ARCHIVES

Ting Ling's "When I Was in Sha Chuan (Cloud Village)"

With a discussion by Yi-tsi Feuerwerker

This story by one of modern China's most famous women writers was written in 1940 during the Sino-Japanese War. A brief biographical sketch of Ting Ling and a discussion of the story are appended.

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"When I Was in Sha Chuan (Cloud Village)"[1]

Despite the general improvement in my health Comrade Mo thought that it would be better to give me a temporary rest from the bustle of the Political Department, and he accordingly decided to send me on a fortnight's leave to Cloud, a neighboring village about thirty lis away. I welcomed the prospect of this change because it would give me an opportunity to write up the notes I had taken during the previous three months.

On the journey, which was covered on foot, I was accompanied by a fellow comrade from the Political Bureau who, I presumed, was visiting the place in connection with her work. She was a silent reserved type of

1. The story is dated 1940. This translation is taken from an English edition of 1945 published by Kutub Publishers, Bombay, translated by Kung Pu-sheng. The story was revised by Ting Ling in the 1951 Chinese edition, to emphasize Ching-Ching's understanding of her work. These revisions are provided in the notes. Notes 2–5 are reprinted from the original translation.

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person and hence the trip seemed dull and lonely to me. Moreover, as I hadn't recovered my full strength, I was compelled to go slowly, so that although we started early in the morning, it was almost sunset by the time we approached our destination.

From the distance, Cloud village looked very much the same as any other. But I knew there was a beautiful church which had not been destroyed, and, in the surrounding hills, a small forest of pines near which I would be staying. From these hills I would have a direct view of the church. The church was not yet in sight although I could now see a few rows of caves along the hillside and the green branches around them, as well as the willow trees encircling the village. The place gave me a feeling of contentment.

"Now we can say we have as good as arrived. Let us rest for a while. What do you say?" I thought that my companion might perhaps be worn out.

"No, we cannot stop. Look at the sky. We still have to find our luggage. I wonder if it has been brought here."

I had gathered from my companion that this was a busy village. However, we did not come across even a child or a dog as we approached it. A few withered leaves were being whirled about and scattered by the wind.

"This used to be a primary school but it was destroyed by the Japanese last year," Ah-Kwei, my companion, said. "And this was a big class-room. Look at it now!" She excitedly pointed to a large, empty courtyard. "A year and a half ago it was full of activity. The officers played football here every day after dinner."

Then impatiently, "Why, there's no one here! Shall we go to the Village Council first or up the hill? I think we had better ask the way before we start. Of course I know the hill well but it is always better to be sure of the direction. Where could they have taken our luggage? It doesn't matter to me so much, but I'm afraid you may be worried."

Near the door of the Village Council there were many white posters stuck on the wall. But it was deathly still inside—not a soul to be found. There were just a few bare tables scattered around.

Suddenly a man dashed in. He threw a glance at me as if he wanted to ask a question, but swallowed it hastily. He started to run out again but we stopped him.

"Oh yes, our folks? They have gone to the west side of the village. Luggage? Yes, there was some luggage. It was sent up the hill some time ago to Second Aunt Liu's." He stood looking at us curiously.

We found that he belonged to the Farmers' Association and so we requested him to take us up the hill and also to send a note to a comrade in the village.

He promised to send the note but would not go with us. He seemed to be in a hurry, and left us as soon as he could.

The street was very quiet. Some doors were closed; those that were

open showed very dark interiors. We wanted to knock and ask our way but we did not know how to begin.

Fortunately, Ah-Kwei knew the village well and she led me up the hill. By now it was dark; the winter sun had certainly set very fast. The hill was not high and near its summit were a few scattered caves carved out of the rock. Occasionally we saw people standing at the top looking across the open field. Ah-Kwei well knew that we could not possibly lose our way but she kept asking whoever we met:

"Is this the way to Second Aunt Liu's house?" "How far is Second Aunt Liu's home?" "Please tell me how to get to Second Aunt Liu's?" or "Did you see our luggage being taken to Second Aunt Liu's house? Is she at home?"

All the answers were satisfactory, and we were directed to the courtyard of Liu's house on the highest point of the hill. Two little puppies were the first to welcome us.

On hearing us approach two people appeared with lamps and led us to the cave[2] at the right. It was a spacious cave, and the *kang*[3] near the window was piled with my bedding-roll, suitcase, and Ah-Kwei's blanket.

Among the people there were a few who knew Ah-Kwei. They took her hand and asked her a string of questions. After a while they went out leaving me alone in the room. I felt a little bored and made my bed. I was about to lie down when the others swarmed in again. A young woman had a big bowl of noodles in her hand; Ah-Kwei, Second Aunt Liu, and a little girl brought chopsticks, plates and a dish of onions mixed with chilis; the little girl brought a small stove of burning charcoal.

They urged me to eat. In the meanwhile I warmed my hands and arms. Second Aunt Liu and her daughter went and sat on the *kang*. There was an air of mystery about them as they continued their previous conversation. At first I thought I had aroused their interest, but by and by I realized that I was mistaken. They were completely absorbed in their conversation. I did not want to betray my interest or curiosity and I did not ask any questions. Disjointed sentences here and there conveyed nothing to me, especially as Second Aunt Liu always lowered her voice, fearing that she might be overheard. Ah-Kwei was now an entirely different person. She seemed to be capable, efficient, and quite talkative. She was apparently a good listener and seemed to grasp the main points of the conversation. The young woman and the little girl did not speak

2. "Caves." In the Northwest of Shansi or Shensi province the land is hilly and rocky. People often drill the rocks and build their houses within them. They are warm in the winter and cool in the summer-time, and are well-ventilated by means of windows and doors in front. More elaborate caves have whitewashed walls. Big halls and hospitals in the Northwest are built in these caves. When the Indian National Congress Medical Mission to China worked with the Eighth Rome Army in the Northwest, they had to work in hospitals built in this manner. [n. in orig. trans.]

3. "Kang." A mud bed built over a stove, common in the Northern and Northwest parts of China, where the winters are very cold. Sometimes a *kang* can be very big, and a whole family often sleeps on one *kang*. [n. in orig. trans.]

much, just supplementing a word here and there, but they followed the conversation intently and not a single word escaped them.

Suddenly the courtyard was full of voices. I could not make out how many people were talking at the same time or how many had come in. Second Aunt Liu and the others climbed down from the *kang* in nervous excitement and rushed out. I followed them blindly. The courtyard was in complete darkness except for the red paper lanterns moving among the crowd. I squeezed myself into the crowd but I could see nothing. The other people were also getting nowhere. They all seemed to want to speak but none of them did. I heard only a few sentences which puzzled me.

"Jade, are you coming too?"

"Did you see?"

"Yes, I saw. I'm scared."

"Why scared? Just a human being, only prettier than ever!"

At first I thought it was a new bride, then a war captive. But they told me I was wrong. I followed the crowd into a cave, but it was full of people and I could see nothing through the mist and smoke. People were leaving; I too left. The courtyard became less crowded.

I could not sleep. I unpacked my suitcase under the light, fumbled over my notebooks and photographs and sharpened a few pencils. I was a little exhausted but also excited by my new environment. I worked out a time-table for my stay.

There was man's voice at the door.

"Are you in bed, comrade?"

Without waiting for an answer the man came in, a rather refined looking country youth, about twenty years old.

"I received Comrade Mo's letter," he began, "this place is quiet and I have put you in Second Aunt Liu's care. Don't hesitate to ask her for whatever you need. Comrade Mo says you want to stay here for two weeks, but if the place suits you, it is perfectly all right for you to stay longer. I live in the next courtyard in the cave below. Send for me if you need anything."

He refused to sit down on the *kang*. There was no chair in the room so I stood up too.

"So you are Comrade Ling!" I said. "Let's have a talk."

I knew he was in charge of some work in the village; he had not quite finished his junior high school. He glanced at my suitcase on the *kang*.

"They tell me you have written many books. Unfortunately they are unobtainable here so I have not read them."

Our conversation soon turned on the progress of cultural work in the village.

"After you have rested for a few days," he said, "We must invite you to address either a mass meeting or a training class. Anyway you must help us. Our most difficult problem here is cultural recreation."

I had met many young people like him at the front. At first I had often been astonished and moved by the rapid transformation in these young people, who were almost of another generation. As I met more and more of them I ceased to be surprised and gave up trying to understand them more fully. I changed the subject.

"What's been happening here?"

"Ching-Ching, Elder Mother Liu's daughter, has come back."

I saw something new in his eyes, radiant with passion and joy. I was about to ask further questions when he explained:

"She has come back from behind the Japanese lines where she has been working for us for a year."

"*Ai-yah.*" I gasped in spite of myself.

Ling was about to continue when someone called him from outside. As he left he said quietly that Ching-Ching would call on me the next day and would have a lot of interesting material for me.

Ah-Kwei came back very late. She lay down on the *kang* turning from side to side trying to sleep. She sighed frequently. Although I was exhausted, I wanted her to tell me something about Ching-Ching.

"No, comrade, I'm not feeling well. I'll tell you tomorrow. *Ai-yah!* we women are wretched!" She covered her head with her blanket and lay still. I did not know when she actually fell asleep.

Early next morning I went out for a walk and found myself in the village. I went into the grocery store because I wanted to rest and also to buy some dates for Second Aunt Liu to put in the porridge. I asked them to deliver the dates. When the grocer learned that I was with Second Aunt Liu, his small eyes blinked rapidly and he asked me in a low voice,

"Did you see her niece? I hear that her nose has gone because of the disease. She was molested by the Devils." He turned to his wife who was standing inside the counter by the door.

"My! she still has the face to come back! It is a punishment for her father, Liu Fushang."

"That child! She was always frivolous. Don't you remember the way she used to run about? The way she and Sha Ta-Bao stuck together like fire. If Sha Ta-Bao hadn't been so poor she would have married him." The old woman adjusted the folds of her dress as she went out.

"There are so many rumors!" He turned around and continued quietly. Now he wasn't blinking but his eyes conveyed a very solemn expression. "Some say that she has slept with at least a hundred men, some, that she has even been the wife of a Japanese officer. This disgraceful woman really should not be allowed to come back."

I restrained myself from answering and walked out as I did not want to start a quarrrel with him. As I walked away I felt his small blinking eyes fixed on my back.

Near the corner of the Catholic church I overheard two water-carrier women.

"She had been to the Catholic father," one said, "and wanted to

become a nun. Father Lu asked her why, but she did not reply and just went on weeping. Well, who knows what is in it? Now she is more worthless than a worn-out shoe."[4]

"Yesterday," the other said, "she was limping as she walked, I am told. *Ai-yah*! how can she have the face to meet people?"

"Some one told me she was wearing a gold ring given her by the Devils."

"She has been to distant Ta Tung, and seen quite a bit of the world. She can speak the Devils' language too."

"Her mother's! . . ."[5]

My walk had become unpleasant. I returned home. Ah-Kwei was not in, so I sat down alone in the cave and read a pamphlet.

When I raised my eyes from my book I noticed two huge baskets used for storing grain. They must have had a long history, as their color was as black as the wall. I opened the moveable part of the window paper and saw that the sky, unlike the previous day, was grey and threatening. At the edge of the cleanly-swept ground the withered branches of a few trees brushed against the silent grey sky. The courtyard was empty and still.

I opened my suitcase and took out my pen and paper. Why didn't Ah-Kwei come back? I forgot that she had work to do and hadn't come here just to be with me. Though winter days are very short, that one seemed even longer than a summer day.

After some time I saw the little girl entering the courtyard. I jumped down from the *kang* and greeted her, but she only smiled at me and ran into the other cave. I walked twice round the courtyard and saw an eagle flying towards the big trees near the church.

As I came to the corner of the courtyard I heard a woman sobbing. She was trying to restrain herself from crying aloud and blew her nose frequently.

I tried hard to keep my mind thinking over the purpose of my visit. I promised myself a good rest and determined to keep my time-table. I returned to my room but it was impossible to rest.

Soon Second Aunt Liu came to see me and was followed by the little girl and the daughter-in-law. They sat on my *kang* by the fire while the little girl investigated my things which were on the little table of the *kang*.

4. "Broken Shoe" is a local term in Shansi, especially well known in Taiyuan, for private prostitutes. [n. in orig. trans.]

5. "His Mother's." The full expression is usually shortened to "His Mother's." It ranges over all nature in its application. As employed in earnest it means that the person (thing, object) is the offspring of an adulterous mother. It is peculiarly insulting in China because it also implies that the speaker is the father of the person being cursed. The oath "hangs on the lips" of many famous characters in Chinese fiction and through its popularization in literature, especially by Lu Hsun, it is a word of rebellion too. No curse is heard more often in all its variations throughout China. [n. in orig. trans.] [Lu Hsun is China's Gorky/Edgar Snow.]

Second Aunt Liu started to relate the events of a year and a half ago when the Devils attacked Cloud.

"At that time everybody had to think of themselves. We who were up on the hill were better off, we could get away easier. There were quite a few families below who could not escape in time. It's really fate. Our Ching-Ching had to go to the Church just at that time—not earlier, not later. We found out afterwards that she had begged the Catholic father to let her become a nun. The whole thing was this—because of war rumors, her father was negotiating a marriage for her with the widowed son of the proprietor of a rice store in West Willow village. The man was nearly thirty and had a respectable and well-to-do family background. We all thought it was a good match except Ching-Ching. She protested and cried before her father, but the old man, who had always given in to her till then, was adamant about this. You know, she is the only child of our elder brother, and naturally he wanted her to be married into a good family. In a fit Ching-Ching went to the church, of all places. At that fatal moment, she fell into that hell of fire. How can her parents help grieving?"

"Was that her mother weeping?"

"Yes, her mother."

"My niece? She's a youngster after all. Though she cried so bitterly yesterday, she has now gone to the meeting in very high spirits. She's just eighteen."

"I hear that she has been the wife of a Japanese. Is that true?"

"Well, it is hard to say. There has been so much gossip and so many rumors which we have not been able to straighten out. She has contracted the disease. How could you keep clean after being put in one of those places? Of course, the proposed marriage with the rice-shop family was broken off. Who wants to have a woman who has been used by the Japanese? And, what is more, she actually has the disease; she admitted it herself last night. She has changed quite a bit. She talked about the Devils in such a matter of fact way—it was as if she were discussing her daily meals. She is only eighteen years old but has already become so bold and free."

"Sha Ta-Bao has been here today, mother," the daughter-in-law whispered, and looked at Second Aunt Liu with searching eyes.

"Who is Sha Ta-Bao?"

"He is the young chap down at the village flour mill. When they were children he and Ching-Ching studied in the same school for one year and have stuck together ever since. But his family was poor, even poorer than us. He was quite reserved but it was our Ching-Ching who ran after him all the time. It was on account of him that she tried to become a nun. After Ching-Ching was taken away by the Japanese Devils he came to see us often. At first, our brother was mad with him and swore at him. But he never answered back and kept on coming. He is a

decent boy, a boy with a conscience. Now he has become a Corporal in the Self-Defence Corps. He came again yesterday. I think he came to elder sister-in-law to propose. But I hear she wept and he also sobbed and left."

"Did he know your niece's condition?"

"How could he help but know? There's not a single person in the village who doesn't know. They know even more details than we do."

"That boy is really loyal. I approve of the marriage. After the last attack by the Devils, who can be called well-to-do any more? I think elder brother and his wife will give their consent. Who else would have her? Not to mention the terrible disease, her notorious name is enough to stop anyone."

"It was that fellow in a deep blue padded jacket, with a dark brown felt hat." The little girl's eyes were shining with curiosity and she seemed to understand fully what was going on.

My mind recalled a figure of this description whom I had seen when I started out for my walk early this morning. He had a keen and honest face and was standing outside the courtyard without making any attempt to come in. On my return I saw him again coming out from behind the pine trees. I did not pay much attention to him as I took him for one of the neighbors. Now, when I recalled him, he certainly seemed to be an energetic, pleasant young man.

My plan for a rest would probably not be realized. Why were my thoughts so mixed up? I was not anxious to meet anyone and yet my mind was full of bits of gossip.

Ah-Kwei smiled at me and went away. She appeared to have understood me. I also understood what was in her mind, so I busied myself over the *kang* for a while, feeling as if the cave, my bed, the lamp, everything had brightened. When I was about to put the kettle on the fire for tea, I heard Ah-Kwei approaching the cave. Someone was with her.

"A guest is coming, Comrade." Before Ah-Kwei had finished, I heard a chuckle.

In the doorway I found myself holding the hand of a stranger, and shrank a little from her feverish touch. She climbed on to the *kang* after Ah-Kwei, a long black braid hung heavily down her back. With deep interest the newcomer looked around the little cave which had bored me so much. She was sitting opposite me, her body leaning back a little, with her hand on my blanket. She did not appear to want to speak, but after a while she quietly glanced at my face. The shadow cast by the lamp made her eyes look very long and her chin small. Though her eyes were in shadow they looked very brilliant by the light of the fire, like the windows of a house in the country during summer, clear and open.

I didn't know how to start the conversation without hurting her feelings and pride. I poured out a cup of hot tea for her.

"Are you a Southerner? I think you must be. You do not look as if

you belong to our province. . . ." It was Ching-Ching who spoke first.

"Have you met many Southerners?" I thought it better to continue the same line of conversation.

"No," she shook her head and kept staring at me. "I have only met a few, but they were always different. I like your people. You are different from us, most of your girls from the South can read. I want to study. Will you teach me?" After I had promised she spoke again.

"All the Japanese women can read too. Those Devil soldiers all kept a few prettily written letters. Some from their wives and sweethearts, others from girls they had not met, with pictures and very affectionate words written on them. It's funny how their girls love war and soldiers. I don't know whether they meant all they wrote, but anyway, the Devils were so pleased they kept them in their pockets like treasures."

"I hear you can speak Japanese?"

She looked slightly embarrassed as she continued frankly. "Running with them for more than a year, as time goes, I picked up a little. There is great advantage in knowing their language."

"Have you been to many places with them?"

"No I wasn't with a particular regiment. People think I had a good time being the Devil-officer's wife, but this is the third time I have come back from occupied territory. Last time I was sent there on a special job, it was a desperate one.[6] Now they are not sending me there any more, and will give me medical care. That just suits me, as I was worrying about my parents and was eager to come back and visit them. But it is hopeless with mother. She cries when I'm not here and she cries when I am here."

"*Ai-yah,* her sufferings were unspeakable. It is wretched to be a woman." Ah-Kwei wore a woeful expression, and almost burst out crying. She drew herself closer to Ching-Ching.

"Suffering?" she repeated as if she was recalling some remote event. "It is rather hard to tell. Some of the experiences were unbearable at the time, but they don't mean much now. But others which I lived through easily at the time are a constant throbbing pain in my heart. More than a year has passed, but everyone is so curious. Now look at the people of this village. Some are very kind to me, but many try to avoid me. Take my family, they too behave like the others. Everyone wants to have a quiet look at me. No one takes me for the former Ching-Ching. Have I changed? I ask myself over and over again. No, I have not changed. If I have, the only difference is that my heart has become a little harder. When you are in a place like that you are just forced to do things."

There was not a trace of sickness on her; her face looked clean and fresh; her voice clear and natural. She did not give me the impression

6. In the 1951 edition, these lines read, "Actually I've run back twice before, this is the third time. Later it was because I was sent there; there was no other way, I knew the place well, the work was important, and at the time there was no one else" (Ting Ling, *Wo tsai Hsia-ts'un shih-hou* [When I was in Hsia village] [Peking, 1951], p. 28).

that she was exaggerating, nor did she show that she brooded over her grievances and sorrows. I could not help inquiring about her state of health.

"I think it's just natural for every human being to want to live, no matter how ill he may be. What else can you do? Kill yourself?[7] I think a little differently, I saw you must find a new way instead of just dragging on. They said they would let me have medical care. Well, that's fine. It's better to get cured. I haven't felt sick at all these last two days, for when I was passing through Chang-Kai Chen, they gave me two injections and some medicines. Last autumn was my worst time. Everyone said I was decaying inside. At that time I had an important message to deliver, and couldn't find anyone to take it for me. That night I groped in the darkness alone and walked thirty lis. I felt pain at every step. I wanted to sit down and rest. If it hadn't been an urgent message I certainly wouldn't have gone. But it had to be done. I was afraid my absence would be noticed by the Devils if I delayed any longer. Later I rested for a week but was up before I was quite better. It's not easy to die even if you want to. Don't you agree?"

She didn't wait for my answer and continued her story. Sometimes she stopped and looked at us. Perhaps she wanted to know our reactions, perhaps she was thinking of something else. All through the narrative, Ah-Kwei seemed even more pained than Ching-Ching. Most of the time she was silent.

When she spoke she showed her unlimited sympathy. But her silence betrayed more clearly how stunned she was by the story. Her soul was tormented, and with all her heart she was living through Ching-Ching's sufferings.

I felt that Ching-Ching was not trying in the least to win our sympathy. She didn't even seem to be aware that others were sharing her suffering. But this made me feel warmer towards her. Had she not told her story in such a calm and quiet manner, as if she were talking about someone else, had she cried out aloud and made us cry too, we would not have been so moved.

At last Ah-Kwei burst into tears, and Ching-Ching came over to comfort her. I wanted to talk over many things with Ching-Ching, but I just could not speak. After she left I made myself read under the lamp for an hour. I could not look at or even speak to Ah-Kwei, who slept close to me, no matter how often she sighed or tossed about on the bed.

After this Ching-Ching came to chat with me almost every day. She

7. In the 1951 edition, these lines read, "Later I made connections with our own people and was even less afraid. When I saw the Japanese Devils getting beaten because of the tricks I played, the guerillas active all over, and everyone feeling better every day, it's worth it. I've got to find a way to live, and to live in a way that makes sense, unless it's absolutely impossible. So when they said they would let me have medical care, I thought that's fine . . ." (Ting Ling, *Wo tsai Hsia-ts'un ti shih-hou* [1951 ed.], p. 29).

didn't talk to me only about herself; she asked me many questions which were not directly connected with her life. Sometimes, when I talked of some remote subject she would listen with difficulty but still full of interest. When we walked down to the village together all the young people were very nice to her. They were, of course, the more active elements in Cloud. But people like the grocery-store owner always watched us coldly with a very tight expression. They disliked and despised Ching-Ching, and because of my association with her they wouldn't accept me into their circle either. It was more so with the women who prided themselves on their chastity. When they thought of Ching-Ching it raised their self-respect, and they were proud because they had not been raped.

After Ah-Kwei went away, my relationship with Ching-Ching became closer. We always wanted to be together. I like a person of flesh and blood, enthusiastic, definitely happy or sad, and with a clear-cut personality. Ching-Ching was of that type. Our talks occupied a good deal of my time, but I felt they were very fruitful, and enlarged my knowledge.

Soon I discovered that Ching-Ching was not absolutely frank with me, she had a secret. But I did not resent it, besides I didn't want to probe into her mind. Everyone has some secret buried deep down in her heart which has nothing to do with other people.

The day of my departure was drawing near. Ching-Ching appeared very unsettled. She did not particularly want to speak to me or do anything definite. She came to my room more often but was always very restless and went out again. Her appetite had been poor lately, and sometimes she ate nothing at all. I asked about her ailment, but I knew perfectly that her trouble was not physical. Sometimes she urged me to talk to her and showed an eagerness to listen, but I could tell she was thinking of something else. She was trying to cover her emotion under an attitude of indifference.

Twice, I saw that smart young fellow coming out of Ching-Ching's mother's cave. I had compared my impression of him with Ching-Ching's and I sympathized with him. Even though Ching-Ching had been used by so many Japanese, and had contracted the notorious disease, he still called on her patiently; bore her no ill-feeling; proposed before her parents and disregarded all ridicule and censure. He apparently thought that she needed him most now, and he understood that a man with the necessary courage and responsibility should stand by the woman he loved at a moment like this.

Ching-Ching, though I had had rather a short period in which to judge, did not show bitterness or dejection. She never expressed the need or the desire for a man's care and comfort. But she needed warmth; she had been wounded. Perhaps, because the wound was so deep, she had become harder. Anyway, I felt she should have something

beyond sympathy to warm her soul. I wished she could cry out her grief.

Naturally I hoped very much to attend the wedding feast of this family, or at least hear the good news before I went away. But what could be in Ching-Ching's mind? The wedding couldn't be delayed much longer and what problem could there be? To me there didn't seem much to worry about.

Second Aunt Liu, her daughter-in-law and the little girl had come to my room to give me some news. They stayed some time but I never gave them a chance to talk. If there were something concerning my friend which she hadn't told me, or about which I hadn't asked her, I would never want to hear it from other people. It would hurt my friend, myself, and our friendship.

It was the same day towards dusk: the courtyard was bustling with noise. All the people in the neighborhood had gathered there. There were whispers, some looked sad, some full of interest. The weather was bitter but these people were consumed with curiosity. They snuggled their heads, huddled their bodies together with their hands tucked into their sleeves, breathing in the bitter cold air and staring at each other.

I heard quarrelling and then sobbing in Elder Aunt Liu's room. Later, I heard a man weep. It must be Ching-Ching's father, I thought. Then followed the crash of broken glass and I could stand no more. I pushed through the crowd of onlookers.

"Oh, you've come just in time, do try to persuade Ching-Ching." Second Aunt Liu pulled me inside.

Ching-Ching's face was hidden behind her long dishevelled hair through which her eyes looked fiercely at the crowd. I stood by her side but she paid no attention to me. Perhaps she regarded me also as one of her enemies. She had changed so completely that I found it almost impossible to associate this girl with all that keenness and joyful spirit which had once belonged to her. She looked like a wild animal in captivity or an avenging goddess. But whom did she really hate and what made her look so cruel?

"Are you so hard-hearted? Can't you think of your parents? Look how I have suffered for you this last year and how. . . ." Elder Aunt Liu was sobbing and scolding from the *kang,* with tears streaming down her face. She was surrounded by several women who were trying to stop her from leaving the *kang.* Nothing could be more terrible, I thought, than a woman who has lost all her pride and self-control. I wanted to tell her it was useless for her to cry like that, but I knew no words would be effective.

The old man sat with his hands hanging down; he looked aged and

feeble. He sighed deeply. Sha Ta-Bao was sitting by him and looked at the old couple helplessly.

"Can't you say at least one word? You should have a little pity on your mother."

"There is a turning point for everything. Even the roads and the running streams know how to change their course when they come to a dead end. Can't you change a little? Why so. . . ?" The women were trying to argue with Ching-Ching.

I saw clearly that this affair would not work out as they wished. Ching-Ching made herself very clear. She did not need any pity nor would she pity others. She was unshaken in her determination and there was no other way. Nothing could move her.

Finally they took my advice to let Ching-Ching go to my room to rest and leave the matter to be settled in the evening. I took Ching-Ching out but she did not go to my room. She left me and ran to the back of the hill.

"Oh, that girl is impossible."

"So she despises and looks down upon us country folk."

"Think of that! Now she is just good for nothing! Still so proud. That stupid Sha Ta-Bao."

The people in the courtyard were commenting as they dispersed since there was nothing more interesting to see. I wandered about in the courtyard for a bit and then turned to the back of the hill. A cluster of pine trees surrounded some grave mounds which had broken grave stones in front of them. There was not a human shadow or even the sound of a falling leaf. Walking to and fro I called for Ching-Ching, but only the echoes answered my loneliness. The hills were in complete silence. The crimson cloud at the edge of the sky had disappeared while the melancholy evening fog rose lightly like a screen of smoke. Through the long and winding hillside I looked for her. After a fruitless search I sat down on a stone tablet. Should I go uphill or wait for her here? Perhaps it would be better to wait here. I sincerely wanted to share her suffering and pain.

Then I saw a shadow coming from below. Instantly, I recognized Sha Ta-Bao. I kept quiet, hoping he would not see me and would go straight up the hill, but he walked towards me.

"Have you found her?" I could not help speaking to him.

He sat down on the withered grass and remained silent while he gazed into the distance. I felt a little uneasy and embarrassed. He was certainly very young. His big eyes, with their long fine eyebrows, appeared rather dull now. His thin lips were closed firmly with grief and

suppressed suffering; they could have been full of life. His face looked honest. But what was the use?

"Don't feel bad. Tomorrow will be all right. I will try to talk to her this evening!" I tried to comfort him.

"Tomorrow, . . . She will always hate me. I know she hates me." His voice was a little gruff and sad.

"No, she has never told me that she hated anyone." I searched my mind and knew I wasn't lying.

"She would not tell you. She would not tell anyone. As long as she lives she will not forgive me."

"Why should she hate you?"

"Of course, ..." Suddenly he turned and stared at me. "You see, I was penniless. I didn't elope with her, but that was my fault, wasn't it?"

Waiting for my answer, almost as if he were speaking to himself, he continued. "Yes, it was my fault. How can I say I was right? Wasn't it I who brought her to this situation? If only I could have been as brave as she was, she would not . . ."

"Yes, I know she will hate me for ever. What shall I do? What does she want me to do? How can I make her happy? I would give my life for her. Can I still be of any use to her? Tell me! I simply don't know what to do. These are torturing days. I would rather have been taken by the Devils. . . ."

I suggested that we should go down. He walked with me for some distance and then stopped. He said he heard footsteps. I encouraged him to turn back. I did not continue on my way at once, I watched him till he was lost amongst the pines, under the dark sky.

That evening I went to bed very late but there was no news of them. I wondered how they had lived through the night.

I had my luggage packed before breakfast, ready for Comrade Ling to take away.

I had to return to my work in the Political Department, possibly for the Mopping-Up Campaign. It would start soon and my health did not permit me to linger here any longer. If I insisted on staying my health would make me a burden here during the campaign. But my heart was hanging empty—in the air. When could I come back again?

I felt someone sneaking into my cave. Ching-Ching jumped on to my *kang* and sat opposite. I saw that her face was swollen a little and her feverish hands made me feel very uncomfortable. I realized now that her illness was a serious one.

"Ching-Ching. I'm leaving. I don't know when we shall meet again. I hope you will listen to your mother. . . ."

"I came to tell you that I am leaving also," she cut in, "probably tomorrow. I wish I could leave even sooner."

"Really?"

"Really!" Her usual expression returned, bright and clear. "They have asked me to go for medical treatment. *Ai-yah!* We might be travelling together."

"Does your mother know?"

"No, but she will let me go if I say it's for medical treatment and I promise to come back when I'm cured. What good is it to stay at home." She looked exceptionally calm and composed today. Remembering my conversation with Sha Ta-Bao I asked her bluntly,

"Has your marriage been settled?"

"What difference does it make?"

"So you obey your mother?" That young man had made a deep impression on me and I wanted him to be happy, but I dared not put my hopes into words. I tried to forget about him.

"To follow their wish! Why should I? Have they ever listened to what I wanted?"

"So, you are holding out against them? Do you really hate Sha Ta-Bao?"

She was silent for a long time. Then she said even more calmly, "Hate him? Not quite that. You see, I'm a sick person anyway. And I have actually been molested by so many Devils that I can't even remember. After all, I am unclean, a woman with a black spot. So I'm not hoping for any happiness. It is much better to be busy and live among strangers than with my own people at home. Now, since they promise to send me to X—— for treatment I think I'll remain there to study. I hear it is a big place where there are many schools to which everyone can go. Now what's the use of remaining here together? It will be bad for everyone, so let us go our own way. I have made this decision not for myself alone but for everyone. So I don't feel I owe anything to others. People say that I'm young, narrow-minded, obstinate, and bad-tempered. Well, I'll not bother to explain myself. There are many things which they do not have to understand."

I was astonished. So something new was growing within her. I felt that her words deserved careful thought, but at that moment I merely told her I approved of her plans.

Her family was there when I left, but she had gone to the village Council Office. I did not see Sha Ta-Bao either. My heart no longer grieved, for I saw a more hopeful future for her. Tomorrow I would see her again. Yes, I should see her and be with her a great deal. As soon as I

left the family, Comrade Ling informed me that Ching-Ching had definitely made up her mind to leave. So her plans were soon to be realized.

* * *

The case of Ting Ling, modern China's most famous woman writer, illustrates some of the dilemmas confronting a feminist dedicated both to the socialist revolution and to literature. Literature as she practiced it provides a record of the changing terms of her search for solutions, yet it was also literature, exerting its own aesthetic demands irrespective of political commitment, that made her uniquely vulnerable. Ting Ling's writing career, which lasted from the 1920s to the 1950s, spanned the tumultuous decades of China in the throes of revolution. (Although she is still alive, the ignominious end of her literary activity with her expulsion from the Communist party in 1958 makes the use of the elegiac past tense appropriate here.) She seemed, moreover, always to have been at the center of what was happening, and each stage of political history she lived through, wrote on, and acted upon with the full power of her personality. The drama of her biography is created out of these tensions between politics, feminism, and art; they also help to account for the particular resonance of her writings.

For years Ting Ling's life story has been sensationalized by journalists. The fullest chronological accounts are provided by foreign correspondents who traveled to Yenan, the base of the Communist party during its years in the wilderness between 1937 and 1945, and who, because of her reputation, considered it mandatory to interview her while there.[8] In addition to these journalistic accounts of the first half of her life, we have reminiscences by her contemporaries, literary gossip, rumors, exposés. We do not have the full-scale, authentic biography which would enable us to reconstruct with some confidence the historical personality behind her writings. We have access only to the works themselves and the ideas *within* them. Since these are most often processed into "fiction," they provide their own opacities.

Ting Ling's personal situation and concerns as a feminist were those of the "second generation," in that the pioneering battles against the most flagrant, institutionalized forms of oppression—arranged marriage, foot-binding, denial of education—were fought and won for her to some extent by her mother. The story of this extraordinary woman is partly told in Ting Ling's unfinished novel *Mother*. Her family, in many ways typical of the declining gentry at the time, was in straitened circumstances when the father died about 1911. Ting Ling was then three or four years old. Left with two small children, the thirty-year-old

8. Gunther Stein, *The Challenge of Red China* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Co., 1945), pp. 251–59; Helen F. Snow, *Women in Modern China* (The Hague: Mouton, 1967), pp. 190–221; Helen F. Snow, *The Chinese Communists: Sketches and Autobiographies of the Old Guard* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1972), pp. 262–66.