

### *Xiao Hong and Lu Xun*

The year 1981 marks the centennial anniversary of Lu Xun's birth. It is also the seventieth anniversary of the birth in Hulan, Heilongjiang, of the novelist Xiao Hong (1911-1942). "A Remembrance of Lu Xun" shows not only the remarkably close relationship between these two major writers of successive generations, but also paints one of the most revealing and human word-portraits we have of modern China's foremost literary figures.

Xiao Hong's personal association with Lu Xun and his family began in November, 1934, after she and her husband, the novelist Xiao Jun 蕭軍, had been in Shanghai for about a month, and came to an end when Xiao Hong went to Japan in July, 1936; she returned to Shanghai nearly three months after Lu Xun's death. The relationship between Lu Xun and his two young Northeastern protégés was unique, particularly with Xiao Hong, for whom Lu Xun was not only a literary patron, but her confidant, protector (at one point, when Xiao Jun was mistreating his wife, he was refused admission to Lu Xun's home) and one of her most devoted fans.

"A Remembrance of Lu Xun" was first published in 1940, although parts of it appeared in print earlier under other titles and with some modifications. It is but one of many memorial pieces Xiao Hong wrote about Lu Xun, including a mime play (1941) and several poems and essays, but it is the most moving and the most memorable.\* In the original, Xiao Hong uses the term "xiansheng" 先生 as a mark of respect with every mention of Lu Xun's name (well over a hundred times); these have been deleted in the translation except when Lu Xun is referred to by his true surname, Zhou 周. The term has been retained in the author's mentions of Xu Guangping 許廣平, Lu Xun's wife. Although some repetitive portions have been excised or condensed, the translation follows the original as closely as possible, with notes supplied to explain certain references and rectify a few factual errors.

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\*A novel about Xiao Hong, entitled *Dreaming of Faraway Hulan River* 「夢迴呼蘭河」, in which her relationship with Lu Xun is imaginatively recreated by the author, Hsieh Shuang-t'ien 謝霜天, was published serially in the Taiwan Daily 「台灣日報」 (Taichung), beginning on May 4th, 1981.

蕭紅：回憶魯迅先生

## A Remembrance of Lu Xun

By Xiao Hong

Translated by Howard Goldblatt



XIAO HONG, *from*  
United Daily News, *Taipei*.

LU XUN'S LAUGH was bright and cheerful—it came from his heart. Whenever someone said something funny, he laughed so hard he couldn't even hold a cigarette. Sometimes his laughing ended in a fit of coughing.

Lu Xun walked with a light, nimble step, and my clearest memory is of seeing him put on his hat and walk out the door, left foot first, without a thought for anything else.

Lu Xun didn't pay much attention to styles of attire; he would say: "I don't even notice other people's clothes . . ."

Once, when he was recovering from an illness, Lu Xun was having a smoke in his reclining chair next to an open window. I was there in an outlandish bright red blouse with puffy sleeves.

Lu Xun said: "This muggy weather is typical for the rainy season." He pushed the cigarette farther into his ivory cigarette holder and changed the subject.

Xu Xiansheng (許先生) was busy with her housework, running back and forth, and she, too, took no notice of my clothes.

"Zhou Xiansheng (周先生)," I asked, "how do you like what I'm wearing?"

He glanced over at me. "I don't . . ." After a moment he added: "You're wearing the wrong color skirt. It's not that the blouse isn't attractive—all colors are attractive—but with a red blouse you should wear either a red or a black skirt. Brown's no good. The colors clash. Have you ever seen a foreign woman wearing a green skirt with a purple blouse, or a white blouse over a red skirt? . . ." He looked at me from his reclining chair then said: "Now, your skirt is brown, and it's a plaid design, which makes the blouse look unattractive.

" . . . thin people shouldn't wear black, and heavy people shouldn't wear white. A woman with long legs ought to wear black shoes, but a woman with short legs

should wear white ones . . . a stout woman shouldn't wear checks, but that's at least better than horizontal stripes. A woman wearing horizontal stripes looks even broader than she really is. Women like that should wear vertical stripes to make them look taller."

That day Lu Xun was in an expansive mood, and he even criticized some low boots I had worn, saying that they were military boots. According to him, the small loops in front and back were for hooking onto pantcuffs.

"Zhou Xiansheng," I said, "I wore those boots for a long time, so why didn't you say anything before? Why bring it up now, when I'm not wearing them any longer? I've got new ones now."

"That's why I'm telling you now. If I'd said something while you were wearing them, you'd have stopped."

We were going out for dinner that evening, so I asked Xu Xiansheng to give me a piece of cotton or satin material to tie up my hair. She brought out three pieces: one beige, one green and one that was the color of a peach. We chose beige. Then just for fun she took the peach-colored one and put it in my hair, saying grandly: "Oh, that's nice! That's just beautiful!"

I couldn't have been more pleased, so, with a coy little display of elegance, I waited for Lu Xun to look my way.

Lu Xun glanced over with a stern look on his face, his eyelids lowered a bit as he fixed his gaze on us.

"Don't make her up like that . . ."

Xu Xiansheng was a little embarrassed, and I immediately felt somewhat deflated.

When Lu Xun was teaching in Beijing he never lost his temper, although he often gave people that peculiar look of his. Xu Xiansheng often told me that when she was studying at Women's Normal University she noticed that every time Zhou Xiansheng was annoyed with his class he would lower his eyes and give them that look. Once, in a reminiscence he wrote of Fan Ainong,<sup>1</sup> he himself referred to this habit of his. Anyone who has ever been on the receiving end of that look has felt chastened by a man of superior intellect.

"Zhou Xiansheng," I asked, "how come you even know about women's fashions?"

"I've read some books on esthetics."

"When was that?"

"It must have been when I was a student in Japan."

"Books that you bought?"

"Not necessarily. I probably just ran across them somewhere . . ."

"Were they interesting?"

"I just glanced at them . . ."

"Zhou Xiansheng, why were you reading books like that?"

" . . ." He didn't answer. What could he say?

From off to the side, Xu Xiansheng answered for him: "Zhou Xiansheng has read all sorts of books."

<sup>1</sup> 范愛農, one of Lu Xun's fellow students in Japan.

During my early visits to Lu Xun's home the streetcar ride from my home in the French Concession to Hongkou<sup>2</sup> took an hour, so I didn't drop by too often. There was one occasion when we stayed up talking late into the night; the streetcars stopped running at midnight, and although I don't recall what we were talking about, I remember that at one point during the conversation I looked at the clock on the table next to me and saw that it was already 11:30, then 11:45, then . . . no more streetcars.

"After all, it's already midnight. Since the streetcars have stopped running, you might as well stay a little longer," Xu Xiansheng urged me.

Lu Xun seemed to be mulling something over that had been said; lost in thought, he leisurely raised his ivory cigarette holder.

After one o'clock Xu Xiansheng saw me (and another friend)<sup>3</sup> outside, where a fine rain was falling and all the lights down the lane were darkened. Lu Xun told Xu Xiansheng to call us a taxi and pay our fare.

Later I moved to North Sichuan Road, so every night after dinner, without fail, I went over to Continental Villa,<sup>4</sup> even during inclement weather.

Lu Xun was partial to northern cuisine. He liked deep-fried and hard foods. Even afterwards, when he was ill, he didn't care for milk, and if a bowl of chicken soup was placed beside him, he merely stirred it a couple of times and that was it.

One night I went over to make some *jiaozi*.<sup>5</sup> I was still living in the French Concession then, so I brought some imported pickles and some ground beef with me. Xu Xiansheng and I prepared the *jiaozi* at the table in the dining room while Master Haiying<sup>6</sup> hung around and pestered us. Before long, he had run off with some of the small, round slices of dough, saying he was going to make a boat out of them. When he brought it over to show us, we ignored him, so he then fashioned a

baby chick out of the dough. Both Xu Xiansheng and I continued to ignore him, forcing ourselves not to praise him, knowing full well that such talk would make him even harder to handle.

The rear part of the dining room started turning dark even before dusk. We felt a chill on our backs. We knew that we weren't wearing enough clothing, but we were too busy to go in and put anything else on. We finished the *jiaozi*, only to discover that there weren't enough; our gabfest had interfered with our work. She had been telling me about her studies in Tianjin and how she had become a tutor while studying at Women's Normal. Her description of the tutor's examination was most interesting: since only one person was to have been selected from among the dozens who took the examination, her being chosen was something to be proud of. She had sought the job to help with her tuition. When winter came, Beijing grew cold, and the home where she had been employed was a long way from the school. So besides her monthly transportation costs, if she caught a cold or the flu she had to use some of the money for aspirin—for ten dollars a month she had to travel from the west side of the city all the way to the east side . . .

When the *jiaozi* were cooked and ready, we went upstairs, where we were met by Lu Xun's bright, cheerful laughter cascading down the stairway; he was having a spirited discussion with a few friends. We all ate well that night.

After that time there were other days when we prepared scallion-rolls or turnovers, and anytime I suggested making these, Lu Xun immediately gave his approval. Even when they didn't turn out well, he still raised his chopsticks and asked Xu Xiansheng: "Is it okay if I eat a few more?"

Lu Xun had a stomach problem, so after each meal he had to take stomach tablets.

One afternoon I entered Lu Xun's bedroom as he was proofreading Qu Qiubai's *Hai shang shu lin*,<sup>7</sup> and he turned around in his swivel chair to face me, rising slightly from his seat. "Haven't seen you for a long time . . ." He nodded as he

<sup>2</sup> A district in Shanghai, 虹口 (Hongkou), on the northern side of the Huangpu (Whangpoo) 黄浦 River.

<sup>3</sup> Most likely her common-law husband, Xiao Jun 萧军.

<sup>4</sup> See p. 177 below.

<sup>5</sup> Meat-filled dumplings.

<sup>6</sup> Lu Xun's son, who was five years old at the time.

<sup>7</sup> Qu Qiubai 瞿秋白, a close friend of Lu Xun and a brilliant Marxist literary theoretician, was executed by the Guomindang in 1935. *Hai shang shu lin* 海上述林, his collected works, was published by Lu Xun.

spoke.

Hadn't I just been over? How could it have been a *long time* since he'd seen me? Even if he'd forgotten that I'd been over that very morning, he had to be aware that I came over nearly every day.

Zhou Xiansheng turned back around in his reclining chair and began to laugh. He had been teasing me.

During the summer rainy season there were few clear days. One morning the sky cleared up, much to my delight, so I rushed over to Lu Xun's home and ran breathlessly upstairs.

"Ah, it's you!" Lu Xun said.

"It's me," I answered. I was so winded I couldn't even manage a sip of tea.

"What's up?" he asked.

"The sky's clear," I said. "The sun's come out!"

Xu Xiansheng and Lu Xun both started to laugh, quickly realizing that their deepening somber mood had been shattered.

Whenever Haiying saw me he invariably dragged me out to the garden to play. He either tugged on my hair or my clothing. Why didn't he drag others along with him? According to Zhou Xiansheng: "Since you wear pigtails, he feels closer to you—he sees others as adults, but he thinks you're more his age."

Xu Xiansheng asked Haiying: "Why do you like her so much? Why don't you play with anyone else?"

"She's got pigtails," he said, coming over and tugging my hair.

There were seldom any unfamiliar visitors in Lu Xun's home, almost none at all, and especially none who stayed over as house guests. One Saturday evening, dinner was set in the second-floor bedroom and guests were seated in every chair. This happened each Saturday evening, when Zhou Jianren brought his family over.<sup>8</sup> Seated at the table was a tall, thin man wearing a Chinese vest. Lu Xun introduced him to me: "This is someone from my hometown, a merchant."

At first glance he seemed to fit the role: he was

wearing Chinese trousers and had closely cropped hair. Then while we were eating, he raised his glass to toast the others and poured me a glass of wine. Later on he seemed a bit too spirited to be a merchant. After dinner he began talking about *False Liberty* and *Two Hearts*.<sup>9</sup> This kind of enlightened merchant was not the sort you saw often in China, and I was always on my guard when I saw something for the first time.

The next time I saw him was when we were eating dinner in the downstairs dining room. It was a clear day with an occasional gust of warm wind, and although it was already dusk, the rear part of the dining room hadn't yet turned dark. Lu Xun had just had a haircut, and I can still remember that there was a plate of herring on the table. It must have been prepared especially for him, since it was fried. A flat wineglass that looked like a ricebowl had been placed in front of Lu Xun. The merchant gentleman obviously was a drinking man, for the wine bottle was standing beside his hand. He was talking about the Mongols and the Miao tribespeople. Then he told us what he had seen while passing through Tibet, including a story about a Tibetan woman who was being chased by a man.

That merchant was a strange one; he seemed to spend all of his time traveling around, but never did any business. Not only that, he had read all of Lu Xun's books, and he kept talking about this one or that one. Then Haiying called him Mr. X, and as soon as I heard the name I realized who he was.<sup>10</sup>

Since Mr. X often returned very late, I ran into him on several occasions in the lane as I was leaving Lu Xun's home. One day I met him as he was coming downstairs from the third floor wearing a long Chinese gown and carrying a suitcase. He was telling Lu Xun that he was going to move out. After he had said his goodbyes, Xu Xiansheng saw him downstairs. Zhou Xiansheng paced up and down a couple of times in his room then asked me: "Well, do you think he's really a merchant?"

<sup>9</sup>*False Liberty* (偽自由書, 1933) and *Two Hearts* (二心集, 1932) are two of Lu Xun's collections of essays.

<sup>10</sup>It was Lu Xun's close friend and colleague, Feng Xuefeng 馮雪峯.

<sup>8</sup>Lu Xun's youngest brother, 周建人, a botanist.

"Yes," I said.

Lu Xun took a couple of meaningful steps across the floor then said: "He's a merchant who deals in personal items, things that affect the spirit ..."

Mr. X had returned from a 25,000-li march.<sup>11</sup>

Lu Xun found illegibly written letters from young people annoying and taxing.

"They don't have to have beautiful penmanship, but at least they should write so that someone can read their letters effortlessly. The young people of today are too busy. They throw a letter together as quickly as they can, and if someone else has to waste a lot of time reading it four or five times, what concern is it of theirs? After all, it's someone else's time! That's a terrible attitude."

Nonetheless, he read every letter sent to him by young people from all over, and when his eyes began to tire he put on his glasses and continued to read them, often late into the night.

Lu Xun was seated in a front-row balcony seat of the X X movie theater; I've forgotten which movie was being shown, but I recall that the newsreel showed a Soviet May Day celebration in Red Square.

"I'm afraid that's a sight I'll never see. But someday you'll witness it," Lu Xun said to those of us around him.

Lu Xun had high praise for Kollwitz' woodblock prints and for the way she lived her life.<sup>12</sup> Kollwitz suffered severe oppression under Hitler and was not allowed to teach or paint. Lu Xun often talked of her.

He also spoke of Smedley,<sup>13</sup> an American woman who first lent her support to the independence movement in India and is now helping China.

Lu Xun regularly recommended movies to

people: the Russian film *Chapayev* and *Fuchou yenyü*<sup>14</sup> and others like *Tarzan of the Apes* and *Unusual Animals of Africa* were the sorts of films he called to our attention. "They're not such good movies," he would say, "but just watching the birds and beasts will help increase your knowledge of the animal kingdom."

Lu Xun didn't go to parks. A resident of Shanghai for ten years, he had never even entered the Zhaofeng Park,<sup>15</sup> nor had he been to the Hongkou Park near his home.<sup>16</sup> When spring arrived I often told him that the ground in the parks had turned soft and that the winds there were gentle. He agreed that we should choose a nice day, some Sunday when Haiying wasn't in school, and all take a taxi to the Zhaofeng Park for a brief holiday. But we never took it beyond the planning stage. Besides, he had his own definition of parks: "I know what they're like ... as soon as you enter, there are two paths, one to the left and one to the right, and alongside the paths are some willows and other kinds of trees. Beneath the trees are some benches, and a little farther on there's a pond."

I'd been to Zhaofeng Park, Hongkou Park and the French Park, and this definition of his seemed to fit the layout of all of them, whomever they served.

Lu Xun had no use for gloves or scarves. In the winter he wore a dark blue cotton gown, a gray felt hat and rubber-soled black canvas shoes. Rubber-soled shoes are hot in the summer, cold and clammy in the winter. Since Lu Xun's health was none too good, everyone advised him to change these shoes for another kind. But he wouldn't hear of it; he said they were ideal for walking.

"Zhou Xiansheng, how many miles do you

<sup>11</sup>The famous Long March of the Communists in 1934-35.

<sup>12</sup>Käthe Kollwitz (1867-1945), a German artist.

<sup>13</sup>Agnes Smedley (1894-1950), an American journalist.

<sup>14</sup>Based on a popular Soviet novel of the late 1920's by Demitry A. Furmanov, translated into Chinese as 夏伯陽. *Fuchou yanyu* 復仇艷遇 is the Chinese name given to an American film the original title of which cannot be ascertained.

<sup>15</sup>兆豐花園, known in English as Jessfield Park, was one of the glories of old Shanghai.

<sup>16</sup>虹口公園 (Hongkou Park), now the site of the Lu Xun Memorial.

walk a day? What do you do besides take strolls over to X X Bookstore?"<sup>17</sup>

Lu Xun smiled but didn't answer.

"Since you're so susceptible to colds, Zhou Xiansheng, shouldn't you wear a scarf when there's a draft?"

But he wasn't accustomed to such things. "I haven't worn gloves or a scarf since I was a child," he would say, "and I'm not about to start now."

The minute Lu Xun opened the door and walked out of the house, his hands were thrust out in the open air, his wide sleeves flapped in the wind, and he was off. He carried a patterned black satin bundle under his arm, in which there were books or letters he was taking down to the bookstore on Lao Bazi Road.

That bundle went with him whenever he went out and always returned home with him. When he went out it was stuffed with letters to young people, and when he returned from the bookstore it was filled with a new batch of letters and manuscripts that they had asked him to read.

When Lu Xun returned with his bundle he would also be carrying an umbrella. Since there were usually visitors waiting for him in the living room, he would hang the umbrella on the coatrack then chat with his visitors. As he talked with them, the water from the umbrella ran down the handle and formed puddles on the floor. When he went upstairs to get his cigarettes he picked up the bundle and umbrella on his way up.

Lu Xun had such a good memory that he never accidentally left his belongings anywhere.

Since Lu Xun was so fond of northern cuisine, Xu Xiansheng wanted to hire a cook from the north. But Lu Xun thought that the wages would be more than they could afford—a male servant would want at least fifteen dollars a month.

So Xu Xiansheng had to buy the rice and the charcoal herself. When I asked her why her female servants were so old (both were over sixty), she said that they had gotten used to them; one of them, Haiying's nanny, had been with them since

Haiying was just a few months old.

Just as we were speaking, the short, stocky nanny came down the stairs and saw us there. "Xiansheng, aren't you having any tea?" She quickly took out some cups and poured tea. She was still so breathless from walking downstairs that gasping sounds rumbled in her throat—she was a very old woman.

Whenever guests arrived Xu Xiansheng went into the kitchen. She always served plenty of food, including fish and meat dishes, on large platters, with a minimum of four or five and as many as seven or eight. But when they ate alone they only had three dishes, usually a plate of fried green peas, some fried bamboo shoots with pickled vegetables and a plate of herring. Their usual fare was as simple as that.

I once discovered a manuscript page from Lu Xun's translation of *Dead Souls*<sup>18</sup> in a fried-dough-twist shop on Ladu Road.<sup>19</sup> They were using these pages to wrap the dough twists, so I wrote to tell him about it, but he seemed unaffected by the news. Xu Xiansheng, on the other hand, was terribly upset.

Lu Xun used his galley proofs for things like cleaning his desk. When he had dinner guests, half-way through the meal he would reach over, pick up some galley proofs and pass them out to everyone. This always made us feel awkward until Lu Xun said: "Use them to wipe the grease off your hands."

In his bathroom, too, one would find galley pages.

Xu Xiansheng was busy from morning till night, and even when she was entertaining guests downstairs she did knitting or pruned her house plants as she talked. When a guest was leaving, she would see him all the way to the front door then shut the door behind him and go back upstairs.

Whenever there were guests she had to go out

<sup>18</sup> According to Xu Guangping, the page was actually from Lu Xun's translation of Pantalev's *The Watch*. See *Regarding Lu Xun's Life* (關於魯迅的生活, Peking, 1954), p. 22.

<sup>19</sup> 拉都路, Route Tenant de la Tour, a street in the then French Concession of Shanghai.

<sup>17</sup> The Uchiyama 內山 Bookstore, owned by Lu Xun's close friend, Uchiyama Kanzo 內山完造. It was located on Lao Bazi Road 老靶子路 (Range Road), near Lu Xun's home.

and buy some fish or chicken then return to the kitchen and prepare the meal.

If Lu Xun had a letter he wanted mailed, Xu Xiansheng would have to put on her shoes and go to the post office or to the mailbox near Continental Villa. If it was a rainy day, then she took an umbrella with her.

Xu Xiansheng was a busy woman; she always had a pleasant smile on her face but there were several gray hairs in her head.

At night when we went to a movie, if there was only one taxi at the Scott Road<sup>20</sup> stand, rather than take it himself Lu Xun would tell us to get in. So Xu Xiansheng, Mrs. Zhou Jianren, Haiying, Zhou Jianren's three daughters and I would all climb into the taxi. Lu Xun, Zhou Jianren and one or two other friends would be left behind.

After we came out of the movie, a single taxi would be called for Zhou Jianren and his family. Then Lu Xun, with Haiying at his side, would walk across the Suzhou River Bridge to wait for a streetcar. After twenty or thirty minutes had passed and no streetcar had come, he would sit on one of the stone pillars of the iron railings that ran along the Suzhou River,<sup>21</sup> take out a cigarette, put it into his cigarette holder and have a leisurely smoke.

Haiying, restless as always, would run back and forth until Lu Xun called him over to sit beside him. Lu Xun would sit there like a tranquil old rustic gentleman.

Lu Xun drank green tea. Since he never drank anything else, coffee, cocoa, milk and carbonated beverages were never served in his home.

Whenever Lu Xun entertained visitors late into the night he joined them in some sort of snack. There was always a tin of biscuits nearby, and as the night wore on, Xu Xiansheng would take out a plateful and put them on Lu Xun's desk. When they were gone she would open the cupboard and take out another plateful. Then there were things like sunflower seeds, which inevitably appeared

whenever there were visitors. Lu Xun would sit there smoking while he shelled and ate the sunflower seeds, and when one plateful was finished he would ask Xu Xiansheng to bring another.

Lu Xun always had two kinds of cigarettes on hand, one expensive and one inexpensive. The inexpensive ones came in a green tin, and although I can't recall the brand name, I do remember that they had a brown tip and probably cost forty or fifty cents for a tin of fifty. They were the ones that Lu Xun usually smoked. The other kind, called Chien Men, came in a white tin and were there for his guests. The white tin of cigarettes was always kept in a drawer in his desk. When guests came he would bring the cigarettes downstairs with him, and after the guests had departed he would take them upstairs and put them back into the drawer. But the green tin was always there on his desk, holding the cigarettes that he smoked throughout the day.

For relaxation Lu Xun neither listened to the radio, went out for walks nor lay down on his bed. "Relaxing for me," he would say, "is sitting in a chair and leafing through a book."

Lu Xun began entertaining guests from two or three o'clock in the afternoon until five or six, and if the guests were staying for dinner, they would have tea with him afterwards. Sometimes, as soon as they had finished their tea they left; but more often, additional guests would arrive before they had finished, and he would entertain them until eight o'clock or perhaps ten, and even until as late as midnight. From two or three o'clock in the afternoon until midnight, all that time, Lu Xun would sit there in his rattan reclining chair and smoke cigarettes.

By the time the guests had left, it was already after midnight, the time that most people would be ready for bed; but for Lu Xun it was time to start to work. Before he actually began he rested his eyes for a moment, lit a cigarette and lay down on his bed. Xu Xiansheng would probably fall asleep before he had even finished his cigarette. (How could she fall asleep so quickly? Because at six or seven o'clock the next morning she had to be up to begin her household chores.) By this time Haiying was in his room on the third floor

<sup>20</sup> 施高塔路, in English "Scott Road".

<sup>21</sup> 蘇州河, then known in English as the Soochow Creek.

sleeping with his nanny.

The house would be completely quiet and no more sounds could be heard outside his window. Lu Xun would get up, sit at his writing desk and begin to write beneath his green lamp.

Xu Xiansheng used to say that when the roosters crowed in the morning Lu Xun would still be sitting there—the horns of cars outside would have started up and Lu Xun would still be sitting there.

Sometimes Xu Xiansheng would awaken and see the bright light streaming in through the window; the light from the lamp would be subdued, and the silhouette of Lu Xun's back would not seem as large or as dark as it had during the night. His silhouette would be gray as he continued to sit there. By then everyone else would be getting up, so he would go to bed.

Haiying would come down from the third floor, his school bag on his back, as he was being sent off to school by his nanny. When they passed Lu Xun's door, she would instruct him: "Softly now, walk softly."

Lu Xun would fall asleep just as the sun was rising in the sky; the sun's rays would be shining down brightly on the people in the next yard and on the oleander shrub in Lu Xun's yard.

Lu Xun's desk would be neat and orderly, his completed article lying beneath some books, his writing brush standing in the fired porcelain turtleback holder. A pair of slippers would be standing at the foot of the bed; his head pillowed, Lu Xun would be asleep.

Lu Xun liked to drink a little wine, but never too much—half a cup or perhaps a cupful. He drank Chinese wine, usually the finest quality Shaoxing wine.

There was a little teashop on Lao Bazi Road, a one-room place in which there were only a few tables. The shop was quiet, poorly lighted and had a slightly chilly atmosphere. Lu Xun normally went there when he had an appointment. The owner was a fat Jew, possibly a White Russian, who apparently didn't understand Chinese.

Sometimes the elderly Lu Xun, dressed in a cotton gown, went there, ordered a pot of black tea and chatted with young people for an hour or two.

One day there was a modish young woman sitting at the table behind Lu Xun; she was wearing a purple skirt, a yellow blouse and a flowery hat. As she was about to leave, Lu Xun glanced at her then followed her with his eyes for the longest time with a strange stare. "I wonder what she does?" he asked. That was the sort of reaction Lu Xun had when he saw someone wearing a purple skirt, a yellow blouse and a flowery hat.

Are there really such things as ghosts? According to legend, there are people who have seen them, some who have even talked to them and others who have been chased by them. The ghost of someone who has been hanged will plaster itself up against a wall as soon as it sees a living person. But no one has ever caught a ghost to show other people.

Lu Xun once told us the story of the ghost he had encountered:

"It was in Shaoxing," he said. "Some thirty years ago . . ."

By that time Lu Xun had returned from his studies in Japan and was teaching at a normal college—which one I'm not sure. On evenings when he had nothing else to do he usually went to a friend's home to sit and talk. This friend lived several *li* from the college, not a very great distance perhaps, but Lu Xun had to pass a cemetery on the way. Sometimes their conversations lasted until quite late, and there were often occasions when he didn't return to the college until eleven o'clock or midnight. One moonlit night he returned very late. While he was walking briskly along the road he noticed a white image way off in the distance.

Lu Xun did not believe in ghosts. As a medical student in Japan he had often dissected cadavers, as many as twenty of them, so he feared neither ghosts nor corpses. Consequently, he was not intimidated by the cemetery and kept walking straight ahead. After he had taken a few more steps the white image disappeared then suddenly reappeared. It also changed back and forth—sometimes small, sometimes large, sometimes tall, sometimes short—just like a ghost. Isn't that what ghosts do, change back and forth?

Lu Xun hesitated a moment: should he keep going straight ahead or should he turn back? This wasn't the only road back to the college but it was

the shortest. He decided to keep walking straight ahead, for he figured that it was about time he saw what a ghost looked like. Nonetheless, at the time he was a bit apprehensive.

Lu Xun had just recently returned from Japan and was still wearing hard-soled leather shoes. He was determined to fight that ghost to the death. As he drew up alongside the white image it shrank and crouched soundlessly down beside a grave mound. Lu Xun kicked out with his hard leather shoes. The white image let out a moan then stood up. Lu Xun stared hard at it—it was a man.

Lu Xun said that when he kicked out he was frightened. He was convinced that if he didn't manage to put an end to the thing his own life would have been threatened, so he had put all his strength into that one kick.

It had only been a grave-robber prowling the cemetery in the middle of the night. When Lu Xun reached this point in his story he broke out laughing. "Ghosts are afraid of being kicked—kick them once and they change into people."

I thought it would be a fine idea for lots of ghosts to be kicked by Lu Xun, since it would give them a chance to be people again.

On one occasion we ordered some food from a Fukienese restaurant, including a platter of fish balls. Haiying tried one and said it wasn't fresh, but Xu Xiansheng didn't believe him, and neither did the rest of us. That was because some of the fish balls weren't fresh, while others were, and it just so happened that there was nothing wrong with the ones the rest of us were eating. Xu Xiansheng gave Haiying another one; he tried it, with the same results, and started to bawl. No one paid him any attention, but Lu Xun picked up one of the fish balls on Haiying's plate, tasted it and found that it really wasn't fresh. "He complained that it wasn't fresh," he said, "and he must have had good reason. It's not right to simply ignore him without looking into the matter."

Later I thought of that incident and spoke of it confidentially to Xu Xiansheng, who said: "The way Zhou Xiansheng lives his life, we'll never be able to match up to him, even in small matters like that."

When Lu Xun wrapped a parcel he made it a

point to do so very neatly. He often took books that were going to be mailed away from Xu Xiansheng and wrapped them himself. Xu Xiansheng wrapped them well enough, but Lu Xun preferred to do it himself.

After Lu Xun had wrapped a parcel and tied it up with string, it would be square and neat with all corners perfectly even; then he would carefully trim the edges of the string with scissors. This was the case even when he wrapped the books in used paper. When Xu Xiansheng returned from shopping she folded up the wrapping paper as she opened the parcels and rolled the string up into balls. If there were knots in the string she took the time to unravel them so that everything would be ready when the time came to use it again.

Lu Xun's address was #9 Continental Villa. As soon as you entered the lane leading up to it you came upon a large, fairly subdued cement courtyard. In it you would occasionally see foreigners coming and going and sometimes you would see a foreign child or two playing there.

Next to Lu Xun's home hung a large sign on which one word was written: "Tea."

It was the first of October, 1935.<sup>22</sup>

There was a rectangular table in Lu Xun's living room, the black paint of which had a somewhat worn look, although the table couldn't really be called old or broken-down. There was no tablecloth on this table, just a pea-green vase in the center in which several large-leafed Chinese evergreen stalks were arranged. Around the table were seven or eight large wooden chairs. The entire lane outside was completely quiet, particularly during the evening hours.

That evening I sat at the table drinking tea with Lu Xun and Xu Xiansheng. Right after dinner we began discussing the puppet state of Manchukuo, talking until nine o'clock, then ten o'clock, and finally until eleven o'clock. As the night wore on I kept thinking I should leave and let Lu Xun get an early rest, since I could see that he was in poor health. Xu Xiansheng said that he had just gotten over a month-long bout with a cold.

<sup>22</sup>This date is probably wrong. See Howard Goldblatt, *Hsiao Hung* (Boston, 1976), p. 43. It was probably November 6th.

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LU XUN (1881-1936), AT HIS WRITING DESK, *ordinarily used a Chinese brush when he wrote. He is here portrayed in a 1977 conception by Fan Zeng 范曾, from an album published by the famous studio Rong Bao Zhai 荣宝斋, Peking. A quotation from Lu Xun's volume of selected essays 南腔北调集 (Northern Tune in Southern Accent), in the artist's calligraphy, is omitted from this reproduction.*

But Lu Xun didn't seem tired. We urged him several times to rest in his rattan reclining chair in the living room, but he was content to sit where he was. He even went upstairs once to put on a fur-lined gown.

Just what Lu Xun talked about that evening I can no longer recall, and even if I tried I might confuse it with things he had said on another occasion. Just after eleven o'clock it began to rain,

the raindrops beating against the window. Since there were no curtains at the window, I could see rivulets of water streaming down the glass. The lateness of the hour and the rainfall outside brought me feelings of anxiety. But every time I stood up to go, Lu Xun and Xu Xiansheng asked me to stay a while longer: "There'll be streetcars up till midnight." So I stayed there until nearly midnight, when I finally put on my raincoat and

我，是清別人寬恕，自己也寬恕了別人。我的忍耐了許多年，尚有人問起我來，怎麼回答呢？我想了又想，決定的是：讓他們怨恨去，我也一個都不寬恕。

但這儀式並未舉行，達摩也沒有寫，不過默默的滿着，有時醫生更切迫的思  
想：原來這樣<sup>寫</sup>就是在死下去，卻也不<sup>要</sup>苦痛；但是，臨終的一刹那，也許並不這  
樣的寂，然而，一世只有一回，無論怎樣，總是受得了的……後來，却有了翻帳，  
好起來了。到現在，我想，這世上的並不是<sup>真的</sup>要死之前的情形，真的要死，是連這些  
思想也未必有的，但究竟如何，我也不知道。

（九月五日。）

"IF I WERE TO DIE, I probably would not even have such thoughts. But after all what it is like [to die] I wouldn't know." The last page in the manuscript of Lu Xun's essay on "Death" concludes with these words, followed by the date, "September 5th"—a little over a month before his death on Oct. 19, 1936. This and another page reproduced on the overleaf are from 魯迅手稿選集 (Selections from Lu Xun's Handwritten Manuscripts), Wenwu chubanshe, Peking, 1961.

一死

雷印造凱德·珂勒惠支 (Kathe Kollwitz) 所以敢畫的這集時，雷因清史沫德黎 (A. Smedley) 女士

湖未了，又逼着茅盾先生譯出，現已登在這些上。其中有這樣的

湖未了，又逼着茅盾先生譯出，現已登在這些上。其中有這樣的

許多年來，凱德·珂勒惠支——她從沒有一次利用過贈授給她的頭銜——作了大量的畫稿，雷寫鉛筆作的和鋼筆作的速寫，木刻，銅刻，把這些來研究，就表示將有三大主題支配着，她早年的主題是反抗，而晚年的是母愛，母性的保障，救濟，以及死。而籠罩於她所有的作品之上的是受難，悲劇的，以及保護被壓迫者深切熱情的意識。

有一次我問她：「從前曾用反抗的主題，但是現在你好像有點拋不開死這觀念，這是為什麼呢？」用了深有所言的話，她回答道：「也許因為我是一天一天老了」……

我雷那時看到這里，就想了一雷想。再雷起來，她用日記。來做畫材的時

候，是一九一〇年終，這時她不過四十三四歲。我今年的這雷想了一想，雷當然

和年紀有關，但回憶雷年終，對於死却沒有感到這雷麼深切。大約我們雷的生死

之已被人們注意，認為無足重輕，所以自己也看得雷。有些外國人說，中國人最怕死。這其意是

那樣

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*KÄTHE KOLLWITZ (1867-1945), the German artist whose work Lu Xun admired, in a self-portrait done around 1935. (Rosenwald Collection, National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.) Lu Xun had edited and published a collection of Kollwitz's prints, which he tells about in the beginning of his essay, "Death" (opposite page). This recurring theme of hers, he writes, has caused him to think of his own death and of the many writing and translation tasks he must hurry up and finish before old age and his illness finally claim him.*

opened the squeaky iron gate that led out from the living room. Lu Xun saw me all the way to the outer iron gate. Why would he do that? Was there any reason why he should be seeing a young visitor like me out? If his hair got wet in the rain, wouldn't it bring on a recurrence of his illness? Standing just beyond the iron gate and pointing to the big sign hanging on the building next door with the word "Tea" written on it, Lu Xun said: "Next time look for that word 'Tea'; we live right next door to 'Tea.'" He reached out and nearly touched the "9" that was nailed beside

the iron gate, saying: "Next time remember it's number 9, right next to 'Tea.'" I stepped out onto the square cement courtyard and, as I walked out into the lane, turned back to take a look at Lu Xun's courtyard, where all the houses were just a dark blur. If he hadn't taken such pains to tell me so precisely, I'm afraid that the next time I would have been unable to remember which house was his.

Above Lu Xun's large iron bed was a white canopy with embroidered flowers that Xu Xian-

sheng had made. Two thick quilts with print covers were folded neatly off to one side. A dresser of drawers stood at the head of the bed near the door. Just inside the door to the left was a square table with a rattan chair on either end. A wardrobe stood alongside the table against the same wall. This wardrobe was originally intended for hanging clothes: it contained precious little clothing, however, and was filled with candy boxes, cookie tins and cans of melon seeds. Once the wife of proprietor X X<sup>23</sup> came over to get an impression of a copyright seal, which Lu Xun took from the large drawer at the bottom of that wardrobe. Along the wall by the window was a dressing table, on top of which rested a square glass fishbowl in which large quantities of sea plants floated. There were no goldfish in the bowl, only some gray, flat-bellied fish. In addition to the fishbowl, there was an oval clock. The remainder of the space was taken up by books. There were also piles of books on the bookcase at the head of the iron bed near the window. Finally there was Lu Xun's writing desk, and it, too, was covered with books.

In Lu Xun's home, upstairs and down, there wasn't a single sofa. The chair at his writing desk was hard, as were the rattan chair he rested in and the downstairs chair he sat in while entertaining guests.

Lu Xun's writing desk faced the window, which, like most windows of homes in Shanghai lanes, nearly filled an entire wall. He kept this window closed out of habit: he was bothered by gusts of wind that shuffled the papers on his desk, and he often spent so much time keeping his papers anchored down that it affected his writing. As a result, his room was as hot and stuffy as a steamer, although he never took anyone's advice to move downstairs—he was used to staying in one place. Sometimes the sun shone in brightly, but even then he rejected Xu Xiansheng's advice to move his desk over to one side; he would rather sit there drenched in perspiration.

Lu Xun's writing desk was covered with a piece of blue oilcloth that was pinned down at each corner with a thumbtack. On it he had placed an ink-mixing stone, an ink stick and his brushes,

which stood in a brush-holder made of fired ceramic. The brush-holder didn't seem to be a very fancy piece; shaped like a turtle, it had several holes in its shell in which the brushes were placed. Lu Xun ordinarily used a Chinese brush when he wrote, although he kept fountain pens in a drawer. On the table there were also a large white square porcelain ashtray and a teaglass with a lid.

Lu Xun's habits were different than other people's: he stacked so much writing and reference material and mail on his desk that there was barely room for him to do his writing. The greater part of the desktop was covered with books and papers.

In the left-hand corner of the desk was a lamp with a green lampshade and a horizontally placed light bulb; it was a very common type of desk lamp in Shanghai.

In the wintertime Lu Xun took his meals upstairs. At such times he would unplug his desk lamp from the socket in the cord hanging from the ceiling and replace it with a light bulb. When he had finished eating, Xu Xiansheng would remove the light bulb for him and plug the desk lamp back in. This was how Lu Xun's desk lamp was arranged: it was connected to a cord hanging from the ceiling.

Most of Lu Xun's articles were written under the light of this desk lamp, since his working hours were from one or two o'clock in the morning until he went to bed just before dawn.

The only other item in Lu Xun's bedroom was an oil painting of Master Haiying done when he was a month old. The area behind the bedroom was filled with books, and not very neatly. Newspapers, magazines and books bound in Western style were stacked in no apparent order, and as soon as you entered you could detect the distinct odor of books and paper. Even the floor was stacked with so many books that the floorspace was considerably reduced, almost eliminated, and in the midst of the stacks of books were large net-covered baskets. A length of cord or wire was attached to the walls, to which little boxes and wire cages were fastened. They were nearly overflowing with dried water chestnuts. The wire, sagging under all that weight, seemed about to snap. Then, by pushing open the window of this storage room, you could find another basketful of water chestnuts drying in the wind.

"Eat some, there are plenty. They're especially

<sup>23</sup>Li Xiaofeng 李小峯, the proprietor of Beixin Book Co. 北新書局, who published some of Lu Xun's books.

sweet, since they've been dried in the wind," Xu Xiansheng would say.

While the food was being cooked in the kitchen downstairs, sounds of a spatula clanging against a frying pan and the ponderous conversations of the two elderly servants could be heard.

The kitchen was the liveliest place in the whole house. The rest of the house on all three floors was still and quiet, with no shouts for the elderly servants nor any sounds of running up and down the stairs. Only five people lived in the five or six rooms of Lu Xun's home: three family members and two elderly servants.

When there were guests in the house Xu Xiansheng personally served tea, but on those occasions when it was not convenient and she wanted one of the servants to do it, she walked downstairs and told one of them. Since there was never any standing at the foot of the stairs and yelling out for one of them, a quiet atmosphere always reigned throughout the house.

Only in the kitchen was there a little noise and activity, such as the splashing of water from the tap, the scraping of porcelain being moved across the top of the cement sink and the washing of rice. Whenever bamboo shoots, which Lu Xun liked so much, were being sliced on the cutting board, there was a resounding thud each time the knife cut off a slice. Actually, in comparison with other homes, this kitchen would be considered quiet, which made the sounds of washing rice and of slicing bamboo shoots come through even more clearly and distinctly.

Two bookcases stood side by side against one wall in the living room. They both had glass doors and contained the complete works of Dostoyevsky and other foreign writers, most of them in Japanese translation. The uncarpeted floor was always scrubbed clean.

Master Haiying's toybox was also located in the living room. Inside were fuzzy monkeys, rubber men, trains, cars and other kinds of toys. It was filled with more toys than you could count. Except for Haiying, that is; he had only to thrust his hand in to pull out whichever toy he wanted. The little rabbit lamp that had been bought for him in town for New Year's still stood on top of his toybox, its paper hair covered with a light coat

of dust.

There was only one light fixture, with probably a fifty-watt bulb, in the living room. The rear door faced the staircase leading upstairs, whereas the front door led directly out onto a ten-foot-square flower garden. There weren't any flowers to speak of in the garden, only a seven- or eight-foot-tall tree, most likely a willow or peach. Each spring there were wood lice all over the tree, which kept Xu Xiansheng busy with an insect sprayer; while talking with her visitors she would continue to spray the tree with insecticide. Along the base of the wall they had planted a row of corn. Xu Xiansheng said: "Corn will never grow here. The soil's no good for growing vegetables, but Haiying insisted on planting it."

In the springtime Haiying dug up the dirt in the flower garden trying to grow all kinds of things.

The third floor was the quietest of all. A pair of glass doors opened out toward the sun, and there was a small cement veranda just beyond the doors. The cloth curtains that hung down in front of the doors were kept warm by the spring air. Sometimes they were blown high in the air by the wind, fluttering and billowing out in an area the size of a large fish pond, while the green trees in the neighboring gardens were reflected in the glass doors.

Haiying sat on the wooden floor pretending he was an engineer supervising the construction of a tall building. His building was constructed on a foundation of a line of chairs, over which he had draped a bedsheet to serve as the tiled roof. The construction job was completed amidst clapping and shouts of delight.

His room gave one the feeling of vast emptiness or of loneliness, and it seemed neither like a room for a woman servant nor for a child. Haiying's bed was off to the side of the room, protected by a large round mosquito net that was left unopened during the day and hung there from the canopy to the wooden floor. His bed was a piece of finely carved furniture. Xu Xiansheng told me that it had been left by the previous tenants. Haiying and his nanny slept together on this five- or six-foot-wide bed.

The heater that had been used during the winter still stood in the middle of the floor, icy-cold, even in March.

Haiying seldom played on the third floor. Except for the time he was in school, he was usually in the courtyard riding his bicycle, and since he loved to run and jump around, there wasn't a spot in the kitchen, the living room or on the second floor that he hadn't played in.

The third floor was empty nearly all day long; one of the elderly servants lived in the rear half of the third floor, and since she seldom went upstairs, once the staircase had been polished it remained clean and shiny throughout the day.

In March of 1936, Lu Xun took ill and was confined to his second-floor reclining chair, his heart beating faster than usual, his facial coloring a bit paler.

Xu Xiansheng was just the opposite: her face was flushed, her eyes appeared even larger and her speech was subdued and quiet, although she didn't seem to be in a more anxious mood than usual. When we entered the living room downstairs she said: "Zhou Xiansheng's asthma is bothering him . . . since he's gasping so much, he's resting in his reclining chair upstairs."

You didn't have to be close to Lu Xun to hear the sounds of his labored breathing—they were audible the moment you entered his bedroom. His nose and his chin whiskers trembled; his chest rose and fell. His eyes were closed, and missing was the cigarette which he seemed never to be without. A pillow was propped up at the head of the rattan reclining chair; his head was tilted slightly backwards and his hands hung limply at his sides. As usual, there were no wrinkles on his forehead and his expression was serene and relaxed, as though there were nothing wrong with him at all.

"Ah, you're here," he said as he opened his eyes. "Got a little careless and caught a cold . . . having trouble breathing . . . went to the storage room to look through some books . . . since no one lives there, it's quite chilly . . . after I came out, then . . ."

Xu Xiansheng could see that talking was a real chore for him. She quickly told us how he had begun gasping for breath. The doctor had come and gone after giving him some medication, but the asthma attack continued. The doctor had come again in the afternoon and had just left.

The bedroom began to turn dark as dusk fell,

while a slight breeze started up outside, rustling the trees in the neighboring yard. Someone's window shutters were clattering noisily in the wind, and water splashed and flowed down the gutters alongside the many homes—obviously the runoff water from washing the dinner dishes. After dinner, some people went out for strolls, while others were off to meet friends, so there was a constant trickle of people walking in and out of the lane. The servant women, still in their aprons, were gossiping at the back doors. Groups of children ran around in the front and rear; cars passed back and forth out beyond the lane.

Lu Xun sat quietly in his reclining chair without moving or opening his eyes, his wan face taking on a red tinge from the flames of the heater. His tin of cigarettes was resting on top of his desk, its lid in place; his tea glass was there too.

Xu Xiansheng walked gingerly down the stairs, leaving Lu Xun alone in his chair on the second floor. As he gasped for breath, his chest stuck out in front of him in an almost military manner.

Lu Xun must rest, Doctor Sudō<sup>24</sup> had told him. But not only did he remain unconvinced by this advice, his head was filled with thoughts of even more things he felt he had to do right away. There was the collating and proofreading of *Hai shang shu lin*, the printing of Kollwitz' engravings and his translation of the second part of *Dead Souls*; then, just when all of these projects were underway, he began plans for the publication of *Thirty Years* (that is, Lu Xun's collected works).

When Lu Xun realized that his health was failing he had even less time to attend to his physical well-being. He wanted to do so much more, to hurry up and get it all done. No one could figure out the reason for all this activity, and we all disagreed with his decision not to rest more. Then later, when we read his piece entitled "Death," we understood.<sup>25</sup>

Lu Xun was aware that his health was failing and that he only had a few years left to work; his own death didn't matter, but he wanted to leave

<sup>25</sup>One of Lu Xun's final essays, in which he discusses his own death.

<sup>24</sup>Dr. Iozo Sudō 須藤五百三, Lu Xun's close friend and personal physician.

a greater legacy to mankind. That's the sort of man Lu Xun was.

Before long, the German and Japanese dictionaries reappeared on his desk, and he recommenced his translation of Gogol's *Dead Souls*.

Since Lu Xun's constitution was weak, he caught colds easily, though even with a cold he continued to entertain guests, answer his correspondence and proofread manuscripts. As a consequence, his colds always lasted for two weeks or a month.

Throughout the winter of 1935 and the spring of 1936, Lu Xun worked constantly on the proofreading of Qu Qiubai's *Hai shang shu lin*. He had to read the several-hundred-thousand-word manuscript three times, and since the printers sent him copies in installments of eight or ten pages, he always felt a sense of urgency regarding it. But he would say: "Here, you see, I can sit and talk to you while I'm proofreading, since I read with my eyes and listen with my ears . . ."

Sometimes when visitors arrived he would lay down his brush over some humorous remark that was made; at other times he would say: "I only have a few characters left here . . . have a seat."

In the winter of 1935, Xu Xiansheng said: "Zhou Xiansheng's health isn't what it used to be."

One evening Lu Xun invited some of us out to a restaurant. He was in a fine mood when he arrived. I can still recall that we had roast duck that evening, and when he saw the whole duck served on a big spit, all oily and shiny, a smile appeared on Lu Xun's face.

After all the dishes had been served, Lu Xun walked over to a reclining bamboo chair to smoke a cigarette and rest his eyes. By the time dinner was over some of us were a bit tipsy, and everyone began to get boisterous, fighting over apples and teasing one another with sarcastic and humorously biting remarks. But during all of this Lu Xun sat in the reclining chair, his eyes closed, looking somber and deep in thought, the smoke from the cigarette in his hand rising slowly. We thought that he, too, had had too much to drink.

But Xu Xiansheng said that wasn't the case. "Zhou Xiansheng's health isn't what it used to be, and after every meal he has to close his eyes and rest a bit, something he never used to do."

Zhou Xiansheng got up from his chair, probably because he had heard the comments about his having had too much to drink.

"I never drink too much. When I was young my mother often told me that when my father had been drinking his mood turned nasty. She told me that when I grew up I shouldn't drink, that I should avoid becoming like my father . . . so I never drink too much and I've never been drunk . . ."

Somewhat rested, he lit another cigarette and came over to get an apple. But there were no more.

"I can't compete with you," he said. "You've grabbed up all the apples."

Some of us who were still holding onto our apples offered them to him, but he wouldn't accept them . . . he just smoked his cigarette.

In the spring of 1936, Lu Xun's health turned even worse, even though he had no particular bout with illness. After eating dinner he would sit in his reclining chair, his eyes closed as he rested quietly.

Xu Xiansheng once told me that when Zhou Xiansheng was in Beiping he liked to amuse his friends by putting his hands on a table and leaping over it. But in recent years he hadn't done it; it seems he wasn't as spry as he had once been.

Xu Xiansheng whispered this to me so as not to let Lu Xun overhear her; he remained sitting quietly in his reclining chair.

Xu Xiansheng opened the grate of the heater and added some coal, which crackled in the fire, startling Lu Xun awake. Once we started talking, he was his old energetic self again.

Lu Xun had been confined to his second-floor bed for over a month, and although his asthma attacks had ceased, he had a fever every day; in the afternoons it reached 38°-39°, and sometimes even higher. During this period his face was slightly flushed and his eyes were weak. He ate nothing and slept little, although he never moaned or groaned, as though there weren't a thing wrong with him. Sometimes he lay on his bed, his eyes open and looking around, while at other times he just lay there quietly in a half-sleep. He drank very little tea during this period. Normally he smoked cigarettes almost without stop, but now he nearly gave them up entirely. His tin of cigaret-

tes was not placed alongside his bed, but rested on his desk, and on the rare occasions that he felt like smoking, he asked Xu Xiansheng to bring one over to him.

With Lu Xun's illness, Xu Xiansheng's routine grew even more hectic. She had to give him his medication and take his temperature on schedule, after which she had to make notations on a chart given her by the doctor. The chart was a lined piece of cardboard on which she noted the temperature-reading in centigrade with a continuous line; it made the chart look like a series of small pointed mountains or like a piece of crystal, the peaks and valleys standing in a line. Although Xu Xiansheng placed a separate mark on it every day, it seemed like an unbroken line that rose and fell; the peaks were bad signs, indications that Lu Xun's fever was high.

Most of the people who came to see Lu Xun no longer went up to the second floor so that he could have a proper rest. The responsibility for entertaining visitors fell to Xu Xiansheng. Then there were the books, magazines, newspapers and mail, which she had to look at so that she could report the important news to Lu Xun. She put those of lesser importance off to one side until his condition had improved, at which time she could retrieve them and give them to him. In addition, there were the numerous daily household matters to be taken care of: for example, one of the women servants took ill and asked for a couple of days off; then Haiying lost a tooth and had to go see a dentist—since there was no one else to take him, Xu Xiansheng had to do it herself. Haiying was in kindergarten, and there were pencils and balls to buy, and miscellaneous things that cropped up now and again. Then when he ran upstairs wanting some peanut candy or some caramels he shouted and ran around until he was quickly stopped by his mother and taken downstairs. "Daddy's sick," she would say, then take out some money and tell the servant to buy a few pieces of candy for him, but not too many.

Then the man came to collect the electricity bill; the minute he knocked on the door, Xu Xiansheng ran downstairs to open it for fear that he might wake up Lu Xun.

Haiying's greatest delight was having stories told to him, and this time-consuming task Xu Xiansheng performed while sneaking in as many

minutes as possible to check the proof copies that Lu Xun had left unfinished when he took ill.

During this period, Xu Xiansheng's responsibilities were greater than Lu Xun's.

Lu Xun took his meals alone upstairs, served to him on a wooden tray that Xu Xiansheng brought up to him for each meal. There would be three or four dishes on that black lacquered tray, each on a small plate about two inches in diameter. One of the dishes would be tender pea leaves or spinach or amaranth, another would be herring or chicken. If it was chicken it was a choice piece, and if it was fish, Xu Xiansheng would likewise place only the best-tasting part on the plate.

Downstairs Xu Xiansheng examined the plates of food on the dining room table with a pair of chopsticks to make sure that the vegetables were tender, that only the leaves and not the stems were on the plates and that the meat or fish was tender and boneless. Her heart filled with limitless hope and limitless demands for the future, her vision surpassing prayers in sincerity, she looked over the plates of food that she had personally selected with great care, then finally climbed the stairs.

She kept hoping that Lu Xun would eat one more mouthful, pick up one more chopstickful or take one more spoonful of chicken soup. Chicken soup and milk were part of the doctor's orders—Lu Xun had to eat more of them.

After Xu Xiansheng took his food upstairs, sometimes she would stay there by his side as he ate and sometimes she would go back downstairs to do something else, then come back in half an hour to remove the plates. The plates that had been filled with food were sometimes carried back downstairs exactly as they had been served, without having been touched. A frown would appear on Xu Xiansheng's brow when that happened. If there were friends around she would say: "Zhou Xiansheng's fever is so high he can't eat a thing, not even tea. He's having a rough time, and he's exhausted."

One day as Xu Xiansheng was at the rear of the living room slicing bread on the table with a serrated knife, she said to me: "Every time I tell Zhou Xiansheng to eat a little more, he says that once he's better he'll worry about convalescing.

He says that it wouldn't do any good to try to force food down now." She continued somewhat doubtfully: "I guess he's right." Then she took a platter of bread and some milk upstairs. She came back down with a bowl of chicken soup on the tray and put it on the table at the rear of the living room. When she went back upstairs the soup sat on the table, steam rising slowly from it.

When she returned she said: "Zhou Xiansheng normally doesn't care for soup, and when he's ill he likes it even less." She had brought back the milk that she had taken upstairs. As much for her own benefit as anything, she said: "Zhou Xiansheng is a strong man. He likes to eat food that's hard and fried. He even likes his rice hard . . ."

Xu Xiansheng was a little breathless from running up and down the stairs, and when I sat next to her I thought I could hear the beating of her heart.

After Lu Xun began eating alone, few of the visitors ever went upstairs, content to leave as soon as they had heard Xu Xiansheng's soft-spoken report on his condition.

Day after day Lu Xun passed the time upstairs resting, until after several days he began to feel a little lonely. On days when his fever was evidently somewhat lower he would ask Xu Xiansheng: "Who's been by lately?"

Seeing that he was a little stronger, she would report all the comings and goings to him.

Sometimes he would ask her what periodicals had arrived.

Lu Xun was sick for over a month.

As proof that Lu Xun had pleurisy as well as tuberculosis, old Doctor Sudō came and drew off the accumulated fluid from his pleura with a needle at least two or three times every day.

With such illnesses, how could Zhou Xiansheng be unaware of what was wrong with him? Xu Xiansheng said that even when his ribs were aching he would simply bear it without a word, so even she had no way of knowing. Lu Xun was concerned that if others knew how he was feeling they would be worried, and then he'd have to go see a doctor, who would make him rest. He knew that he would be unable to comply.

After examining Lu Xun, an American doctor from the Fumin Hospital said that he had had tuberculosis for twenty years and that this attack

had made his condition critical. The doctor made an appointment for him to go to the Fumin Hospital for a thorough examination, including an X-ray.

But when the day came, Lu Xun was unable to walk downstairs, and it was several days before he could go to the Fumin Hospital for his examination. Following the initial X-ray they took a complete series of both of his lungs.

The day she picked up the X-ray photos, Xu Xiansheng showed them to everyone downstairs; the upper tip of the right lung was black and there was a black spot in the middle. The lower half of the left lung looked pretty bad and there was a large black ring on the edge.

Following this, Lu Xun's fever remained quite high; it was clear that he would have an increasingly hard time resisting the illness if it stayed that high.

The American doctor only performed an examination; he prescribed no medication, believing that it would serve no purpose.

Lu Xun had known Doctor Sudō for a long time, so he came every day and gave Lu Xun some medicine to reduce his fever and stop the spread of the tuberculosis bacteria. He said that if the right lung didn't get any worse and stayed just as it was the fever would subside on its own and he would be out of danger.

Xu Xiansheng was crying in the living room downstairs. In her hand she was holding some thread from one of Haiying's old sweaters that she had unraveled, then washed and was now winding into a ball.

Lu Xun seemed to show no interest in anything. He wasn't eating at all and his mind seemed to be a thousand miles away. He just lay there in a sort of stupor.

The weather turned hot and the windows in the living room were all opened, as the sun danced and shone on the flower garden just beyond the door. Sparrows landed on the oleander shrubs, sang a few brief notes and flew off again; children played and chattered in the courtyard, and the winds, slightly hot, brushed against the people's skin. The buds of spring had just begun to sprout, and summer was suddenly upon us.

The sounds of the elderly doctor and Lu Xun's conversations upstairs were barely audible. Down-

stairs, visitors continued to come and to ask: "Is Zhou Xiansheng any better?"

As always, Xu Xiansheng answered: "There's no change."

But today when she said it tears were streaming down her face. As she picked up the visitors' glasses and poured some tea, with her left hand she held a handkerchief tightly against her nose.

Her visitors asked: "Has Zhou Xiansheng gotten worse?"

"No," she answered. "The fault lies in my own heart."

A moment later, Lu Xun summoned Xu Xiansheng upstairs to help him find something. Hurriedly drying her eyes, she was hoping to find a way to avoid having to face him; looking around and realizing that there was no one who could take her place, she picked up the not quite completely rolled ball of yarn and went upstairs.

The elderly doctor and two visitors who were asking after Lu Xun's health were upstairs, and the moment she saw them she lowered her head and smiled in embarrassment. Not daring to face Lu Xun, she kept her back to him as she asked him what he wanted then hastily began to roll the yarn up into a ball. She remained standing with her back to him until she accompanied the elderly doctor downstairs.

Every time the doctor left, Xu Xiansheng carried his leather satchel downstairs all the way to the front door. Xu Xiansheng seemed cheerful, with a quiet smile on her face as she unbolted the iron gate and very respectfully handed the old doctor his satchel. She watched him as he walked out then turned back, walked inside and closed the door.

Whenever this old doctor was in Lu Xun's home, even the elderly servants treated him with the greatest respect. If he was coming downstairs while one of them was on her way up, she would quickly go back down and move out of the way to stand at the side of the staircase. One day one of them was going upstairs with a glass when she met the old doctor and Xu Xiansheng coming down together. Unable to move out of the way quickly enough, she was so flustered she spilled the glass of tea. Even after the doctor had passed by and gone out the front door, the old woman stood there dumbly watching after him.

"Is Zhou Xiansheng any better?" I asked her

one day when Xu Xiansheng was out.

"Who knows?" she said. "The doctor comes to see him every day then leaves without saying a word." It was obvious that she attached a great deal of hope to the doctor's visits.

Xu Xiansheng was very calm and gave no appearance of having lost control, even though on that one occasion she had broken down and cried in front of us. She still continued doing what had to be done: she washed the yarn, set it out to dry and began rolling it into a ball.

"I take Haiying's sweater apart every year, wash the yarn and make him another one; he gets bigger every year and outgrows the clothes he has been wearing," she said to a close friend downstairs as she began to knit.

Xu Xiansheng had to find the time to do these jobs when she could; in the summertime she was always preparing for winter, and in the wintertime she was always preparing for summer. She often said: "I'm constantly busy over nothing."

She was being polite, but there was truth in what she was saying about being busy. It seemed to me that she never enjoyed a peaceful meal. Haiying would want one thing one minute and something else the next, and if there were guests she had to run out and buy some food for dinner and, of course, go into the kitchen and cook. She would put the food on the table, pick out the best pieces for the guests and put them on their plates. After dinner there was fruit to put out, and if she served apples she first had to peel them. When she served water chestnuts and saw that the guests were having trouble peeling the skins, she did it for them then handed them back. But this was before Lu Xun's illness.

Besides knitting wool sweaters, Xu Xiansheng also made clothes for the family. She made many sets of underwear for Haiying as she sat at her sewing machine by the window.

Xu Xiansheng paid no attention to her own appearance, and the clothes she wore every day as she ran upstairs and down were old ones; they had been washed too many times, the buttons had come off in the scrubbing or were chipped and broken and all were several years old. In the spring she wore a violet-colored Chinese dress made of Nanking silk, the material for which had been given to her to make into a quilt cover when Haiying was born. She said it would have been a

pity to use that material for a quilt cover, so she made it into a Chinese dress instead. Just as she was telling me this, Haiying came in and she made a sign with her eyes to drop the subject. If we had continued talking about it, Haiying would have caused trouble for sure, saying that since it was his he wanted it back.

In the winter, Xu Xiansheng wore a pair of cotton shoes that she had made herself. She wore them until February or March when the mornings and nights were still cold.

One day Xu Xiansheng and I were in the small flower garden having our picture taken when she noticed that one of her buttons had fallen off, so she pulled me in front of her to hide it from the camera.

When Xu Xiansheng did her shopping she went to bargain shops. Either that or she went where there was a sale going on. She economized wherever she could and used the money she saved to print books and artwork.

Now Xu Xiansheng was sitting beneath the window sewing clothes as the sewing machine made a *ke da, ke da* sound, causing the glass doors to tremble slightly. Dusk falling beyond the window, Xu Xiansheng inside with her head lowered, the sounds of Lu Xun's coughing upstairs—all these blended together in constant repetition, a source of hidden strength. In the midst of hard times and of sadness a sort of determined faith in life endured, firm as a strong fire.

With her fingers guiding the material she was sewing, she lowered her head once or twice in the presence of the machine's power. Her countenance was one of quiet seriousness, without a sign of fear; contentedly she worked at her machine.

Haiying was playing with a large pile of small amber-tinted ampules, which he stuffed into a cardboard box and ran up and down the stairs with. When the sun glinted off them they turned golden yellow, while at other times they were a coffee-brown. Calling together some of his playmates, he put on his exhibition with considerable pride, showing off these things that only he was privileged to have.

"These are medicine bottles from my daddy's injections," he said. "Bet you don't have any!"

Of course they didn't, so he clapped his hands and began shouting proudly.

Xu Xiansheng called him over and, as she walked downstairs, told him not to shout.

"Is Zhou Xiansheng any better?" we asked Xu Xiansheng.

"The same as always," she said, picking up one of Haiying's ampules as she did. "Just look at these . . . all of these ampules . . . an injection every day, and now we have a great pile of them."

As soon as Xu Xiansheng picked up the ampule, Haiying came over and, treating it as a precious object, quickly took it from her and put it into his box.

A teapot cover that Xu Xiansheng had made was on the rectangular table; she took the teapot out from under the patterned blue satin cover and poured tea. The house was quiet, upstairs and down, the stillness broken only by the happy shouts of Haiying and his friends playing and jumping around out in the sunlight.

Just before going to bed each night, Haiying always called out, "See you tomorrow!" to his father and mother. One evening he stood at the head of the stairs leading up to the third floor and yelled: "Daddy, see you tomorrow!"

Lu Xun's illness was at a critical stage, and he seemed to have phlegm in his throat, so his answer was extremely low, so low that Haiying didn't hear him.

"Daddy, see you tomorrow!" he called out again. He waited a moment, heard no reply then screamed out over and over: "Daddy see you tomorrow Daddy see you tomorrow Daddy see you tomorrow . . ."

His nanny dragged him upstairs, reminding him that his daddy was asleep and telling him to stop yelling. But what chance was there of his listening to her! He continued to shout.

Lu Xun started to say "See you tomorrow," but the words stuck in his throat, and no matter how hard he tried he couldn't get them out. Finally, with great effort he raised his head and, in a loud voice, called out: "See you tomorrow, see you tomorrow!" Then he started to cough.

Xu Xiansheng was given a fright and ran upstairs, scolding Haiying repeatedly. Haiying ran upstairs laughing, all the while muttering to himself: "Daddy must be deaf!"

Lu Xun couldn't hear what Haiying was saying, for he was still coughing.

In April, Lu Xun's condition improved some-

XU GUANGPING, *Xiao Hong*,  
*Xiao Jun* and *Haiying* at *Lu Xun's*  
*grave* in 1937.



what. One day he came downstairs on his way to keep an appointment; dressed with great care, he picked up his black patterned bundle, put on his hat and started out the door.

Xu Xiansheng was downstairs with some visitors, and when she saw Lu Xun come down she quickly said: "You can't walk there. Why not take a taxi?"

"Don't worry," Lu Xun said, "I can walk there."

Xu Xiansheng still advised against it and tried to give him carfare. But Lu Xun wouldn't take it and left with great determination.

"Lu Xun is certainly strong-willed." Feeling somewhat helpless, she simply uttered that one sentence.

That evening Lu Xun returned home with a high fever. "Taking a taxi would have been a lot of trouble," he said. "It was only a short walk—I was there before I knew it. Besides, I hadn't gone out for such a long time that I felt like

walking... but that little bit of exercise brought my illness back... still not ready for any exercise."

His illness upon him again, Lu Xun was bed-ridden once more.

In July, Lu Xun's condition again improved a little. He took medication daily and his temperature was recorded on the chart several times a day just as before. The old doctor made his regular calls, saying that Lu Xun was on the road to recovery. The bacteria in his lungs had nearly stopped spreading and his pleurisy was receding.

Nearly all the visitors went upstairs to pay their respects; there they found Lu Xun's mood to be one of a person on the mend after a prolonged illness. He chatted with them as he sat in his reclining chair under a woolen blanket. Cigarette in hand, he talked to them of translating and of various periodicals.

Not having gone upstairs for a month, I now found myself doing so with some uneasiness. As

I entered his room I felt that there was no place for me to stand or sit.

Xu Xiansheng offered me tea, but I just stood there beside the table without seeming to even see the tea glass.

Lu Xun most likely noticed that I was ill at ease, for he said: "You're a lot thinner. Being this thin is no good, so you'll have to start eating more." He was teasing me again.

"If you ate more, then you'd fill out, so why don't *you* eat a little more?"

With this response of mine, he began to laugh; his laughter was bright and cheerful.

From July on, Lu Xun's condition improved daily. On the doctor's orders he began drinking milk and chicken soup now and then, and although he was still thin, he was in good spirits.

Lu Xun said that his basic constitution was strong, which was why he was able to recover from his illness.

This time Lu Xun had been rendered inactive for a long spell. He hadn't even gone downstairs, let alone out of doors. During his illness he hadn't read the papers or any books, and had merely lain there quietly.

But there was one small picture that he had kept beside his bed and at which he had looked constantly. It was one of a number that he had shown everyone before taking ill, a picture no larger than one of those small prints from a package of cigarettes. It was a picture of a woman in a long skirt running in the wind with her hair blowing about, and on the ground beside her was

a small red rose blossom. I recall that it was a color woodblock print done by a certain Soviet artist.

Lu Xun had a great many paintings, so why had he chosen this particular one to place beside his bed? Xu Xiansheng told me that she didn't know why he looked at that picture so often.

People came and asked him about this matter or that, but he would only say: "You look into the matter yourselves and do what has to be done. What if I weren't here?"

This time Lu Xun had gotten better.

But there was something added: he felt that he had to do as much work as possible . . .

Lu Xun assumed that he had recovered, and so did everyone else. Preparations were begun for the coming winter to celebrate his thirty years of work.

Three months passed.

October 17th, 1936, Lu Xun's illness returned; it was asthma again.

The 17th, a sleepless night.

The 18th, he gasped all day long.

The 19th, early morning, he was failing rapidly. Right before dawn, just like any other day, his work finished, he rested.<sup>26</sup>

<sup>26</sup>Lu Xun died at 5:25 on the morning of October 19, 1936.