her gaze, however, was firm, penetrating the moisture in her eyes. Perturbation was his first reaction, because he had thus far dismally failed to fathom the depth of her soul. As they were walking across an open field

on their way back, the tragic picture of her firm shining eyes not only showed vividly before him but reached down into his innermost heart.



# 星

海風微微地吹過島上，把日裏剩下的熱氣全吹走了。夜晚是很靜寂的。全個島落在一層柔軟的黑暗的網裏。只有深藍色的天空中閃耀着無數的明星，這裏的星似乎比在別地方都明亮。人們常常這樣說：白天是太陽使這個島特別光亮，夜裏是星子使這個島特別燦爛。

燈光漸次地滅了。一些建築稀落的聳立在黑暗裏，被茂盛的樹木掩護着。路是幾條螺旋形的山路，交纏着，從巖石般的山頂上蜿蜒地伸下來，到了下面的一層便是比較熱鬧的街市，這時沿街의商店已經大半關了門。路再伸出去，那外面一層，靠着碼頭一帶，便是幾家旅館，都是些三層的樓房，從那些新式窗戶裏射出來較多的燈光在海面上。

海上是一片黑暗。海水似乎靜靜地睡了。一二十隻空的小船連接地泊在這些建築的下面。碼頭上只有幾盞冷清清的電燈光照着那空闊的微溼的石板路。幾個舟子把船靠在岸邊，自己坐在船頭打盹，等候着深夜過海的客人。

平靜的海面忽然微微動起來，濺水聲和搖櫓聲從遠處逼近了。一隻小船一搖一擺地向着碼頭駛來。先前寂寞地打盹的舟子都帶了興味地向那邊望着。他們的船也跟着海水一偏一斜地在動，直到來船逼近，那舟子打起了招呼，他們便起來，把船撥開一點。給來船讓了一條路，使牠在石板路旁邊停住了。

一個戴白通帽的長身材的青年客人從船上大步走上岸。他把托在手腕上的學生服穿在身上，一面扣着鈕子，默默地彎進了裏面的街道。

碼頭旁邊那家較大的旅館的二樓上，兩扇靠左的通洋臺的玻璃門突然開了。接着洋臺上現了一個半身的人影，這也是一個青年，穿了一件翻領襯衫，披着一頭亂髮，有一張略帶青黃色的長臉。

這青年把身子倚着洋臺的欄杆，擡起眼睛望望天空，又埋下頭看看海，然後再仰頭去看天。他把那許多星子望了一會，他覺得他和牠們十分熟習，便親切地自語道：『這些星全沒有改變，只是更明亮一點。』剛說完這話他就覺得一種感情猛烈地從心底升了起來，他望着星，不覺低低喚出了一個人的名字，他把手用力壓着那欄杆的冷酷的水門汀扶手，他覺得他的眼睛潤溼了，他想忍住那眼淚。他沒有聽見外面

的叩門聲。直到房門開了，一個人的腳步聲在房裏響起來時，他纔略帶點驚訝地掉轉身子。

來的就是剛纔過海來的那個青年，白通帽還拿在手裏，三角形的臉上帶着快樂的微笑。兩個人對望了片刻，最後還是主人跑了過去一把握着客人的手，緊緊握了一會兒，纔斷續地說：

『家楨……你居然……來了！我等了……這許久……我到處找你……打聽你的消息……』他這時高興得又快要流淚了。他慢慢地鬆了手。叫做家楨的客人雖也很高興，卻不十分激動，這時便平靜地回答道：『我早就想來看你。你的信是接到了的，而且你到這里來，報上也登載過消息。……志良，你現在是文學家了。』

家楨的最後一句話像針似的在志良的腦裏刺了一下，他把眉頭微微一皺，他不知道家楨是否有意把牠說出來的。但看見家楨的臉上帶着平靜的微笑，不像有一點惡意，他便靜下心來，責備似地笑着說：

『你真正豈有此理！一見面就挖苦我。我想，過了這幾年你也該寬恕我了。』

『我挖苦你？你不是一個名人嗎？』家楨好意地哂笑來起。他把右手在志良的肩頭拍了兩下，親切地

望着志良，用一個上了年紀的人對年青朋友說話的神氣繼續說道：

『你並沒有什麼大改變，人稍微瘦了一點，額上多了兩條皺紋。我常常聽到人說起你，我也讀過你寫的東西……我很奇怪你會寫出那樣的東西！……』

志良聽見家楨提起他的作品，就不自主地馬上紅了臉，連忙打斷家楨的話頭說：『不要只圖說話。我們先坐下再說。在洋臺上坐，好不好？』他不等家楨回答就端了一把椅子到外面去。家楨看見這情形，便放下帽子，也幫着再端了一把椅子放在洋臺上。

兩人在洋臺上坐了。兩人都覺得有許多話要說，一時卻不知道從何處說起，就把眼睛擡起去看對面。對面只是黑黝黝的幾個荒島的影子，那個熱鬧的都市從這裡是看不見的。海上很靜。他們又擡起眼睛去看天。天空卻不會休息，每個星都在飛動。那一天的星子繫住了他們的眼光。

家楨先把眼光埋下來看他的朋友的帶了幻夢的表情的臉，一面平靜地問道：『志良，你在想什麼？你從前似乎不曾有過這樣子。』

志良略略現出驚訝的表情，埋下頭來看了家楨一眼，又把眼光掉開去，淡淡地說：『我沒有想什麼。』

過後他又掉過臉看家楨，換了語調說：『你們也太狠心了。這幾年爲什麼連信息也不給我一個？我知道你們很忙，但是寫幾個字也花不了什麼工夫。』

家楨誠實地微微笑了，他依舊平靜地答道：『你固然說得不錯。然而我們就通個信息，又有什麼用處？我們的環境不同了。這幾年來你一天一天地往上面爬。我還是從前那樣子……』家楨的話都是無心地說出來的，卻很使志良的心發痛，他覺得每一句話都是在刺他，他不能忍耐地聽下去，他想起從前的事情心裏還有些難過，就打岔道：

家楨，你不應說這樣的話，從前的一切我都記得很清楚，這幾年我就沒有忘記過你們，只是你們把我忘在腦後了。我寫過好幾封信你們都不理我。』

家楨似乎知道了志良的心理；便帶着誠實的微笑分辯道：『我們何曾就把你忘掉過？我們時時都記起你的。而且你是不容易被人忘掉的。刊物上常常有你的文章，我們也常常聽見人談起你的名字……』他接着連忙說一句解釋的話：『你不要誤會我又在挖苦你，我說的是真話。』

『名字……文章，這些有什麼用處？』志良接口自語似地嘆息說，他的面容微微陰暗一下。他不願意

把這時的臉色給家楨看見，便掉頭去看天空的星，他的心跳動得很厲害，他沒法使牠平靜。最後他失掉了控制自己的力量，他忍不住猛然轉過頭去問道：『家楨，你說秋星現在怎樣了？她好嗎？』

家楨聽見志良的顫抖的聲音，看見志良的激動的表情，起初有點驚訝，但過後也就明白了。他知道志良從前和秋星也很要好。他以為志良已經把秋星忘掉了，現在看見志良的神情，知道她的影象還在攪動志良的心，他覺得很窘，想告訴志良一件事情，但又不由得對志良起了一點同情，便不忍多說話，只是安慰似地說：『她很好，我們常常在一起的。其實你還記着她幹什麼？』他對志良溫和地笑了一笑，但他自己覺得這笑容是很勉強的。

志良不作聲了，他默默地望了望天空，過了一會忽然半吞半吐地說：『家楨，你可以帶我去看她嗎？』他並不掉頭去看家楨。他想裝出平靜的樣子，然而聲音的顫抖洩漏出了他內心的激動。

『這有什麼不可以。』家楨覺得有點難於回答，便勉強笑了一下。『不過我想你最好還是不要去看她。你看了她於你於她都沒有什麼好處。』

志良失了鎮靜，他掉過頭用祈求的眼光看家楨，

忘了自己似地興奮地說：『你一定要帶我去看她。我一定要看她，我有許多話要和她說。你知道我跑到這裡來就是爲着來找尋她。』他眼光閃閃地望着家楨，急切地等候着家楨的回答。

家楨憐憫似地望着志良，略一遲疑，便溫和地安慰道：『不要着急，她會來看你。』他站起來帶着沈思的樣子走了兩步，掉轉身子，背向着海和天，身子靠在欄杆上面，充分地顯出了他的身子的長度。

『她會來看我？』志良驚喜地問道。他激動地望着家楨的帶了溫和的表情的臉，他還不能夠馬上就相信那句話。『她在什麼地方？她現在在什麼地方？』他接連地問着。

家楨把臉掉向外面看了看，立刻掉回來，咬了咬嘴皮，捺住感情淡漠似地說：『她就在對岸，我和她一起來的。』

『那麼她爲什麼不和你一道來？』志良覺得心裏一陣暖熱，彷彿那顆心就要從胸膛裏跳出來，他不能夠再控制他的聲音，讓牠猛烈地顫抖着，幾乎使他變成口吃了。『她讀到我的那些信嗎？』

『她全讀過了，』家楨平靜地點點頭。過後他慢慢地解釋說：『她在那邊有事情。所以讓我一個人來

看你。她也許明後天會來看你，她一定會來的。」

志良滿意地躺在椅子上，他的激動的紅臉露了光彩而微微地笑了。他沒有注意到家楨的從上面射下來的沈重的眼光。他的眼睛夢幻地望着海和天，其實都不是，他所看見的是他的過去和她的過去。忽然他醒過來了，他帶笑地絮絮地問家楨：

『她沒有改變罷：我還記得她那樣子：那張孩子般新鮮的橢圓臉，那一雙鳳眼，那兩道細眉，那一個玉石鑿成的鼻子，那一張小嘴，說起話來，是那麼明白，清脆。』他極力在回憶中描繪秋星的面貌。『你還記得罷，因為她身材苗條腰身很細，我們常常和她開玩笑，叫她做馬蜂。……』

家楨靜靜地聽着志良的話。他幾次想笑，又想大聲嘆息，都極力忍住了。最後他聽到「馬蜂」兩個字就忍耐不住笑出聲來。他用笑來掩飾心裏的複雜的感情，一面還說：『這叫做三句話不離本行。你又在寫小說了，你應該把這些話留給你的讀者聽。』

他便轉過身子去看海，海平靜地躺在他的下面，沒有一點波浪。碼頭邊起了一陣少女的笑聲，三個像是賣藝的女郎穿着三種顏色的短衫長褲，從划子走上岸來，三個人揮舞着綢傘，有說有笑地往裏面走去



了。家楨憂鬱地笑了笑，便轉過身子去看志良。

家楨的話並不會使志良掃興，他還在腦裏描繪未來的景象。他是一個小說家，他知道怎麼創造背景和創造故事，他這時候甚至爲自己創造了一個未來的生活，並不去管這是否有實現的可能。他看見家楨轉過身子來看他，便得意地說：『我知道她會來的。』

家楨看見這情形，他的心被攪亂了。他知道志良的希望，這是他初來這裏時所不曾料想到的。他相信志良的快樂是真誠的，唯其如此他卻不願意在志良的興頭上去澆冷水了。然而他又不能夠忘掉他的來意，他覺得他應該說出他預備的那番話。他思索了片刻，便走到椅子前面，坐下去，換了一個嚴肅的表情，但依舊用溫和的聲音對志良說：

『志良，我們談句正經話。我問你，你這幾年究竟過得快活不快活？』

『你爲什麼問這樣的話？』志良詫異地望着家楨，看見家楨的嚴肅的表情，更有些莫名其妙了。

『你回答我：你是不是真正快活，像你在文章裏所表現的那樣？』家楨依舊帶了莊重的樣子說話。

志良點了點頭，低聲答道：『我想是真的。』

『我總覺得這有些勉強，』家楨說了這一句，看

見志良要插嘴，便做手勢阻止他，一面接連地說下去：『你不要打岔，且等我說。我們這幾年並不是不關心你。你的文章我們差不多全讀過。我們有時也打聽過你的消息。我們覺得你和我們是一天天離遠了。』

『這是免不掉的事情，』志良終於打岔說。『不過我也並非有意的。我得說句實話：我不能夠再相信你們那種辦法。我只得走我自己的路。』志良的態度是很誠懇的。他起勁地說話，好像要用力把他的話打進聽話的人的腦子裏似的。

家楨默默地站起來，咬着嘴脣皮，把身子靠在欄杆上，依舊是背向着海和天。他的眼光看下去，定在志良的開始被苦澀的表情把快樂趕走了的臉上，沈重地說：

『你不覺得你的文章裏缺少什麼東西嗎？你自己的路，那是什麼路？在你的文章裏只有哲學，只有漂亮的警句。你的文章裏使你顯得比你本來更聰明。一般的讀者會相信你成功了。但是，志良，只是我們，你的老朋友，我們知道你是無路可走了。……我是爲了這個來看你的。』

這些都是志良沒有想到的話，然而卻是他怕聽

的，現在清朗地在他的耳邊響了，不僅在他的耳邊而且還在他的心上響了。他苦悶地看着志良，忽然覺得那一個大的影子威壓地壓在他的身上，他的心開始不安起來，他掙扎似地回答道：

『你還是不了解我，你還是和從前一樣地不了解我。我離開你們並不是害怕犧牲什麼。但是你不覺得你們那些犧牲都是徒然無益的嗎？我們既然可以做一點別的比較有益的事情，爲什麼不做？所以我離開了你們。……』一陣感情的波動壓倒了他，他不能夠接着說下去。

家楨並沒有大的激動，他帶着憐惜的微笑看志良，他甚至用了平靜的聲音說：『你以爲那些讀者會比我們更了解你嗎？……我知道，你的思想我很知道。你會說，一切只要讓牠慢慢地自然發展，要用人力去推動，是不行的；還有知識是最要緊的東西，所以應當喚醒愚昧。你這樣離開了我們，開始了你的文學生涯。你到處發表你的教訓，闡明你的哲學。然而結果呢？現在連你自己也不相信你的教訓，你的哲學了，你只是在美麗的文字裏打轉。你那內心的空虛我是看得出來的。你極力在你的文章裏面表示你很快樂。然而你的文章裏面隱藏着的憂鬱而絕望的調子。

只有我一個人知道。……你不要強辯，你且說句真話，你是不是覺得缺少什麼東西？』

志良注意地聽着這些話，起初他幾次想打岔家楨他那時紅着臉現了氣憤的樣子，他覺得家楨故意在挖苦他。後來他的臉色漸漸變成了青白色，好像一股憂愁的風吹到了他的臉上，又像他的心底的祕密被人揭發了出來。他想鎮靜自己，不讓家楨知道他這時在想些什麼，但是他的思想亂了，他不能控制自己，便爆發似地責備說：『這和你又有什麼關係？我們分別了幾年一見面你就拿那些話來逼我？你以為我就會跟你回到你們那裏去嗎？你不要做夢！』他也站起來，走進房裏去煩躁地在屋子裏踱了幾轉，又走出來把身子靠在欄杆上，俯下頭默默地望着海。

家楨依舊站在原處，這些時候他不曾動過一下身子。志良的話並沒有傷害到他。但是他更為志良感到苦痛了。不過他和別人不同，他把一切都隱藏在心裏，在可能範圍內不肯讓什麼來攪亂他的平靜的面貌。所以他只把眉頭微微一皺，就默默地注視着志良的舉動，等到志良站到他的身邊，過了半晌，他纔轉動身子同情地叫了一聲：『志良。』

志良掉過頭來，兩個人的眼睛對望着，志良覺得

受不住家楨的注視，便又把臉掉開去望天。家楨立刻把一隻手壓在志良的膀子上，用弟兄一般的口吻說：

『你知道我不是來和你爭吵的。我們依舊和從前一樣地關心你。我讀你的文章，我比你的一切的讀者更明白你，所以我替你擔心。倘使你不相信我，反正我還有別的事情，我馬上就要走了，我以後不會再來麻煩你。』

這幾句話一直進到了志良的心深處，把他大大地感動了。他想起了從前的事情，那時他和家楨和別的朋友在一起生活，他們兩個的感情特別好，還有另一個女朋友秋星，她和他們兩個都很好，他們過得像兄弟姊妹一樣。然而後來他的思想漸漸地變了。最後他們應該到某一個都市去，他一個人卻留着不肯走，開始了他的新的生涯，於是他成了一個小說家。新的朋友和新的環境阻止了他和他們接觸，他以為他已經忘掉了他們。然而秋星的印象卻漸漸地在他的腦裏浮現出來。

他沒有東西可以用來消除她，結果那影象就盤據了他的心，使他甚至於趕到這地方來找尋她。現在家楨來了，而且告訴了她的消息。家楨的面貌和談話使他回憶起了從前的生活和友情。他們的會面在他是

很可寶貴的。家楨現在說要走，以後也許不會再來。他還能夠拿那些爭吵來毀壞他們的友情嗎？他覺得他先前錯了。他還沒有詢問過他們的生活情形呢，那應該是他最關心的。他想到這裏便猛然抓住了家楨的一隻膀子，懇切地帶了點悔恨地祈求說：

『家楨，你不能够馬上就走。你不要介意我先前的話。我的心亂得很。我們且坐下，慢慢地細談，我這裏也有地方給你睡。你告訴我，你這幾年怎樣生活的。還有關於秋星的事情，你得詳細告訴我。你知道我很關心她，還是和從前一樣地關心她。』他的聲音抖得很厲害，還拖了長的餘音在後面，好像這幾年來的寂寞，跟着他的話在房間裏呻吟。

家楨不答話，也不走，他默默地擡頭把天空望了一會，其實他看見的並不是天，卻是志良的臉。他知道自己心裏有兩個念頭在激鬪。他後來勉強回復了平靜的心境，甚至故意用一種淡漠的聲音說：

『志良，我告訴你一個消息：我和秋星已經同居了。』

志良呆呆地望着家楨，好像沒有聽懂他的話，過了半晌，他纔紅着臉掙出一句：『真的？我倒沒有想到！他覺得自己再沒有力量支持下去了，便走到椅子

面前，坐下去。他不敢看家楨的臉，卻自語似地低聲說：『你爲什麼不早說？』

家楨這些時候連志良的一點小舉動也沒有放過。他的銳利的眼光是能夠明察一切的。他起先下了打擊，現在卻來看效果，這效果，是他早料到的，但他卻也被感動了。到了該他開口說話的時候，他也只能夠自語似地低聲回答了一句：『我想你並不關心。』

志良很注意地聽了這句話，他也不分辯。他默默地擡頭望那天空。天幕上依舊閃耀着那麼多的明星。可是他卻覺得牠們現在完全是陌生的，而且漸漸地黯淡了。他好像在做夢，這晚上的事情完全是他想不到的。然而家楨的影子突然來遮了他的眼睛。他覺醒似地掉過眼睛看家楨，恰恰碰見家楨的同情的眼光。他笑了，他自己又覺得他哭了。他不能自主地問道：

『我還可以和她見面嗎？』

『爲什麼不可以？志良，你怎麼會說出這樣的話？』家楨感動地說，他充滿了友情地拍一下志良的肩膀。『我不是告訴過你，她會來看你嗎？我們還希望你能夠和我們在一起住些時候。』他遲疑一下，看見志良不答話，便繼續說：『我看你樣子很疲倦，應該休息了。我現在要走了。我明天和秋星來看你。』

他說完話，不等志良挽留，就急急走進屋裏，取了帽子戴在頭上，跨着大步走出了房間。

志良惶惑地望着家楨的背影在門外消失了，他並不動一下身子。

夜漸漸涼起來，房間突然顯得空闊而冷靜了。

## 二

志良一夜盡做奇怪的夢。第二天他還沒有起牀，旅館的侍役就送了一封信來，他拆開看，是家楨寫的信。

『秋星一早來了一個電話，她回去了，不能來看你。我打算搭今天十二點鐘的汽車回去。倘使你要去看她，可以和我同車去。我在車站等你。』

後面還註明到汽車站去的路線。

他連忙跳下牀來，看表，知道已經過了十點鐘，就急急穿好衣服，把東西略略收拾一下交代給了侍役。過後他一個人挾了一個皮包出去，匆匆忙忙地走到碼頭，雇了一隻划子，往對岸駛去。

到了對岸，他又看表，知道時間不很充裕了，就不再停留，馬上雇人力車到汽車站去，許多車夫圍着他兜生意，但是他們都不懂普通話。他沒法使他們知



道他要到什麼地方。這樣爭執了一些時候，最後他碰見了一個中學生，他便請那個年青人替他雇好了車子。等他坐車趕到車站，汽車裏已經擠滿了人，沒有座位了。

車站很小，這一條街正在修路，到處是塵土和碎石。好幾個來遲了的客人提了小行李站在車站門口。兩部空車停在對面。車站旁邊擺了好幾付賣食物的擔子，一些人圍在那里喫東西。

志良勉強擠到車上去，卻尋不着家楨，只看見無數陌生的面孔。他只得走下車來，焦急地站在車子旁邊，不知道應該怎樣做。太陽當頂地曬下來，空氣成了燒灼似的熱，周圍響着奇怪的語言，更增加了他的煩躁。汗珠不住地沿了他的臉頰流着，他的臉發燒，口也乾了。他便取下草帽當作扇子搖動了幾下，但沒有什麼用處。

於是汽車開動了。一陣塵土飛揚起來，使他不得不往後面退。他失望地看着車子轉了彎不見了，正打算進站內去問明下一班車的時刻，忽然有人在後面拍他的肩膀，他轉過身子，看見家楨提了一個包袱立在他背後。

『車子已經開了，怎麼辦？』他着急地問道。

『不要緊，對面還有一部車子，我們上去罷，』家楨安靜地回答道。

志良擡起頭去看，果然那兩部空車中，前面的一輛裏面已經坐了不少的人，他先前卻不曾注意到。這時他便跟着家楨跑過去了。

汽車裏面充滿着鬧聲和塵土，一股強烈的汗臭直往他們的鼻端撲來。這些家楨已經習慣了，志良卻不能不略略皺了一下眉頭。車上坐滿了人，靠裏邊還有一點小小的地位，家楨讓給志良坐了，卻把手裏的小包袱交給志良。

『這裏的汽車不及上海的好，你恐怕坐不慣，』家楨站在志良面前帶笑地說。

『幾個鐘頭，大概不要緊。不過車裏面悶熱得難受，』志良一面揩汗一面回答。

『開了車就不熱了，』家楨又說了一句，便等着賣票的走過來買好票子。再過片刻車子就震動起來，沿着那不很平坦的馬路走了。

汽車經過的地方在志良的眼裏都是陌生的：起初是街市，過後就進了鄉村。車子震動得很厲害，同時發出大的響聲，使得他不能夠和家楨談一句話。他便把眼睛掉去看外面。

明亮的陽光照耀着道路，一路上是紅的土塊，青的樹林，黃的田野，亮的河水。一切是明亮而新鮮。尤其是那茂盛的榕樹充分地展示了豐富的生命。志良覺得彷彿有一層陰影離開了他的身子，他是一刻比一刻地變得更年青了。

到了一個地方，車子就停下來，客人全都下車到江邊去搭小火輪，他們應該走一段路。大家都爭着往前跑。志良跑到江邊，忍不住氣咻咻地對家楨說：『這地方真好，我倒有些羨慕你們。』家楨默默地笑了一下，兩個人便走下石級，跳上了船。船不久就開動了。

這新奇的環境給了志良以新奇的感覺。他和家楨立在艙面上，以輕快的心情看前方。江面很寬，一片白茫茫的水遮住了他的視線。遠處是岸，但那里一切是模糊的。他看不清楚什麼，所以他不知道前面是個什麼樣的景象。他不覺開始幻想一些景象，但馬上一個人的面貌就浮現出來。他好像在寫一篇小說，剛描繪了背景，人物就在背景前面出現了。他的腦裏漸漸起了複雜的思想。他無意間掉過頭，看見家楨也在看江面。家楨的臉永遠是平靜的，使人不知道他心裏在想些什麼。『家楨，你和她在一起過得很快活嗎？』

志良忍不住就這樣問了。

『她，你說誰？』家楨忽然回過頭來問，他似乎並沒有聽清楚志良的問話。

志良微微紅了臉，他先前的話是不留心地說出來的，這時候他又以為家楨也許是故意這樣問他，所以有點窘，但也照直說了：『我是說你和秋星。』

『還好，』家楨簡單地答了兩個字，過後又加了一句：『當然快活。』

志良看了家楨一眼，就不再作聲了。不久船靠了岸。他們兩個急急跳上岸去，一口氣跑到車站。車子正停在那里等候客人。他們最先跳上車去搶了兩個座位。

『你看，我們這裡的生活就是充滿着鬭爭的，』家楨開玩笑似地說，於是笑了。

兩人談了幾句話。車子開動了。志良看見車子滾滾地前進着，知道他們是一刻一刻地逼近目的地了，他便想到快要和秋星見面的事情，他希望家楨多告訴他關於她的事，可是他又覺得不便多發問。他問了幾句，然而家楨的回答都是很簡單的。家楨似乎在想別的事情。所以他也就不再開口，只是默默地在腦海中細描着她的影象。

車子到了一個大站停下來，一些客人下了車，接着就上來一批新的客人。家楨下車去買了一大包點心，剛回到車上就聽見有人在下面喚他。他把點心分了些給志良，然後伸出頭去，一個穿着制服的中年人等着和他說話，那是這裏的站長。

『家楨，先前碰見秋星，知道你這班車回來。』站長用普通話說，接着他把臉挨近一點放低聲音嚴肅地問道：『你知道那邊的消息嗎？』

家楨點了點頭，沈靜地低聲答道：『我看不大要緊。』

站長小心地四面望了望，帶了點焦慮的樣子說：『民團的力量究竟單薄，倘使汪國剛真的在省城裏疏通好了。他一定會反攻的。你們要當心一點。』

『我知道，』家楨簡短地答了一句，態度還安詳，他又微微點一下頭。站長還想說話，然而車又開動了。

這些話都被坐在旁邊的志良聽進去了。他知道汪國剛是這裏一個土匪的名字，三個月前那個人還佔據着他們現在正要去的那座古城，後來被民團趕走了。他不知道汪國剛如今在什麼地方。但從站長的話看來，情勢是有些嚴重的。他的心情突然緊張起來。

他很替家楨擔心。可是他看見家楨的態度依舊很安詳，便又漸漸地鎮靜下去了。

車輪聲在炎熱的空氣裏單調地響起來。車子不停地在耀眼的紅土馬路上前進，接連地穿過幾匹新開斷了的山，許多株茂盛的榕樹和龍眼樹飛似地往後面退去了。

一切是平靜，和諧，明亮。南國的風物以牠的迷人的魔力吸引了志良的全部的注意，給他注入了愉快的思想，使他忘卻了先前聽來的話。

於是汽車進了古城，在一陣喧鬧中到了停站了。志良跟着家楨走下車來，看見鐘上的短針正指在「四」字上。四個團丁搨了槍在站上逡巡着。另外有兩三個穿制服的人俯着身子在檢查客人的大件行李。

### 三

這天晚上已經夜深了，志良還不想睡，他一個人坐在桌子前面攤開日記簿，在那上面寫道：

『呵，我到底看見她了！當我寫這些字的時候我的心還在抖動。我一想到和她見面的時刻，我覺得我的心馬上就要爆裂了。是歡樂，是怕懼，是痛苦，我說不出當時的感覺。我覺得好像完全忘掉了自己，又

好像只記着我自己一個人。

『她並沒有什麼大改變。不，她完全和從前我們分別時一樣。那眼睛，那眉毛，那嘴，那整個純潔清朗的面貌。這一年來我常常在夢裏看見的，這兩個月來我朝夕不能夠忘記的，今天終於真實地在我的眼前活動了。這會是夢麼？夢會是這麼美麗的麼？』

『我不知道應該從什麼地方寫起。似乎每一個字每一句話都要爭着先出現在紙上。我不能夠冷靜地安排文字像我平日寫小說那樣了，因為這是在寫我自己，是的，這是在寫我自己……』

他寫到這裏，心跳得更厲害了，他不能夠再寫下去，這一天的經過在他的腦裏複現了出來。一陣激情襲擊了他，他順從般地放下筆，對着面前那盞黯淡的煤油燈，從頭回憶着他這天和她見面的經過。——

他和家楨出了車站就到婦女協會去。那是在一個古舊的鐘樓上面。從那里望下去，這古城的唯一的馬路和那兩排比較繁盛的商店就豁然映入眼簾。她正靠着欄杆看望街景。他們走上樓，轉進了走廊，腳步聲送到她的耳裏，她便掉過身子來看他們。

她帶着愉快的微笑喚他的名字，向着他伸出了手。他連忙跑過去，把那隻溫軟的手握着了。他望望

她的孩子般的天真的臉，望望她的被藍色方格子布短衫裹着的苗條的身子，他望望她的星一般明朗的眼睛，半晌說不出話來。倒是她先開口問了：『你這幾年都好嗎？』……

他不覺滿足地微微笑了，似乎這屋子突然發亮起來，周圍的一切都沐浴在光明裏面。他不能自己地低聲自語道：『還是那麼清脆的聲音，還是那麼熟習。』他的聲音漸漸地高起來：『她還關心我。這些年頭她並不曾忘記我。』接着他就把這兩句寫在日記簿上，又加了一句：

『聽見她的聲音，我就像受到一次祝福。』——

回憶之幕繼續拉開，他彷彿又站在她的面前了。他望着她，差不多要流出眼淚。他掙扎了許久纔說出一個「好」字。他覺得這幾年來不斷地壓迫着他的那寂寞開始飛走了。他慢慢地放鬆她的手顫抖地問道：『你呢？』

她微笑着，像孩子般親切地答道：『我很好，我在這裏過得很快活。』她把他端詳了片刻，又說道：『你瘦了一點。這幾年你過得快活罷。我讀過你寫的那些文章，你寫得真美麗，不過……我們還是進去坐罷。』她望了望家楨，家楨笑着點了點頭。她便領着



他們進了會客室。

他們穿過會客室，進了裏面的一間屋子。她告訴他這是值日的職員住的地方。她有時就在這裏睡。他把屋子看了看：房間小，陳設很簡單，有一張牀，一張書桌，一隻櫃子，兩把椅子。她要他和家楨都坐下。他在牀前那張椅子上坐了，家楨卻站着對她說：『星，我現在到工會去。等一會你陪志良先回家，好嗎？』於是對她笑笑，又和他打個招呼，就大步走出房去。……

『她和家楨感情很好，他們還是互相愛着，』他忽然忍不住打岔似地說了，聲音裏面充滿着羨慕，又帶了點憂鬱。但回憶中的景象卻把這羨慕和憂鬱馬上驅散了。——

她倒了一杯開水放在他面前，一面關切地問道：『這幾年你就只寫文章嗎？』

他點了頭，眼睛依舊不離開她的臉。

『他們都說你成了有名的小說家。』她並不避開他的注視，安靜地走到牀邊，坐下去繼續說道。『我想你的生活應該是快活的。我和楨本來沒有功夫讀小說，但因為是你寫的東西，所以也讀了不少。不知道爲什麼緣故我總覺得你很寂寞，你並不快活。我也和

植談起過。他不滿意你的文章，他說那裏面缺少着什麼東西。』……

他想到這裏，忽然埋下頭去瘋狂似地在日記裏寫着：『她說我這幾年很寂寞，她說家植以為我的文章裏缺少着什麼東西。她知道，她應該知道。我缺少熱情，缺少愛。我渡過海來找尋她，就希望在她那里尋到這個東西。然而她現在——』他遲疑一下纔寫完這最後的一句：『不能夠把牠給我了。』

他的臉上現了一陣痛苦的痙攣，就擲了筆，把雙手蒙着臉，他希望能夠暫時忘掉自己，然而那回憶又接着來追逼他了。

『你們爲什麼這幾年不給我一個信？爲什麼我最近寫信給你們，你們也不回一個字？你們就忍心忘掉了我！』她的話使他記起了過去幾年間的生活，那似淡而實深的心的苦痛又來壓迫他，使他說了上面的話。話是平常的，但聲音裏卻帶了那麼強烈的怨憤的調子。

她驚訝地望着他，她還不大明白什麼東西在折磨他的心。她思索一下就同情地問道：『志良，你心裏有什麼事情？我想不到你會是這樣地苦惱。』

他把嘴一動，打算馬上回答她，但忽然又改變了

心思，就很勉強地對她笑了笑，搖着頭說：『沒有什麼。我很好。……』

他的思想從回憶裏跑了出來，回到日記上面，他放下蒙臉的手，拿起筆接着先前中斷的地方寫了下去：

『我沒有告訴她，我沒有對她說真話。我對她說我很好。她不會知道的，我為什麼不對她說真話呢？我為什麼不讓她知道我心裏所想的一切呢？我太懦弱了。』

他絕望地擱下筆，又沈落在回憶的海裏去了。——

她知道他沒有對她說真話，但也不再追問，便換過話題說：『我這幾年也有好幾次想給你寫信。可是事情很忙，又不知道你的生活怎樣。我又怕會給你招來麻煩。我們的環境既然不同，通些信函也沒有什麼好處。你的新朋友一定很多，你的生活也一定——』

她的話還沒有說完，就聽見外面有個女人的聲音在喚：『秋星。』她連忙站起來對他匆匆說了一句：『你等一下，我馬上回來，』就走了出去，剩下他一個人在房裏。

他聽見她在外面和人說話，他聽不清楚她在說些什麼。那聲音離他很近，他卻覺得和他隔得很遠。好像有什麼東西隔在他們中間。他第一次有了這樣的感

想，他覺得他開始發現了一件新的事情，然而這發現卻使他變得更憂鬱了。……

他又回到日記上面去，在那里寫道：

『我們中間似乎隔了一堵牆，這是無形的，我摸不着牠，但我怕我們不會再像從前那樣地互相了解了。』

他感到一陣苦痛，不能夠再寫下去，便蓋了日記簿，讓回憶之幕再拉開來。——

過了一會她拿了一束紙件進來，後面跟着一個很年青的女學生，她並不給他介紹，只顧把那紙件放進書桌抽屜裏去，另外取出一束紙件交給了女學生，女學生和她說了兩句話就出去了。她把書桌上的東西稍微整理一下，然後對他說：

『我們現在可以走了。』

『到你家去嗎？』他無心地問，便拿了他的皮包挾在左腋下。

『嗯嗯』她點一下頭就伴着他走出去。客廳裏有幾個女子在談話，看見他們便笑着打了個招呼。

他們下了樓，沿着馬路走去。街上行人不少。商店門口顧客進出不絕。人力車上坐着大肚皮的商人，被壯年的車夫慢慢地迎面拖過來，經過鐘樓下面的大

門往後面去了。幾個豔裝女子撐着花布傘，有說有笑地走在前面。他們過了一條街，在十字路口看見了警察和團丁。但市面上依舊充滿着平靜的景象。

『我萬想不到你會到這裡來，』她忽然愉快地說。『你初到這裡，也許會覺得不慣，久了你就會愛起這地方來。可惜你不能夠久住。』這時候他們走過了第二條街，就轉進了一條僻靜的巷子。是石板鋪的路，但已經破碎不平了。

『我還歡喜這地方，我也許可以多住幾天，』他聽見她的話，覺得很高興，就快活地說了。他還想說別的更重要的話，但看見她正掉頭來看他，一陣激動阻止了他的話語。

『你什麼時候回上海去？』她問道。

『不一定，現在還有點事情，』他急急地答道。

『什麼事？我可以知道嗎？』她帶笑地追問。

『我回頭慢慢和你談罷，』他有些慌張，連忙用這句話關住了門。

她用責備的眼光看他一下，依舊帶笑地說道：『你還是那種脾氣，說話總是半吞半吐的。』

他也勉強笑了，忍不住吐出了一句話：『你也和從前一樣，還是那麼可愛。』

她溫和地笑了，態度還是很平靜的。他的心却猛烈地抖動起來。

街上是那麼靜，他們走的全是僻街，再過兩條巷子就到了她的家。她在那油漆剝落的門上拍了幾下，裏面起了一個女孩的聲音。她和那女孩隔着門說了兩句話，門便開了。她陪着他走了進去，穿過一個大天井進了她的房間。

房裏是一些舊式的家具，高大的架子床，寬大的書桌，笨重的靠背椅……這些襯着方塊磚砌的地和陰暗的光線愈顯得這房間陰鬱可怕。這景象是他沒有料想到的。

『秋星，你怎麼能夠住在這裡？』他感到失望，就痛苦地叫起來。

『爲什麼不能呢？我們搬到這裡已經有一年多了，』她驚訝地望着他，似乎不明白他的意思，過後就平靜地回答了。

『這地方我要是住上一個月恐怕就要發狂，』他把皮包放在桌上，帶着苦澀的微笑說。

『我也想你會住不慣，上海沒有這種房子，』她說。『房間的確陰暗一點，院子裏那顆大樹把陽光全遮了。不過我們一天很少在家。其實這裡也有一種好

處，天剛剛亮的時候，吹起一點風，不知有多少雀子聚在樹上叫，也很好聽。我們常常就在那時候起來。』

『你們常常是這樣忙碌的嗎？』他打岔地問。

『忙的時候多，而且常常只有一個人回來睡覺。楨有時就住在工會或學校裏，我有時也睡在婦女協會。今晚上楨回來睡，我還要到婦女協會去。』她絮絮地說了這些話，她的態度很安詳，好像她對這生活很滿意。

他呆呆地望着她，似乎沒有聽懂她的話，其實他是懂了的，但對她這人他覺得更不瞭解了。這念頭很使他苦惱，他不能自主地固執地說：

『秋星，你爲什麼要留在這裡？你看，這陰暗的房間，這些陳舊的家具，那些繁忙的工作，這一切只有折磨你，使你一天天變老的。……』心的激動使他變得口吃起來，他一時接不下去，就在書桌前面的椅子上坐下來。

她微微地笑了，她偵察似地望着他的激動的臉，溫和地說：『志良，我明白你的意思。但是你不要把我看作你小說裏的女主人公那樣。她們是那麼溫柔，那麼多情，那麼嬌嫩，你寫得真美麗。你看我這裡還有你的幾本小說。』

她說着就去在書桌上取了一本書，指給他看，隨手翻了兩下，望着書頁似嘲笑似讚嘆地加了一句：『只有她們才配住在上海，過你小說裏面描寫的那種生活。』她像記起了什麼事情，不等他答話，就馬上換過語調說：『你隨便坐坐，我到後面弄飯去。』

『我去給你幫忙，』他站起來說，要跟着她去就忘了回答她的前面的話。那樣的話他也很難回答。

『不要你來打岔，』她連忙阻止道。『你好好地在屋裏坐坐罷，楨不久就會回來的。』

他聽從她的話，讓她帶着愉快的笑容進了後面去。房間裏雖然仍舊陰暗，但似乎連屋角也被她這笑容照亮了。他埋着頭滿屋子踱來踱去。

不久家楨就回來了，面容雖然平靜，雙眉却微微皺着。他看見家楨的臉忽然想起了在車站上聽見的話，便問道：『有什麼消息嗎？』

『雖然有些謠言，現在還不要緊，』家楨平靜地回答，過後又放低聲音自語似地說：『不過我以為你還是早些走好。』

『你們呢？』他驚愕地問。他覺得房裏又開始陰暗了。

『我們是不要緊的，你是客人，犯不着在這里冒



險。』家楨懇切地答道，但並沒有一點激動。

他卻很激動，一時答不出話，遲疑了半晌纔裝出淡漠的樣子說：『我剛剛來，還想住幾天，多看看你們的生活。』

他看見家楨不答話，卻在桌上取了一本書來隨意地翻看，心裏忽然起了幾個念頭，過了一會忍不住問道：『家楨，我在這里住，不會妨害你們的工作嗎？』

家楨起初一呆，過後就笑起來：『你這是什麼話？你高興住隨你住多久，不過我們擔心你的——』

這時候窗外起了皮鞋聲，秋星端了菜進來，家楨馬上住了口，去收拾方桌。他也來幫忙。等菜都端進來了時，家楨點了煤油燈，他們便坐下來喫飯。……

他想到這里，忽然把眼睛埋下去，又把日記簿打開，拿起筆急急寫道：

『我們三個在一起喫飯，就像從前那樣。我們談了一些從前的事情。那許多事情他們完全沒有忘記。我好像又回到從前那種生活裏去了。但是不知道怎樣我總覺得我和他們不同。我沒有一個時候不偷偷地看她，她的面貌完全有改變。我自己變了。是的，我知道是我自己變了。……』

他不能夠再寫下去，這『變了』兩個字苦惱着他。他絕望地放下筆，他並不要再往下想，但回憶之幕卻自己在他眼前拉開了。——

喫過飯他們隨便談了一些話，她就到婦女協會去。他和家楨留在家裏。似乎先前的話談得太多了，這時候兩個人坐在方桌的對面兩方，中間隔着一盞煤油盞，大家望着燈光說不出話。他的心似乎跟着她到婦女協會去了。他禁不住要替她擔心。

家楨忽然站起來說要睡了。他並不想睡。家楨卻去收拾牀鋪。在這之間外面起了捶門的聲音，家楨馬上走出房去。他聽見家楨開了大門，低聲和人在談話。不久家楨走回房裏來。他瞥見外面階上有一個穿學生服的年青人在等着。

『我有點事情，現在要出去，今晚不回來了。只得讓你一個人在這裡睡，』家楨抱歉地匆匆說道。

『有什麼不好的消息嗎？』他驚恐地低聲問。

家楨搖搖頭，說：『不是那事情。你放心，現在還不要緊，』接着又向他囑咐了幾句話，就跨出高的門限，和階上站的那年青人一道走出去了。他跟着去把大門關好，還上了門門。……

他噓了一口氣，像經過長途旅行歇腳後感到疲倦

似的。他站起來就在房裏無聊地走了幾步。他忽然想起一些事情，便又走回書桌前面坐下去，抓起筆，像有什麼東西要從他的胸膛裏湧出來似的，他用戰抖的手急急在日記簿上寫道：

『我好容易纔把她找到，我不能夠讓她再失去了。我無論如何不能夠失掉她。我不能離開她，我不能夠一個人走。我要設法使她離開這裡。我不能夠讓她留在這裡過危險的生活，……我決不能夠一個人回到那孤寂的生活裏去……』

他力竭似地擲了筆，額上冒着汗，心在沈重地跳。他下了一個決心蓋起日記簿，把手掌壓在那上面。

滅蚊香的氣味在房間裏慢慢地散布。夜很靜，只有窗外石階下蟋蟀叫得更響亮了。

#### 四

早晨天剛亮志良就被窗外龍眼樹上的麻雀聲驚醒了。他在牀上迷糊地再睡了一會，忽然記起了她昨天說過要他早晨到婦女協會去，就連忙起身，梳洗過後，在七點半鐘的光景他便趕到了鐘樓。

早晨的空氣很新鮮。鐘樓上硃紅色牆壁抹了一大

塊金黃的陽光。她就在廊上倚着欄杆在和人講話，看見他來便驚喜地對他笑了笑。他靜靜地靠在欄杆上，埋頭去看下面的街道。過一會她把話談完了就招呼他進房裏去。

『昨晚上睡得還好罷？一個人不寂寞嗎？』她一進屋就含笑地問道。『我想不到你會來得這樣早。』

他聽她這語氣，明白她已經知道家楨昨晚不在家裏睡，他想他們昨晚一定有什麼重要事情，或者開過什麼會議。他很想知道這個，他很想知道她，但他又明白她不會告訴他。他們談了幾句別的話，他終於忍不住問道：『秋星，昨晚上你們有什麼事情？告訴我，免得我替你們擔心。』

她把細眉微微一皺，遲疑一下，過後就笑了，她搖搖頭，平靜地說：『沒有什麼。楨有他自己的事。』她不願意他再問，馬上接着說：『現在這裡沒有事情，我們到公園裏去走走也好。』她就這樣輕易地換過了話題。

他明白她的意思也就不再追問了。兩個人走下樓，往裏邊那條微微傾斜的土路走去。

早晨路上還沒有塵土飛揚。曉風差不多使人不知道地在他們的臉邊掠過。他覺得連內臟也被洗滌乾淨

了。陽光輕輕地撫着他的臉，使他看見每件東西都比在平日明亮。

公園就在眼前，地方很大，却現着荒蕪的樣子。有幾條曲折的小徑，交叉地伸到裏面去。路旁零亂地長了不少的龍眼樹，一串串的淡黃色果子垂在綠葉叢生的枝上。草長得很高，成了綠油油的一片。在小丘上面立着一個新修的亭子，紅色油漆的圓柱和欄杆，鮮明地在綠樹叢中映出來。沒有門，沒有籬笆。公園前面有一座紀念碑，過了這碑他們就進了公園。

周圍很靜寂，偶爾有一兩個赤腳戴斗笠的女人挑了擔子從後面來，走過那貫穿公園的土路往鐘樓那邊去了。

『你想不到我們這裡也有這麼安靜的地方罷，』他們走在小徑裏，在前面走着的她忽然回過頭來對他說，她有意義地笑了笑。

『安靜的地方到處都有的。』他漫然應了一句，他禁不住埋頭去望她的細腰。

『你還回上海嗎？』她又問道，這次却沒有回頭。

『嗯，』他含糊地應着，心裏很激動。

『你在這裡還住幾天？』

他感到一陣絕望，遲疑了一下，纔答道：『沒有一定。』

『你在上海住得舒服嗎？』

他想：你爲什麼老是問我這種話？他這次不回答了，却反問她：『你就不想回上海嗎？』

『我也許永遠不回去了，』她毫不遲疑地回答。這時她走上了一個斜坡，在半途就停住了。路旁有幾株龍眼樹，好些樹枝載着剛熟的龍眼低垂下來。她伸手去折了兩枝，一面叫他也折。他便也折了幾枝，兩個人捧着往亭子那邊走去。

他們進了亭子。兩個人對面在欄杆上坐了。樹枝堆放在他們的中間。每人拿了一枝在手裏，摘下果子來喫，摘一顆，剝一顆，摘完一枝就把枝子拋到下面去。

『志良，你看我過得快活不快活？』她忽然仰起頭望着他微笑，口裏還含着一顆龍眼核。

『哦，我現在才相信了，』他忘了別的事情，高興地答道。

『比從前怎樣？比從前更快活嗎？』

『嗯，』他含糊地應着，但馬上就覺得寂寞起來。他忍不住喚了一聲：『秋星。』『嗯，』她一

面應道，一面低頭在剝龍眼。

『你說你永遠不回上海去，爲什麼呢？』

『我們誰知道以後的事情。我不過隨便說說罷了。』她忽然把手望東邊一指：『你看那邊！』

『那邊？』他連忙掉頭向東邊看。遠遠地現出來一座山，山頂在陽光的照耀下變成了紫色。他問道：『你說那匹山嗎？』

『那邊離城不過幾十里路，本來可以去玩的。但是現在汪國剛紮在那邊，』她平靜地說。

『汪國剛？他就在那邊？』他驚恐地叫起來。『我昨天還聽說他要攻打這裏，你不知道？』

『輕點，』她做個手勢來鎮靜他。然後淡漠地說：『這消息我們常常聽見的，這是第五次了。反正地方很近，他隨時都會進來的。』

『倘使他這次真的來攻打呢？況且聽說他在省城已經有了接洽，』他焦急地問道。

『民團還可以和他打一仗。要是他再打敗仗，這次就可以把他澈底解決了，』她故意做出樂觀的樣子說。

『萬一他打勝了攻進城裏來你們怎麼辦呢？』他固執地追問，他的焦慮不住地增加着。

『那麼一切都完了。土匪就從這道城門進來。要是在夜裏我們更不容易逃避。所以我說我也許永遠不回上海了。汪國剛這人是很殘酷的，我有一個朋友被他砍了頭。』她說這些話時，聲音臉色都沒有改變，好像在敘述一個故事。最後她加了一句：『所以我希望你早些走。』只有這句話是帶了關切的調子說出來的。

他的心馬上緊張起來，臉上起了一陣苦痛的拘攣。唯其他看見她帶着毫不在意的樣子，他更替她擔心。

『秋星，你和我一道回上海去罷，』他嚴肅地懇求道。

她驚愕地看他，不明白他的意思。

『秋星，你無論如何不能夠再在這個地方住下去。我不能夠讓你在這裏犧牲。在上海你可以寫文章，可以做別的事情，你也可以過得很快活，我要盡力使你快活。我不能夠讓你冒這種危險，這是不值得的。你馬上離開這裏罷。』他彷彿看見別人就從他的眼前把她搶走了，擲進無底的深淵裏去。熱情鼓舞着他，他把他過去的寂寞，他的愛都放在聲音裏面。話像流水似地從口裏瀉了出來。



這些話都進了她的耳朵，很使她感動，她不願意多分辯，就感激地對他笑了笑，溫和地說：『我明白你的心。但是我不能夠離開這裏。』

她站起來把欄杆上堆着的殘餘的龍眼枝一手推開，坐得靠他更近一點，伸手去握着他的一隻手，輕輕地加了一句：『我也不願意離開這裏。』

『是爲了家楨的緣故嗎？』他的臉忽然陰沈起來，他的心微微發痛，他極力抑制着自己，發出溫和的聲音問道。

她微微地搖頭。坦白地直視着他的眼睛，慢慢地說：『不一定是爲了他。我固然愛他。但我也愛工作。』

他的眼睛又漸漸在發亮了，一線希望在陰雲中透露出來，他便鼓起了勇氣說：『在上海不是也有工作嗎？別的地方也有的。何必一定要在這裏？』

『但是你不看見我已經在這裏過得很好嗎？』

『我不相信，我不相信，』他絕望地帶了憤激地說。

『志良，你爲什麼要這樣地關心我？這裏不是也有無數的人？爲什麼你只關心到我一個？』她憐惜地望着他，過了片刻纔溫和地問道。

『因為——』他說了兩個字忽然停住了，他擡頭望了望她，苦笑一下，站起來，長長嘆了一口氣。

『志良，』她低聲喚道，他應一聲，掉過頭來看她一眼，又連忙把頭轉開了。她說：『你心裏有什麼事情？你為什麼不告訴我？我知道。』

『你就知道我愛你嗎？』他迸出了這一句話，臉通紅着，心裏很激動，他站在她面前，睜大兩隻眼睛凝視着她。他完全沒有想到他這話會有什麼樣的効果。他伸手去握她的手，他坐下來，靠着她的身子。

她微笑了，她的臉色很平靜，她用愛憐的眼光回答他的注視，她讓他握着她的手，過了半晌纔說：『我知道的，但這又有什麼用處？我們已經過了那種時期了。現在我們並不能夠專靠着愛情生活下去。我們還是談點別的事情罷。』她把手從他的緊握中慢慢地取了出來。

『但是我，我以後怎麼能夠活？那寂寞，那沙漠上似的寂寞，那長期的等待……這一切你是不會知道的，』他失了控制自己的力量，他帶着絕望和恐懼地說。

『我知道又有什麼用處？我們兩人已經不是該在同一個環境裏面生活的了，』她斜着頭看他，於是站

起來，像責備又像嘆息地說：她順手拾起了一根龍眼枝，拿在手裏玩弄，身子倚着圓柱，又掉頭看他，勸慰地說道：『你已經那樣地過了幾年了，你以後也會忘記的，而且你會成爲一個偉大的文學家……』

他聽了這話，猛然跳了起來，走到她面前，抓住她的手，苦痛地說：『你現在還不能夠饒恕我？你還忍心控苦我？我知道你還恨我。』

她微笑地搖搖頭，用憐惜的聲音說：『我恨你？沒有的事，你爲什麼會想到饒恕上面來？你知道我和楨都關心你。不過……』她住了嘴不再說下去了。

這個『楨』字使他苦惱，接着又是『不過』兩字，他知道現在再說什麼話也沒有用處，他的勇氣失掉了。他無可如何地鬆了手轉過身子，默默地在階上踱着。

『志良，』她喚道。他不自主地應了一聲，就站住了，掉轉身子來看她。

『忘了這一切罷，想着這些也只會使你苦惱。你爲什麼不像從前那樣地和我談話呢？你看我並沒有改變，』她懇切地說。『是的，我明白你的意思，』他帶了悔恨地低聲說，他覺得自己的眼睛有些模糊了，他不敢再凝視她的臉，就微微把眼睛掉開去看遠處，

在他的眼前遠遠地橫着那匹山。但他看見的卻依舊是她的臉。『我變了，你們沒有改變，我完全改變了。』他漸漸把聲音提高起來，因為另外一個思想又來折磨他：『但是你不覺得你這犧牲不也是徒然的嗎？那匹山，那汪國剛，那陰暗的房間，那繁重的工作，……這些有什麼好處？你不過白白毀了你自己，將來沒有一個人會記念你，也沒有一個人會得到你的好處。……』

『然而我自己是滿足了，我並不希望人家記念我，』她平靜地打斷了他的話，就把手裏的龍眼枝擲到下面去，慢慢走到他的身邊，挽住他的一隻膀子，說：『志良，我們不要說這種話了，』就拉了他沿着石階走了幾步，轉了兩個彎，她站住了，鬆了手指點給他看下面的景象，一面說：『那些街市，那些房屋，那些人，對於你也許是陌生的。然而我是太熟習了。我很愛他們，這種感情我形容不出來。爲我們自己我從來沒有想到什麼危險。』她的聲音異常柔和，裏面帶了感情而顫動着。『前一次汪國剛在這城裏，我們也在。汪國剛這人是殘酷嗜殺的，我們看見他坐了轎子到武廟去拜關帝，他的衛兵手裏都拿着大砍刀。……』

『但是現在情形不同了，』她的敘述雖然很平靜，但卻給他增加了恐怖，他的焦慮繼續折磨着他，他忍不住打岔地說：『倘使他真的在省城裏有了接洽，民團一定會失敗，那時你們的處境的確是很危險的。』他再固執地祈求地附加道：『秋星，你答應跟我到上海去罷，我們勸家楨也去，我不能夠讓你們留在這危險的地方。』

她感動地望着他，她的柔和的眼光愛撫着他的臉。她微笑了，眼淚開始在她的眼睛裏閃耀起來，她把身子偎着他溫柔地說：

『你的好意我很明白。我感激你。但是我想留在這里也不見得就有危險。而且這里的人又不只我們兩個，比這更危險的情形我們也經過來的。你就忘了從前嗎？』她這時候忽然瞥見下邊有兩個人正往這上面走來，她知道是家楨和一個朋友，就高興地說：『我們下去罷，你看楨來找我們了，還有一個老朋友，也是你高興見的。』『嗯，』他含糊地應了一聲，卻癡呆似地站住不動。她看見這情形就挽住他的膀子，走下石階，沿着寬闊的斜坡走下去迎接他們。他們還不曾走下山坡，在半路上就和上來的人遇着了。

和家楨同來的是一個紫色面膛的中年男子，名叫

維德，從前和志良在一起工作過的。這個人這幾年裏也沒有什麼改變，不過寬額上添了兩道皺紋，闊嘴上多了幾根短鬚。他看見志良就伸出手張開闊嘴問：

『我們等了好幾年，你爲什麼早不來遲不來，偏偏在這個時候來？』

這樣的話叫志良有些發楞了，他不知道應該怎樣回答，就握着維德的大手帶笑地和維德問答了幾句。這時候家楨就走到秋星的旁邊，嚴肅地在她的耳邊說了兩句話，她微微點着頭。這情形並沒有被另外的兩人看見。『志良，你和他們在這裏多玩一下，我有點事先走了，』秋星看了看志良，匆匆說了上面的話，就放快脚步走下了山坡，往小徑裏急急去了。志良一面在和維德談話，却又禁不住偷偷望着她的苗條的背影。

## 五

第二天傍晚在家楨的家裏晚飯。擺上了桌子，他們在等候維德，維德本來說過在六點鐘光景來的，這時已經是六點三刻了，卻還沒有維德的消息，家楨知道維德平日最能守時刻，疑心出了什麼事情，有些焦急起來，就主張不再等候他。

他們坐下去，還沒有喫完一碗飯，外面忽然起了響亮的撞門聲。

『奇怪，又好像不是維德，』家楨驚愕地說，就站起，走去開門。

門開了，一個年青的學生走了進來，他跑得氣咻咻的，帶着一張驚惶的臉。他跟着家楨走到石階上，站在桌子面前又看了看秋星和志良，然後用本地話對家楨說：『維德叫你們到學校裏去，今晚上在那里開緊急會議。』

『又有什麼消息？』秋星用本地話問道。『是的，情形很不好，你們到了那里就知道，』學生嚴肅地回答着，過後給志良打個招呼，用不很純熟的普通話問道：『這位就是志良先生嗎？』志良的帶着點驚惶的表情的臉上勉強做了一個笑容，他答應一聲，就客氣地請那學生在旁邊那把空椅子上坐。『我不坐了，還要到別處去，』學生推辭說，走下了石階，家楨也不挽留，把他送出去，關了門回來。

三個人都不說話，匆忙地喫了飯。秋星把碗筷搬進後面去了。家楨一面收拾桌子，一面告訴志良，他和秋星馬上要到外面去，晚上不一定回到家裏來睡。志良剛要答話，秋星就出來了。她馬上對志良說：『你

『明天就走，好不好？』

『爲什麼這樣快？』志良看見她的嚴重而關切的表情，更增加了他剛才起的那疑懼。他知道他所擔心的事情逼近了，他有些恐怖，他也想離開這地方。但看見她和別的人卻安靜地留在這裡，他又感到留戀了。而且看見她安靜地站在他的面前，他甚至不相信會有什麼事情發生。如今聽她說起明天就走的話，他又不覺痛惜地叫了。

『事情是很嚴重的，我和秋星都不願意你在這裡犯危險，』家楨用低沈的聲音說，他的臉上稍微帶了點緊張的表情。

『但是你們呢？』志良關心地接口問道，他完全失了主見。

『我們是不要緊的，』秋星在旁邊柔聲插嘴說，『只要你能夠安全地離開就好了。』

志良苦痛地望着秋星的臉，他想找一個決定的回答，然而思想很亂，他便把頭略略埋下去。他想：我爲什麼就和你們不同呢？

『秋星，我們走罷，讓志良在家裏休息休息，』家楨看見這情形，就催促秋星道。『不，我也去，』志良聽見這話，馬上擡起頭着急地對他們說。『我可



以跟你們去嗎？這裏太冷靜，太寂寞……』他的激動阻止他再說下去。『好，我們就一起去，』家楨稍微遲疑一下就答道。秋星用同情的眼光看了志良一眼，然後去後面喚了一個女孩子出來關大門。兩扇油漆脫落的木門關上了，這三個年青人踏進了街心，於是石板路上就單調地起了六隻皮鞋的響聲。

天還沒有全黑，夜晚是很清朗的。沒有別的行人。街道清靜得可怕。風時時吹動樹葉，發出來低微的聲音。蟋蟀在長了青草的石板縫隙裏淒涼地叫着，遠遠地有幾隻狗在狂吠。秋星走在中間，家楨志良兩人和她挨得很近。他們走過了一條街，忽然從旁邊巷子裏跑出一條黑狗，跟在他們後面狂叫，他們便散開來。秋星走在最前面，志良跟着她，家楨在後面趕狗，狗退了幾步，在一個空院子門口站住不動了，繼續地叫了幾聲，四近還有狗響應地叫着。等他們去得漸遠時，狗又瘋狂地追了上去，撲過去吠，這時候，不知道從什麼地方又跑來了兩條狗；三條狗都跟在他們後面狂叫。他們有時也停住脚步掉過身子來，狗就遠遠地望着他們不前進了，等他們再轉身往前走時牠便又追上去吠。

家楨和志良看見把狗趕不開也就不理了，讓那三

條狗在後面吠。牠們的狂叫聲在這靜夜裏給人帶來了恐怖的感覺。尤其是志良，他的心跳得很厲害，他感到一種從來沒有過的緊張的心情，彷彿前面就有一個可怖的結局在等候他。

『爲什麼今晚上狗叫得特別厲害？』志良爲了要打破那使他的恐懼增加的沈默，終於忍不住這樣地問了。

『其實平常晚上也有狗叫，不過今晚特別使人聽見不舒服罷了，』這許久不說話的秋星接口答道。

家楨先前曾用本地話低聲和秋星談過幾句，這時，就掉過頭來對志良說：『你在上海自然不大會聽見狗叫，在這裡我們天天都聽得見。』

不久他們轉進了正街，好像進了另一個世界。狗早已跑開了，圍繞着他們的是許多忙碌的人。街上有些搨槍的團丁往來逡巡着。商店裏燃着明亮的電燈。黃包車上坐着豔裝的青年妓女。一羣人匆匆走過來，另一羣人匆匆地走過去。市面似乎是很平靜的。

忽然在後面起了軍號聲。街中漸漸地空出了一條路。每家商店裏的人全都擠到了門口。一切的活動好像全都停止了。於是一隊全武裝的團丁，約有一百名的光景，排着隊齊整地從後面走來，經過這裡往前面

去了。

『就只有這一點？』志良恐怖地問家楨道。

『比這還多得多，已經開了好些去了。不過汪國剛的人也不少，』家楨莊重地低聲回答。『那麼情形真的很嚴重了？』志良擔心地低聲問。『見了維德就會知道的，』家楨用低沈的聲音回答。

他們到了學校，兩扇黑漆的大門已經關上了。家楨用力在門上插了幾下，裏面有人問『是家楨嗎？』他答應了，於是門開了半扇，放了他們三個進去馬上又重閉了。開門的是個教員模樣的青年男子。他低聲對家楨說：『人來齊了，就等你們。』他又和志良打了個招呼，就引他們走過傳達室，沿着石階進裏面去。這學校是由一座廟宇改造的。兩邊的房屋是課堂和宿舍，正面是大禮堂。兩邊黑暗着，禮堂上燃着明亮的煤油燈，維德用他的粗壯的聲音在那里和學生們演講。斷續的字句進了志良的耳朵，使他的心情更是緊張了。『明天停課，學生除回家的外，都散布到鄉下去，三年級的學生已經走了，』那個青年男子用本地話對家楨說。『學生在開會，所以維德現在來激勵他們。』家楨路路點着頭。這是他們前夜商定了的計畫：情形危急的時候就派學生到鄉下去工作。他知道

現在已經到了嚴重的時期。維德的演說就像一個人的最後的掙扎似地在靜夜中抖動。他沒有一點懼怕，他的心情卻陡然嚴肅起來。

黑暗中起了脚步聲，一個女子迎面走來，低低喚了一聲：『秋星，』就走過來握了秋星的手，親密地挽着她往前面先走了，進了最前面的一個房間，那裏面一張方桌上放着一盞煤油燈，燈光十分暗淡。圍着方桌坐了六七個人，每個人的臉都是陰沈的，嚴肅的，他們在低聲談話，看見有人進來就閉了嘴喫驚地向門邊看。秋星和他們打了個招呼。

家楨一面走着，一面和那個年青男子低聲商量事情。他們快走到那門口，青年男子就去把隔壁房間的門打開，進去在桌上摸着火柴來燃了燈，這也是一間教員宿舍，裏面擺了兩張牀舖。家楨把志良請進了這屋子，對他說：『我們要商量一點事情，你坐在這裏等我們罷，』說完就伴着青年男子走了。志良一個人留在這陰暗的屋子裏，外面也是一片黑暗。隔壁房間裏起了唧唧的聲音，像是幾個人輪流在談話，他注意地傾聽，但也只零碎地聽到幾個字，不能夠連貫起來。而且維德的粗壯的聲音有時候會威壓地飛下來，把隔壁的低語壓倒了。

於是隔壁一個女性的聲音抓住了他的全部的注意。那是秋星的聲音，雖然很低，但他也能夠分辨出來，不過他不能夠明瞭那意義罷了。她談了許多話，似乎那些人都靜靜地聽着。讓她一個人發表意見。因為他覺得在這時候比較先前更要甯靜些。

過後家楨又在說話，這聲音也是他所熟習的，家楨說話不多，接着還有兩個人說話，以後就似乎起了一點爭論，但不久又平靜下去了。秋星的聲音再響起來。他更注意地聽着，依舊聽不清楚她在說些什麼。

志良這些時候心裏就非常焦急，他很想聽懂他們的話，他知道那裏面含着重大的意義。那些聲音斷續地送進他的耳裏，但他却沒法捉住那整句的意義。在隔壁那些人帶着緊張的心情和休戚相關的態度談論着目前的重要問題。他猜想，也許是怎樣爲了別人爲了理想去犧牲他們的生命。他知道那些人到了犧牲自己的時節沒有一個會是弱者，而且沒有一個會替自己打算。這思想很使他感動。他起了一種異樣的感覺，這是他這幾年來所沒有感到過的。他開始覺得他有些羨慕他們了。這時候外面是一片黑暗，房間裏祇有一盞半明不暗的燈。蚊蟲帶着單調的令人煩厭的叫聲在他周圍飛來飛去。他一個人冷清清地坐在桌子前面，腦

裏裝滿着驚懼和憂鬱的思想，等着時間遲慢地過去。在隔壁却充滿着暖熱和生命，那些人集在一起，準備去犯危險，如同去赴盛筵。這是一個何等明顯的對照。在羨慕中他又感到一種隱約的慚愧。這羨慕和慚愧合在一起更增加了他心裏的煩躁。他差不多不能夠靜靜地聽下去了。

忽然外面起了一陣響動，接着有許多人說話和走路的声音。他起初有點吃驚，但馬上就明白了：大禮堂的講演完畢，學生們正散下來。學生們三五成羣，接連地走過他這房間的窗下，激動地談論着目前的情形，他們講的都是本地話，他不懂得那意義。他又聽見維德在大聲喚着一個學生的名字，那人答應了，似乎有三四個人去圍着維德和維德講話。後來維德一個人走進了隔壁的房間。

隔壁的討論似乎快完畢了，發言的人也沒有先前那樣地起勁，但維德的加入又像添了一點活氣。維德和幾個人交換了一些意見。於是屋裏落進了暫時的靜寂。房門開了，又關上。兩個人走出來，經過這窗下往外面去了，志良又聽見房門打開，再有三個人出來往外面走去。

他似乎看見了一線光亮。他想，秋星家植幾個人

馬上就會到他這邊來的。他盼望着，等待着。過了一會，他們沒有出來，隔壁又起了談話的聲音，是一個女子在說話，他知道這是若，就是先前迎接秋星的那個年青女子，這天上午他在秋星那里見過她一次，秋星對他讚美過她的勇敢。接着秋星的聲音也聽見了。維德的聲音比較粗壯，而家楨的聲音永遠是低沈。他聽着這些，依舊不懂得意義，心裏愈加煩躁，蚊蟲又不停地來叮他。他坐不住就站起來，輕輕地在屋子裏踱來踱去。

隔壁的門終於再開了，五個人一起出來，走過他這房間，並不停留就逕自往外面去，好像把他這人完全忘記了似的。但不久秋星一個人走了回來，推開門進了房裏。

『等久了罷，』秋星一進屋就柔聲地這樣說。

『不要緊，』他看見秋星的笑容，就忘却了先前的煩躁的等待，高興地答道。『你們的事情商量好了嗎？』

『嗯，』她點點頭，想說什麼話又止住了。

『情形不十分嚴重罷，有什麼消息嗎？』他看見她這樣子，馬上就記起了這兩天的種種見聞，驚懼和憂鬱又抓住了他，他禁不住關心地问道。

『謠言很多，不過也許不會有什麼事情，』她把身子斜靠在桌子上。眼睛望着燈光，有意無意地答道。過後她沈吟一下，又把眼光掉去看志良的臉，志良這時站在靠背椅後面，兩隻手腕壓着椅背，臉上帶着疑慮的表情看她。她喚了一聲：『志良，』又用更柔和的聲音說：『你答應我明天走，好嗎？』

『爲什麼？』

『我們很擔心你的安全。』

『那麼你們呢？你們就不怕嗎？』他帶了十分關切的樣子望着她。

『我們——』她遲疑一下，但被他的眼光追逼急了就直說出來：『我們在這裡工作，這結果是我們應該得的。我們沒有抱怨，我們不能走……而且我們也願意等着來經歷那一切。』她的眼睛發了光，她的臉剛纔還被一種關心的表情塗上一點陰暗的顏色，但等她說到最後一句就似乎眉飛色舞地微笑了。

她的話使他感到一陣深的苦痛，他的臉上淡淡地起了一下痙攣，卻不會被她看見。他一方面因了關心她的安全而恐懼（唯其她自己不關心，他更覺得那是重要的了；）一方面他又因了她在她和他或他們中間劃出一個顯明界限而感到孤寂和絕望。他甚至有點疑



心她會輕視他。他就掙扎似地說：『那麼你以為我就是一個完全自私自利的人嗎？你們都在這裡犯危險，我就忍心一個人走？』他掙紅着一張臉，牢牢地望着她，好像害怕一把眼睛掉開就會失掉她似的。

『誰說你是個自私自利的人？』家楨的聲音接着響起來。他已經推開門進來了。志良驚訝地掉頭看他。他誠懇地望着志良繼續說：『志良，你和我們不同，你是一個客人，你安全地來這裡，你得安全地回去。你留在這裡有什麼好處呢？』

『那麼我不可以給你們幫忙？』他忽然抓到了一個希望，便激動地這樣說了。

『現在太遲了，』秋星帶了個苦笑說，『我們很早就望着你來的，可是不希望在這樣的時候。』遠遠地斷續地響着軍號的聲音，在靜夜的空氣裏淒涼地顫動着。

『星，你陪志良回家去罷，』家楨猛省地對秋星說，『時間不早了。我今晚在工會裏睡。』

『好，志良，我們走罷，我們回家去細談，』秋星接着對志良說。

『志良就搭明天上午的車走，』家楨陰沈着臉，固執地，發命令似地說。『我明天來送你上車。』他

從衣袋裏摸出一隻電筒遞給秋星，一面說：『星，你拿這個去，我等一會借維德的來用。』

『我們一道走，不好嗎？讓我來送你一次，把你送到工會，反正我順路，』秋星接過手電筒，忽然親密地對家楨一笑，溫柔地說，兩眼很柔情地望着家楨的陰沈的臉。

『好，我們走罷，』家楨順口粗聲回答道，這聲音有點像嘆息。

志良望着這情形。他起先本來有好些話要和家楨爭論，但這時淚水卻充滿了他的眼睛，他不願意他們看見他的眼淚，便低下頭默默地跟着他們走出門去。

每間宿舍裏都有燈光，學生們似乎在收拾東西。維德還沒有回來。他們走過傳達室，看見先前給他們開門的青年男子站在門口。他給他們打個招呼便去開門。

『砰，』一個清脆的槍聲不知道在什麼地方響了起來。大家喫了一驚，停一下。那個青年男子把手按着門問：

『還走嗎？』

四周很靜，再沒有第二聲槍響。

『走！』家楨望了秋星一眼，然後沈靜地答道。

他又加上一句：『大概是團丁的槍走了火。』

『那麼再見罷，』青年男子親切地說，就開了門放他們出去。

廣場上寂靜無人，夜並不黑暗。在清朗的高空橫臥着明亮的北斗星，給他們指示方向。環境是太靜了，他們甚至怕說出一句話來驚動牠，不，是怕會被別人聽見。

他們走出了廣場，轉過一條窄巷，然後進入了大街，就碰見一男一女迎面走來，秋星不覺驚喜地低聲喚道：『若。』

來的正是維德和若。

『你們還回去？這時候馬路上的交通斷絕了，誰也不能通過，』維德嚴肅地說。

這句話使得平日很能鎮靜的家楨和秋星的臉上也現了驚惶的表情。

『但是我要到工會去！我在那里還有事情，』家楨激動地說。

『你大概可以通過。不過亦吾已經到了那里，你明天去也好，』維德說。

『不行，我非去不可，』家楨思索片刻，決斷地說。他望着秋星和志良。『你們回學校去睡罷。我明

天上午再來。』說罷，他不等他們說話，便動身走了。

衆人不阻止他；秋星也默默地望着，等他走了兩步，她忽然喚道：『楨！』

家楨站住，回了頭來看。她拿着手電筒走去，一面說：『這個還是給你罷。』

『我不要，我看得見，』家楨答着，毅然掉轉身子大步往前面走了。

志良看見這一切，他的眼裏忽然湧着眼淚。他跟衆人走進窄巷時，忍不住低聲問秋星道：『你爲什麼不阻攔他？他不會有危險嗎？』

『那是沒有關係的，既然他自己願意，而且他覺得應該。』她的聲音雖然低而平靜，但當她把頭掉過來看他時，他卻看見她的眼裏也閃耀着淚珠。她的堅定的眼光透過淚水而射到他的臉上。他起初只感到惶惑，他覺得不了解她。可是他們走進那空闊的廣場，他依舊覺得那明亮的眼光還在他的眼前閃爍，而且漸漸地射進他的內部了。他的心起了短時間的抖動。

他跟着他們進了學校。

## 六

這晚上志良睡在維德房裏，秋星和若同睡。到了

半夜忽然一陣密放的槍聲把他們驚醒了。

『維德！』志良驚恐地叫起來。

『志良，你也醒了？』維德在對面的牀上說，他的聲音還是很鎮靜的。

外面是一片黑暗，房裏抖着微弱的灰色的光線。吹着風，砂石在空中飛舞。遠遠地響了緊急集合的軍號。

『果然打起來了，』志良聲音戰抖地說。

『大概不要緊，你放心睡罷，』維德這樣說了，就起來在光赤的身子上穿了一件汗衫。

『維德！』秋星在隔壁大聲叫道，『快起來！』

『你們起來了嗎？我已經起來了，』維德一面大聲答應，一面摸索到桌子前面去點燃了煤油燈。

槍聲炒豆似地繼續密密麻麻地響着，就像在志良的心上敲打。維德穿好衣服出去了。他在隔壁和秋星她們說話。學校裏這時候突然顯得熱鬧了，彷彿起了一個騷動。學生們都醒過來，在大聲講話。

『志良，你起來了嗎？』志良在窗外說。『你還是睡罷，有事情時我們再喚你。』『不，我馬上就起來了，』他慌張地應道，連忙從牀上跳下來，揉了揉眼睛，就開了門出去。

秋星和若都站在石階上。天井裏榕樹下面有好些學生聚在一起低聲談話。一道灰暗的霧遮了他的眼睛，他覺着好像在做夢。但是夜晚的冷氣使他不覺打了一個寒噤。他默默地走到秋星的身邊。

正在和若講話的秋星聽見他的腳步聲就掉過頭看他，惋惜地對他說：『你來得真不湊巧。』

『事情真的是十分嚴重嗎？』他恐怖地問道。

『那也說不定，我想大概是不要緊，汪國剛打仗並不行，不過這回總使你受了驚，』秋星答道，這些話好像是說來安慰他的。

他聽了秋星的話，稍微放了心，緊張的心情算是寬鬆了一點。他便分辯說：『受點驚算得什麼一回事，你們都不怕，我和你們還不是一樣的人？』

秋星對他微微一笑，這笑容多少帶了點淒涼的味道，但他卻沒有看見。

機關槍的聲音響了一陣又停下了，這時候只有斷續的幾下「碰碰」的槍聲。『大概現在休息了，』若在一邊自語地說。

忽然一個隱雷似的聲音衝破了靜夜的網，把空氣大大地震動了。樹上的烏雀驚惶地亂飛着。接着又是一排槍。過後砲聲繼續響着，槍聲又密放起來。學生

們在天井裏驚恐地嚷着。有些人就急急走上石階，進房去。

『汪國剛有大砲，事情有些不妙了，』秋星忽然驚疑地說。

『一定是省裏發的，招安的條件大概講妥了，省裏對民團也很猜忌，正好借重汪國剛。不過汪國剛有砲，恐怕也不會放，打不準，』若憤激地接口說道。

『只要我們能夠在這裡多住五年就好了，現在一切剛有了個眉目……』秋星好像沒有聽見若的話，她沈溺在自己的思想裏，用了痛惜的調子自語地說。

砲聲停了，排槍依舊在放，似乎近了一點，機關槍聲又響了起來，在這中間夾雜着一片人聲，這是喊殺的聲音，但很遠，很低。

在衝鋒了！志良這樣想着，他臉上的肌肉就搖動起來。他的眼前現了無數根鋒利的槍刺，好像就對着他衝過來，他不覺閉上眼睛驚叫一聲，聲音雖很低，但已經夠把秋星和若驚動了。

『志良，什麼事情？』秋星驚訝地問，若也掉頭來看他，但她們看不清楚他的臉部的表情。

志良呆了片刻，纔醒悟過來，有點慚愧地揩着額上的汗珠，慢慢地噓了一口氣。『你冷罷，那麼你還

是進裏面去睡一會』秋星看見他這情形就憐憫地柔聲對他說。

『不要緊。我不想睡，』他半昏迷地答道，他眼前彷彿還有發亮的槍刺在晃動。

『天快亮了，睡睡也好，』若也過來勸他。槍聲漸漸地稀了。天空的顏色也淡了些。東方在發亮。星子一顆一顆地隱去，只有那太白星還明亮地掛在那里。空氣突然寒冷起來。

『你們這裡夜晚很短，』志良望着天空無心地說了出來，他這時還在努力鎮壓那紛亂的心曲。

『早些天亮也好，這黑暗叫人有些忍耐不下去了，』若在旁邊接口說，他寬心似地吐了一口氣。

軍號聲無力地響着，過後又停止了。天亮了。一片紅霞塗在淺藍色的天空。風微微吹動榕樹的綠葉，無數的麻雀吱吱喳喳地在樹枝上叫起來。

維德回來了，家楨和他同來，那個住在傳達室的青年男子跟在他們後面。

『維德，外面消息怎樣？』志良看見他們，就連忙走去迎接，急切地問道。這時候還留在天井裏的少數學生便走上石階來聽維德說話。

維德把他的血紅的眼睛望了望志良，搖搖頭，低



沈地說：『現在還不知道，不過我們決定要你暫時離開這裡，家楨要到別處，他可以和你同一段路程。』

這意料不到的答語，使志良呆了一下，他不能夠馬上找出一句答語，他轉頭去望秋星，秋星和若兩人正在和家楨低聲商量什麼事情。維德看見他這樣就不再作聲，只拍了一下他的肩膀，等他回過頭想對維德說話時，維德已經被那些學生包圍住在談話了。

志良一個人站在階上，覺得沒有趣味，他兩邊都有人在談話，他彷彿也聽見了。維德在和學生談論到鄉間去的事情，家楨和秋星的聲音更低，他只能夠抓住幾個字眼；但這些他馬上就忘記了。他的腦筋很遲鈍，好像頭腦裏裝了一堆石子，思想很亂，他不能夠決定走不走。他似乎有些留戀，然而又有點畏怯。過後他又感到孤寂。他無聊地走下石階，到榕樹腳下一塊涼的石凳上坐了。

學生們開始散了，大家爭先恐後地跑進宿舍裏去，維德同兩個學生走進了一個宿舍，這時候外面有人在敲門，青年男子去開了門，進來一個矮小的穿中山服的中年男子，低聲問道：『預備好了嗎？』

『馬上就好了！』青年男子一邊點頭一邊回答，便陪着這新來的人去找維德。

學生們陸續地走出來，站在階上，排列成三隊，大多數的人手裏都抱了個包袱，也有的挾在腋下。人數一共是六十幾個。

矮小的中年男子一邊和維德說話，一邊走出來。他用眼光在學生的臉上掃了一下，說了兩三句話，就帶了他們走出去了。依舊是青年男子去開門關門。維德留在階上和剩下的幾個學生談話。

志良茫然地望着這一切，心裏很難受。他好像在看另一個世界的事情。不知道怎樣他總覺得他和那些人，那些動作，那一切事物中間隔了一層紙。他和他們似乎是兩個世界裏的人，等到那大門重新關上時，他忽然感到一種絕望，他甚至奇異地想他自己是不是已經死亡了。這思想使他的力量崩潰下來。他無力地把頭垂在胸前。

『志良，你就跟禎一道走罷，』秋星和家禎走到他面前，她把一隻手放在他的肩頭上懇求地說。

他像從夢裏醒過來似地擡了他的疲倦的眼睛看她，似乎不明瞭那句話的意義，過後忽然呻吟地問道：『你呢？』這聲音是很奇異的，這裏面含着複雜的感情，有關心，有妬嫉，有怨憤，有失望。

『我自然留在這裏，』她柔和地一笑，但她的聲

音卻有點近乎嗚咽，她不再說話，就掉過頭，逕自走開了。

志良馬上站起來。他想走去追她，但被家楨阻止了，家楨陰沈着臉，帶了點命令口氣地說：

『走罷，你不看見她心裏難受嗎？』

『但是我不能夠在這種時候離開你們，』志良抓住家楨的膀子熱狂地說。

家楨的臉色變得軟和了。他親切地但又帶了點苦澀味道地說：『你的話固然有理，但是你留在這裡對我們不會有——』剛說到這裡一排槍聲突然響起來把他的話打斷了。這槍聲比先前的更響亮。

兩個人對望着交換了一瞥驚恐的眼光，但家楨的身子立得非常堅定。秋星走過來帶了點激動地說：

『你們快走！楨，你不要耽擱了，你還得陪志良回家裏去拿東西。』

志良昏迷似地站在家楨和秋星的面前，還不能夠決定應該怎樣辦。然而事實卻已經不容許他有遲疑的時間了。

一個巨大的響雷打在左角的屋頂上，屋頂被炸開來，碎瓦和灰塵四處飛舞。土地動搖着，像發生了一個大地震。

學生們驚惶地叫着，齊往外面跑。在灰塵瀰漫的空氣中維德的響亮的聲音叫起來：『不要慌，大家鎮靜一點！』砲彈的餘音消滅了，飛舞的灰塵也停下來。門大開着，學生們跑到外面廣場上去了。維德的聲音在喚『若。』

志良呆呆地站在那里，一隻手抓住家楨的膀子。等到一切復歸於平靜時，他纔醒過來似地望了望秋星，然後回頭苦痛地對家楨低聲說：『走罷。』

槍聲像暴雨似地落着，碎瓦繼續從屋頂上落下。維德和若一道走着，看見他們就走下階來說了兩句話，催促他們快走，又和志良握了手，然後拉着若匆忙地走進宿舍裏面去了。

志良沒有異議，就跟着家楨和秋星走出了大門。廣場上還有幾個學生在那里談話。太陽已經升起來了，金黃色的陽光，抹在脫落了石灰的牆壁上，在志良的眼睛裏看來好像是淡淡地染了一片血跡。

他們剛走了兩步，一個巨大的聲音，又在後面響了起來。牆壁震動着，似乎要倒下來一般，殘留着的石灰紛紛落在地上。

『我回去看若，』默默地走着的秋星忽然焦慮地說。

『你不和我們一道走？』志良驚訝地問道。

『我不送你，』她堅決地答道：『反正有楨送你也是一樣，我還要去婦女協會。』她本來要轉身走了，但看見他帶了苦痛的表情望着她，像要說什麼話却又說不出來似的，她的心也覺得有些難受，她便伸出手給他，對他微笑了一下，感激地說：『我們再說罷。不要替我擔心，我們一定有機會再見的。』他也茫然地伸出手來，她把他的手緊緊握了一下，就摔掉牠，側着臉對家楨柔情地說：『楨，你要當心。』

『我知道，』家楨低聲答道，同時還答她一個親切的微笑。他們的眼光對看了一會，從眼光裏交換了一些意義更深的話語。她的眼睛裏先迸出了淚水。她忍耐不住：便猝然轉過身子，拔步往裏面跑去了。

家楨默默地望着她的背影消失在大門裏面，他始終沒有流一滴眼淚。他覺得志良的手戰抖地抓住他的膀子。他忽然下了一個決心，呻吟似地說了一句：『我們走罷，』就拖着那半昏迷的志良急急走出了廣場。

一排密放的槍聲追趕似地在後面跟着。

大街上很冷靜，行人不多。街中間有幾個持槍的團丁往來逡巡着。十字路口有警察在站崗，同時在一

家關閉着的商店門前駐紮着十多個團丁。

家楨伴着志良走過大街穿進了小巷，他昨晚拿到了通行證，所以不會受着留難。那些小巷似乎比在平日更冷靜了，除了一兩個揹着槍慢慢兒踱着的團丁外，再沒有別的行人。繁茂的龍眼樹從院子裏伸出來，那垂着纍纍的淡黃色果實的樹枝在明媚的陽光裏微微動着。但志良不會注意到這景象了。那接連着密放的機關槍，小槍的聲音佔據了他的頭腦，牠們威脅地安放了一個可怕的景象在他的眼前，老是不放鬆他。他惶惑地跟了家楨大步走着，不說一句話，急促地呼吸着，好像有什麼野獸在後面追趕他們一般。

他們到了家楨的家，家楨用力捶着門，等了好一會纔有人來開了門讓他們進去。家楨在書桌的抽屜裏取了一小束紙件揣在懷裏，志良拿着他的皮包。他們不多在家裏停留，又匆忙地出去了。

剛走出門，志良忽然想起了秋星，他禁不住恐懼地問家楨道：『秋星不會有危險嗎？』

『誰知道！我們快走！』家楨無情似地用低沈的聲音回答。他只顧大步走着，使得志良有些落後了。

槍聲剛纔停了一會，這時候又響了起來，起初是斷續的幾下，過後就是一排密放，這一次真密，好像

許多匹駿馬奮起蹄子向着他耳邊奔騰過來。他恐怖跑了幾步，抓住家楨的膀子，絕望地問道：

『秋星，她不會……』

他不能夠接着說下去，他睜大一雙血紅的眼睛望着家楨。家楨不答話，却避開了他的眼光。恰恰在這時候砲聲響了，他覺得周圍的空氣起了一陣猛烈的震動，彷彿兩旁的牆壁都會傾倒下來，壓在他的身上。他昏迷似地停了脚步。直到砲聲的餘音在空中完全消失了時，他纔無力地跟着家楨往前面走了。

這砲聲代替家楨，給了他一個回答，這回答證實了他的恐懼，而且把他的最後的一線希望也毀掉了。

## 七

汽車站上車子都開走了，大半是被民團要了去運送團丁。剩了一部壞車子停在那里。許多人擠在站上吵鬧地要求開車，站長後來答應了把這部車子也開出去。

家楨他們到站時正看見一羣人圍着車子爭先恐後地擠上去，他們費了很大的力量纔在車上找到了兩個站立的位置。於是車子很喫力地緩緩開動了。

車上擠滿了客人，大家帶着緊張的面容激動地談

論着戰事。空氣很壞，充滿着臭味，而且異常悶熱。車子雖然走得很慢，但是卻震動得十分厲害，常常把站立的客人顛來播去。

志良和家楨被車子顛播着。他們用力地抓住旁邊座位的靠背。他們不交談一句話。家楨的臉上老是帶着嚴肅的表情，他皺着眉頭在計劃什麼事情。志良的臉上卻不時地起着拘攣，他的臉蒼白得像一張紙，他的一對血紅的眼睛茫然地望着車窗外的景物。

依舊是耀眼的紅土馬路，依舊是新開斷的山，依舊是那許多茂盛的樹木。這一切和兩天以前並沒有兩樣，然而現在牠們都失去牠的光采了。他的眼睛只看見一片灰暗的顏色，有時候就會有一對發光的眼睛在這灰暗中現出來，那明高的淚珠就像滴在他的心上，他的心隱隱地痛了。

槍聲漸漸隱了下去，汽車走得較遠了，但依舊走得很慢，而且除了顛播之外還使人時時刻刻都擔心牠會馬上停下來不能夠再開動了。

『真慢得很，』家楨忽然焦急地說。志良驚醒似地掉頭看他，希望聽見他說兩句話來打破這種不確定的苦痛，然而他却閉着嘴不再作聲了。

車子像一匹倦馬似地困難地捱着路程；後來快逼



近那個大站了，牠卻特別遲慢起來，似乎動一下也要費大勁似的。

忽然前面起了車輪的響聲，兩部大汽車載滿着團丁迎面駛過來，那氣勢是很兇猛的，這輛車子連忙往旁邊避開，車身大大地震動一下，就馬上停住了，讓那兩部大汽車在旁邊飛跑了過去，過後司機再來開車，車子却像固定在地上似地不能夠移動了。

司機下車去修理車子，賣票的給他幫忙。客人在車上嚷着，談論着，抱怨着，過了一會，司機回到車上來。車子動了。司機勉強開着這病車，差不多一步一步地捱到了車站。

站臺上空着，沒有一輛車子，許多人激動地圍着一個職員在談話。站房門口有兩個武裝的團丁在守衛，一些行李堆在那裏面，幾個女客帶了小孩坐在那里。

車子一到，全個車站都騷動起來了，大部分的人擁擠地撲過去，有的提了行李想擠上車，有的想去打聽城裏的消息。他們把車子包圍着。這情形甚至使車上的人也喫了驚。

然而車子壞了，不能夠再往前面開動。司機和賣票安靜地甚至帶了幸災樂禍的態度把這消息告訴衆

人，便排開人羣逕自往站房內走去，留了那車子和一車子的客人在站臺上。包圍着車子的人們也就漸漸地散開了去，讓那些帶着失望的面容的乘客提着小件行李下車來。他們生氣地口裏抱怨着，踏着大步走進站房內去找站長交涉。

站長在樓上，他有要緊的事情。他們找不着他。另一個職員來和他們講話。車子沒有了。說是要下午纔有車開回來。有些客人吵着要退票。

家楨和站上的職員很熟習，他們讓他和志良兩人到樓上去。站長正在一個房間裏打電話，家楨看見這情形，就和志良在外面廊上站着等候他。廊上有一個凳子，他們把手裏的東西和帽子放在那上面。

過一會站長掛了電話走出來，臉上帶了焦急的樣子，家楨一個人立刻迎上去。兩個人低聲談了幾句話。站長就急急地走下樓去了。志良茫然地倚着欄杆看那下面站臺上喧鬧的人羣。家楨走到志良的旁邊站了半晌纔苦澀地低聲道：『志良，那邊大概守不住城了。』他想使他的聲音平靜，那苦惱纏住他，他不能夠接着說下去。志良馬上掉過臉驚愕地望着家楨，他的眼睛急急地震動，他張開嘴想說話，但話沒有說出口，他忽改了主意就默默地埋了下頭，把兩隻手撐住

欄杆。

樓梯上脚步聲響了，站長激動地跑上來。

『一部車子也找不出來，至早也要到下午兩三點鐘才有，而且還沒有把握，』站長失望地對家楨說。

『但是我不能夠等，我馬上就要走，』家楨變了臉色自語似地絕望地說。

『我也知道，但是沒有車子怎麼辦呢？』站長把手按住額角沈吟地說；過後他忽然放下手堅決地說道：『我給你設法雇一部人力車罷，反正路程也不太遠，你看怎樣？』

『好罷，』家楨無可奈何地答道，他的眼睛略略放了點光，不像剛纔那樣地絕望了。

站長不再說話就匆匆走下樓去。

『志良，我不能夠再送你了，』家楨在廊上走了兩步，忽然看見志良在注視他，就走到志良的面前撫着志良的膀子惜別似地說。

『你答應我你和秋星再來看我罷，』志良孤寂地微笑一下，突然覺得心裏隱隱地發痛，眼淚從眼眶裏迸了出來，他緊緊抓住家楨的膀子，像不願意把家楨放走似的，他用了近乎抽泣的聲音祈求地說。這聲音裏交織着失望和希望，但失望是九分，而希望就只有

一分。

家楨默默地點着頭。

『你答應我讓我和你們在一起住一些時候罷，我不再寫那些小說了，』家楨的點頭並不能夠使志良滿足，他還繼續地哀求道。『只有你們知道我是多麼地寂寞……離開你們我是多麼地寂寞——』他的話被站長的地步聲打斷了。

『車子馬上就來，你預備走罷，』站長走上來，略帶了寬慰的樣子說。

『好，謝謝你，』家楨應了一聲，他忽然想起一件事情，就把志良介紹給站長，關切地說：『這是我一個好朋友，現在到××去。他剛來，不懂本地話，一切要靠你幫忙，請你好好地照料他上車。』

『那自然，』站長和藹地笑了笑，就伸出手和志良握了手。他剛要開口說應酬話，電話的鈴聲忽然響了，他急急走進房間裏去。

『這站長是個很好的人，你可以相信他，他會照料你，』家楨望着站長的背影感動地說。

『你沒有危險嗎？』志良也很感動，他忽然想起家楨的事情，他知道家楨一定是懷了什麼重大的使命到別處去，他不禁有些擔心起來，就焦急地問道。

家楨淡淡地一笑，這樣掩飾了他心裏的憂鬱，他極力做出平靜的聲音說：『我看不會有什麼危險。你放心，將來我會和秋星一道來看你。』

『那麼你們不會忘記我？』志良緊緊握着家楨的手，兩眼含了淚感激地望着家楨，半晌纔說出這一句話。他的聲音抖得很厲害。

家楨剛要答話，站長就從房裏急急走出來。臉色突然變得十分可怕了，兩隻小眼睛圓圓地睜着，那強烈的眼光像找尋捕獲物似的抓住了家楨的臉，激動和恐怖使他變得口吃起來。他說：

『汪國剛——進城——了……』

『會這樣快？』家楨勃然變了臉色，驚惶地失聲叫起來。志良呆呆地望着站長，臉上的肌肉猛烈地在抽動。

『城裏很混亂，……到處起了火，……民團正望這面退下來……』站長一面喘氣一面說話。

『秋星！』志良忍不住叫了一聲，這聲音和抽泣差不多。他的眼前現了一片火光，在火光中露出了一個女人的頭，但馬上就被火焰包圍住不見了。他的耳邊彷彿響起了一片腳步聲，汪國剛的隊伍提着大砍刀進行着，進行着。他苦痛地掉轉頭走開，把身子倚在

欄杆旁邊的圓柱上面。

家楨立在站長面前，不停地用力搔着頭髮，一張臉通紅着，汗珠從額上滴下來，他好像沒有聽懂站長的話似的，不作聲，只顧咬着嘴唇。

『你還去嗎？到那邊去好像也沒有什麼希望了，還是到××去避一下好，』站長看見他不說話，以為他被這惡消息打倒了，心裏沈重得難受，好像那上面壓着一塊石頭，便絕望地說。

家楨忽然放下手，把頭往後一揚，於是堅決地，粗魯地說：『我去！』就伸出手來抓了站長的手緊握一下，說聲：『那麼再見罷，也許在地獄裏面。』然後轉身去在凳子上取了他的白通帽戴在頭上。這時候志良已經比較鎮靜了一點，聽見他說要走也轉身來看他。他便走到志良旁邊拍一下志良的肩膀，大聲說：

『我去了。要是秋星沒有意外，她也許會到這里來……』好像有什麼東西堵塞了他的咽喉，使他不能夠繼續說下去，他就毅然地掉轉身子大步往樓下走了。

站長跟了他走下樓。志良卻站在那里，呆呆地望着他的背影，過了半晌忽然猛省似地撲在欄杆上面大聲叫着『家楨！』

家楨正走到站臺上，聽見志良的聲音擡起頭來望他一眼，點了一下頭，也不說話，就和站長一起走出了站臺。他的白通帽消失在人叢中再也看不見了。

然而在志良的淚眼裏那頂白通帽還鮮明地顯現着，而且牠不住地往上面升，往上面升，超過了欄杆直到他的眼前，於是就遮了他的眼睛。

『我要給你們以晨星。』同時好像有誰把這句被他遺忘了多年的話語在他的耳邊反覆地大聲說了。他癡呆地望着站臺上喧鬧的人羣。他的眼睛一陣昏花，彷彿有無數金光在眼前閃耀。

他覺得他真的看見了星光。

『真正是一個好人！』一個讚嘆的聲音意外地把他驚醒了。

他回頭看，那個中年站長含了眼淚站在他的背後。站長看見他掉過頭，便誠懇地安慰他道：

『等一會就有車子，你不要緊。』

他不回答，只是無可如何地苦笑着。他這時候簡直想不到一個走字。

## 後 記

本社編印漢英對照文藝小叢書，目的想把國內文壇上有價值的作品介紹到海外去，同時還有一種副作用，就是要使愛好文藝的青年把它作為閱讀，揣摩以及練習翻譯的資料，因此已出版的各冊中（如手，高老夫子，傷逝等）在編排方面都採取了漢英逐節（every paragraph）對照的形式，因為那些文字全是直譯的。

本書係中篇小說，全文共分為七章，自第一章至第四章也是直譯的，第五章以後，譯者為顧全外國讀者閱讀的便利起見，把原文中的對白縮短了，改成直線的敘述事實，而且刪除了那些繁瑣的部分，所以在編排方面，祇能採取另一種接排的形式了。不過由於譯筆的謹嚴，對於巴金先生原文的精華，是無損秋毫的。

巴金先生的作品洋溢着高度的熱情，有人說他的作品正表現出現代青年口中所要說的話。因此能受千萬讀者的愛戴並不是偶然的，在介紹了魯迅先生，蕭紅女士的作品後，我們就選定了他的作品。

最後，本社虔誠的希望海內外讀者不吝賜教。

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