

徐訐：私奔

## Sister Tsui-ling

By Hsu Yu

Translated by George Kao

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MOST NATIVES of Fengyang-ts'un had the surname Yang. Although I am not a Yang, my mother was, and so it came about that I grew up in that village. There I spent my childhood in the home of my maternal grandmother.

The people of Fengyang-ts'un had always lived in close intimacy; regardless of family condition or station in life, they had called one another Grandpa or Grandma, Uncle or Auntie, Brother or Sister. The poor in the village were mostly of the older generation, while the well-to-do were more often found among the younger adults. This may seem odd but was the result of an understandable development: the offspring of the rich married early, while the children of the poorer families generally married late. Thus it happened that sometimes adults in a rich family would call the children of their poor relations Uncle or even Grandpa. However, family and clan relationships that went back a long ways are sometimes hard to unravel; in such cases people would address each other by any polite title, usually according to age.

Though I did not belong to the Yang clan, perhaps out of respect for my grandmother, everybody called me Little Brother—really everybody, old and young, rich and poor, even visitors from afar and peddlers making their daily rounds.

They say that when I was young I was quite a winsome lad, and as I remember those years it does seem that the villagers of Fengyang-ts'un treated me with great affection. And on the two or three occasions I left Fengyang-ts'un to visit Shanghai during our summer or winter vacations, I kept hankering to return to the village life. My elder sisters had their hearts set on such urban

joys as taking piano lessons or going for motor rides, but I just wanted to go back to Granny's place and loaf. That may be why my father regarded me as a boy with no ambition.

Our house in Shanghai was liveable though it was small, but I didn't like the narrow lane it was on, where, on summer evenings, throngs of strange boys gathered noisily to ride their cycles, to roller-skate and play ball. Back in Fengyang-ts'un there were grainfields right outside our door and we had space in which to roam and play to our hearts' content. Everybody in our home in Shanghai sang the praises of the bathrooms which had running water. I felt that they were not as much fun as the brooks and streams of Fengyang-ts'un, where we had much better bathing and swimming than in Shanghai. For in Shanghai one had to join the Y.M.C.A. to swim, and mixing with a lot of strangers in their multicolored swim suits seemed unnatural. But my sisters insisted this was very civilized and that the way we swam in the country was barbarous. I wondered where on earth they had picked up such ideas and felt somehow that they were wrong.

I didn't like the people of Shanghai either—not even my sisters. In the country we called them "Shanghailanders". My sisters, of course, were also "Shanghailanders"; and like the rest they seemed to look down on me, calling me a country bumpkin.

In truth I was a country boy; I liked the villagers of Fengyang-ts'un just as much as they liked me. There were a number of girls in Fengyang-ts'un similar in age to my sisters, and everyone of them seemed more lovable than they. Of these girls, I liked Sister Tsui-ling best.

Sister Tsui-ling was also not surnamed Yang,

nor had she been raised in the village. She had come to Fengyang-ts'un fairly recently, because, it was said, her parents had died and she had had to come to live with her maternal grandmother. This old lady, known as Grandma Hui-chuang, worked as a seamstress in Uncle Wang's household, and there Sister Tsui-ling lived with her, occasionally helping with odd jobs.

The other village girls all seemed to have more money than Sister Tsui-ling, and wore more expensive clothes. Nonetheless, she was the prettiest. She might be dressed in homespun clothing but she always stood out from the rest. At the time, the fashion among the village girls was to wear their hair in one or two long braids. The sleeves of their blouses, I remember, were like trumpets, wide at the cuffs; and the blouses themselves were hip-length and slit on both sides, revealing a pair of long trousers the bottoms of which were also modishly wide. On Sister Tsui-ling these bell-bottomed trousers were always the right width; and perhaps because she was well-built, the hem of her blouse did not protrude like those of the other girls. I knew she made most of her clothes herself.

She had two long braids of jet-black hair, an egg-shaped face with big eyes and a small, attractive mouth. She never showed her teeth when she smiled, even though they were very beautiful. Her arms were plump without being fat, and so soft that they felt like a budding peony to the touch. No wonder I thought she was lovely; everyone in the village was fond of her, and Auntie Wang treated her like her own daughter, constantly giving her gifts of clothing and things like powder and rouge. But Sister Tsui-ling didn't seem to care much about pretty clothes or cosmetics: I never saw her dolled up like the other girls.

NOT FAR FROM Fengyang-ts'un the Chang clan ran a free school which the children of our village, including myself, attended. The teachers were hired from among the graduates of a normal school in the city. They were friendly and nice to us, and often in the evening, after school, some of us went walking with them. I don't know when these young teachers caught a glimpse of Sister Tsui-ling, but thereafter they kept quizzing us about her—what her name was, who was she and from what family, and so on—and for a time there was quite a wave

of interest.

This seems altogether natural when I think of it now. To these young men who had come far from home to teach in this out-of-the-way village, a lovely member of the opposite sex would naturally be an object of curiosity. But understandable or not, and for reasons I couldn't fathom, this display of interest on the part of my teachers rubbed me the wrong way.

There was among them a Mr. Shih who was our math teacher. I was a favorite of his because I did so well at math. One day after school he took me for a walk along the river and suddenly asked if I knew whether Sister Tsui-ling had been to school. I knew that Sister Tsui-ling had been graduated from elementary school in another village and had been a very good student; we often went to her for help when a math problem stumped us and she was always able to figure it out. So I proudly replied that Sister Tsui-ling had, of course, been to school.

Mr. Shih was delighted with this piece of information, and then he asked: "Could you do something for me?"

"What?" I replied.

"But you mustn't let others know." He said, grabbing hold of my hand.

"What is it?"

"Don't tell anyone, and particularly don't tell any of the other teachers here."

The situation struck me as rather odd. What could it be that Mr. Shih was willing to confide in me but did not wish any other teacher to know? So I asked again: "What is it?"

"Promise me first and then I'll tell you," Mr. Shih said.

Curious to know what it was all about, I gave him my promise. He then pulled a letter from a pocket, a thick one, and asked me to deliver it secretly to Sister Tsui-ling.

I took the letter and, instead of going home to Grandmother's, went to look for Sister Tsui-ling. I was twelve years old and this was the first time that I had ever done anything stealthily. My heart was in my mouth, I was so afraid I would run into Grandma Hui-chuang or Uncle Wang or Auntie Wang. When I found Sister Tsui-ling I pulled her into the courtyard; dusk had fallen and it was already quite dark there. I gave her the letter and told her that it was from Mr. Shih.

Sister Tsui-ling took the letter and suddenly beamed, her face shining in the twilight with a radiance that I thought truly beautiful. She was seventeen, but she was not much taller than I. She placed her hand on my shoulder and walked with me a few paces, saying:

"Please return the letter to him. Just say I don't read."

"But I already told him. . . ."

"Then just say I want to return it to him," she said. "There's no need to say anything else."

"All right," I said taking back the letter from her and stuffing it into a pocket.

"You'd best not let anyone else know about this nor let anyone see the letter."

"All right," I said again. I didn't know why but I was much elated. I said: "Sister Tsui-ling, people are a lot of nuisance, aren't they?"

"Just don't pay any attention to whatever they are up to."

"I'll do what you say." As I said this I pressed her hand and felt indescribably at peace.

The next day I returned the letter to Mr. Shih. He was extremely disappointed, and asked whether Sister Tsui-ling had anything to say, I proudly replied, "She just said to give this back to you," and skipped away.

I didn't know at the time that I was being cruel.

Mr. Shih was very quiet from then on and no longer palled around with us. He did not return the next semester.

## 2

BOTH GRANDMA Hui-chuang and my maternal grandmother knew that I was fond of Sister Tsui-ling, that I loved to be at her side and always listened to what she said. So everytime Grandma Hui-chuang came to visit she would pat me on the head and remark jokingly to my grandmother:

"How about letting me marry Tsui-ling to Little Brother here. Then we two would become relations."

"That would be fine, provided you can bring yourself to do it."

"How about you, would you be willing?"

"Let Tsui-ling come over to our house right away," Grandmother said laughingly. "They would

be like sister and brother, how nice it would be! She would be good company for me too."

When I overheard such words I became extremely elated; but as I listened further, either Grandmother or Grandma Hui-chuang would end up saying:

"Pity Tsui-ling is a little too old. Otherwise, they would have been a Heaven-made pair."

I suffered the injustice of it all: granted that Sister Tsui-ling was a few years older than I, she wasn't much taller and I was confident I would soon overtake her in height.

I had no idea what marriage was all about, but I did know that being married meant being together, and there was no one I'd be happier to be together with than Sister Tsui-ling. I felt so close to her that I would tell her things I couldn't talk about with others.

But soon I was to feel the kind of hurt experienced by Mr. Shih.

It was a hot summer morning; my vacation had already begun and Grandmother decreed that I should practice calligraphy, both the big and small style, each day. I remember I usually worked in our backyard because it was out of the sun's reach in the morning. Along the backyard wall were balsam flowers and cockscombs, and in the summer they burst out in a riot of red; and there was also a tall cassia tree in whose branches the cicadas sang in noisy unison. I was grinding the ink-stick preparatory to doing my calligraphy, and Grandmother was seated across the table from me, combing her hair, when Grandma Hui-chuang arrived. She always exchanged a few friendly words with me when she came to visit, but that day she paid no attention to me but straightaway started talking to my grandmother.

Grandmother invited her to sit down and, seating herself on my left, Grandma Hui-chuang began without any preliminaries:

"What do you think of this thing anyway? Truly I find it hard to decide."

"Does Uncle Wang know anything about these people?"

"He told me not to worry, said the family is good and respectable. He knows them well."

"What does the boy do?"

"He's in the hardware business in Shanghai, twenty-three years old this year."

"Has Uncle Wang ever met him?"

"No," replied Grandma Hui-chuang, "but he knows that the family owns twenty *mou* of land, also an oil shop in town. The boy earns ten dollars or more a month in Shanghai."

"Well, family background is secondary, the important thing is that the boy himself has to be decent," Grandmother opined.

"It would be rather nice for the likes of us to match up with a family like that," said Grandma Hui-chuang. "I reckon it's safe since the proposal came through Uncle Wang. Still and all, men are inclined to be careless about these things. It'd be best if I could see the boy."

"Weren't you even shown his photo?"

"No," said Grandma Hui-chuang. "But photos don't tell much anyway. Best that I see him face to face, don't you think?"

While I continued grinding away with my ink-stick, I suddenly felt uneasy. I sensed that they were discussing Sister Tsui-ling and that they were think about marrying her off to a Shanghailander. The more I listened the more I was worried and hurt, so I slipped into the house, came out through the front door and went to look for Sister Tsui-ling.

I FOUND her sitting and sewing under the eaves in front of her house. Perhaps she noticed my agitation, for she put down her sewing and asked me concernedly:

"What's the matter, Little Brother?"

"I . . ." Before I could get the words out I saw someone coming, so I took her by the hand and said: "Let's go for a walk, shall we? I have something to tell you."

Outside there were the grain and the rice fields, the tranquil brook and the peaceful cemetery. These were all places where we used to play, most of the time three or four of us village boys kicking a rubber ball around, catching little fishes in the brook, playing hide-and-seek by the stone fence over at the cemetery, or picking wild berries in the woods. Sometimes Sister Tsui-ling would join us, always at twilight or in the evening.

Now and then a rainbow with its multi-colored bands would appear above the horizon or, in the evening, a host of little stars would shine in the sky, and all around there was the twinkle of glow-worms. When we were with her we didn't have to play at anything and we still had fun; she would pick a few blades of grass with which to make



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Author's self-  
portrait, 1951.

Of all the practicing Chinese writers of fiction today Hsu Yu is the most continuously productive and popular. In forty years of authorship he has published more than sixty volumes. These include poetry, stories, drama, essays, novels, and literary criticism, but it is as short story writer that he is most widely known. From Shanghai to wartime Chungking to Hong Kong, his stories have charmed generations of youthful readers, men and women, with their intriguing plot, inventive characterizations and urbane style. Having worked as a magazine editor in Shanghai, a research student in Paris and a journalist in New York, he excelled in depicting big city life with a cosmopolitan flavor—his heroes as often as not a professor, a writer, or an artist. But he has been

equally successful with homespun types, such as presented in the pastoral setting of this story, originally published in 1951 under the title "Elopement".

Hsu Yu was born in 1909, in Ts'u-hsi, Chekiang. He graduated from the Peking National University in 1931, majoring in Philosophy and with a strong side interest in Psychology. His best-known novels are *Feng hsiao-hsiao* (風蕭蕭) and *Chiang-hu hsing* (江湖行), both of which have been made into motion pictures. He has taught at universities in Chungking, Hong Kong and Singapore, and is at present head of the Department of Chinese at the Hong Kong Baptist College. Commenting on another story, the noted critic Yin Ti said: "Hsu Yu writes simply, but he succeeds in making us think deeply. Admittedly he is a teller of tales, but what's more important is that he possesses the ability to tell a story clearly and tell it whole."

tiny toys for us, or she would tell us stories or ask us to pick pretty wild flowers for her to wear in her hair. We enjoyed anything that she proposed. But the two of us, seldom ventured out alone, and rarely in the morning when there were chores to be done.

Now she held my hand while we walked together. The glare of the sun was in our eyes, and magpies and sparrows were chattering all around us. She picked her way along the walls and in the shade of the trees, keeping me close at her side so I would be out of the hot sun. Now and then I stole a glance at her: she really was not much taller than I. I didn't say anything, nor did she ask me any questions. After a while we came to the brook and as though by mutual agreement we stopped in the cool shade of some huge old trees where we were wont to play.

She still didn't ask me anything. In my adult recollection, I believe that she had already guessed what it was that seemed to have upset me. Finally, I had to get it out by myself, but I hardly knew what words to use. I said:

"Sister Tsui-ling, I heard my grandmother and Grandma Hui-chuang talking. They said Uncle Wang's going to marry you off to . . . to someone in the hardware business in Shanghai."

"Oh," she said with a little laugh but with great composure. "That's my grandmother, old folks are always talking like that."

"Do you like the idea?" I was a little surprised at her reaction.

"It doesn't matter whether I like it or not," she replied in a natural tone of voice. "When a girl grows up she is married off sooner or later, isn't that so?"

"But to a Shanghailanders . . ."

"Wouldn't you like to see me get married?" She teasingly asked.

"If you get married we can't be together anymore," I said.

"Of course we can, you can come see me often."

"That's not the same."

"Why is it not the same?"

I knew I wouldn't be able to explain, and remained silent instead for a while. Then I said:

"Why do they say you are much bigger than me? Actually we are about the same height. Pretty soon I'll be taller than you, don't you think?"

"Yes, of course. In another two years you will be taller."

"Then, why . . . ?" I persisted, "why wouldn't Grandma Hui-chuang marry you to me? Then we could be together all the time."

"Oh," she put an arm around me, saying, "Little Brother. You are my little brother, aren't you?"

"But I'll grow up. I'll be a grownup before you know it."

"But you must understand, women grow old quickly. By the time you are as old as Chi-ming, I'll be an old woman."

I had nothing to say in response to this, but I refused to believe what she said. After a while, as I kept quiet, she said: "Let's go back. Old folks, like my grandmother, love to talk about match-making and things like that. Let them talk; anyway, I'm not going to get married."

"Really? You're not going to get married?"

"It's too early for that, isn't it?"

I didn't say anything, but just followed her home. Although I did not completely recover from my dazed feeling Sister Tsui-ling's words brought me some comfort.

## 3

THE DAYS flitted by in the fiery heat of summer, and I didn't hear any more talk between grandmother and Grandma Hui-chuang about Tsui-ling's marriage. Nor was it mentioned again by Sister Tsui-ling. But I couldn't forget her comment, that when I was as old as Chi-ming she would be an old woman, and I remembered it particularly when I was with Brother Chi-ming. How I envied him!

Brother Chi-ming also came from outside the village, they said from Neng-hai. To my child's mind it was some faroff place; actually it was only in a neighboring district. Because it was in the mountains its land was poor, and its people often worked in other villages. During the harvest season, group after group came over as farm-hands; and some who got along well stayed on to work all year 'round. But they did not buy farm land in our village because, after they had worked with us for a year or two they saved enough to buy a lot of farm land in their native hills. Some of those

who were still hiring themselves out as farm-hands or tenant farmers in places like Fengyang-ts'un were already landowners at home. And after laboring for ten or twenty years among us, they could afford to retire to their native place and take things easy.

There was a man named Chin Fa—we all called him Uncle Chin Fa—who had been in Fengyang-ts'un fifteen years, working on the farm owned by the village guild. People said he had already bought himself eighty *mou* of farm land and two hills; he often talked about retiring and going back home in another five years. It was Uncle Chin Fa who one year brought to our village Brother Chi-ming, a well-built fellow of twenty-one or two with a prominent nose and close-cropped hair. He was known for his great strength and it was said that he had once killed a tiger in his native village. When kids asked him about this he always denied it, saying: "Who told you such things?"—but we would consider his reply as merely an indication of his modesty.

Around Fengyang-ts'un there were temple fairs, where people vied with one another lifting stone weights, and I had seen Chi-ming lift heavier weights than other people could. He was a popular fellow, and would do almost anything for anybody when asked to help—and do it with pleasure and wholeheartedly—things like picking beans, carrying loads of eggplant, or going into town to run some errands. My grandmother often asked him to help out with one thing or another. Afterwards she would have him stay for a meal, and I would have a rare opportunity to observe him close at hand. Otherwise, he was always busy, most of the time in the fields. All day long as he worked he sang little folk songs in his native tongue which none of us understood but which I found pleasing to the ear. He would work and sing and handle any job with ease, whether on hot summer days or in the bitter cold of winter. Everybody in the village liked him, especially the children; to us he was something of a hero. Two incidents that involved him have remained particularly vivid in my memory.

There was in the countryside a kind of cedar tree that grew big and tall and bore tiny little berries. They were not edible but were great fun to play with; we stuffed the hard, round things into little bamboo tubes and, by pushing sharply from

the other end with a bamboo stick, shot them out with a "pop!" like firing off a gun. For a while this was a popular game, and we kids vied with one another in collecting cedar berries. But the cedars were very tall, and even when we climbed up as high as we could and beat at the branches only a few berries would drop to the ground. Once, when we were gathering berries, Brother Chi-ming happened by and we asked him to help. He set his carrying pole down, slithered up the cedar tree like a monkey, and broke off several branches for us. We wound up with our pockets full of berries and our hearts filled with admiration for Brother Chi-ming's prowess.

Another time, three of us saw an empty sampan moored at the riverbank not far from our homes; we leaped into the boat and pushed off with a bamboo pole. No one realized how rapidly the current flowed that day; it quickly carried the boat to mid-stream, where the water was too deep for the pole, and sent it rushing headlong down the river. At first we were delighted, but as the sampan gathered speed we became frightened. Nine-year old Little Ping started to cry and I had no idea of what to do; fortunately the third boy, Yang Pa-chih, started yelling for help. Three or four people appeared on the riverbank hollering for us to turn the boat around, to toss a rope to them, and to do this and that, none of which we could manage. Finally, Brother Chi-ming arrived. Without a word, he pulled off his clothes and leaped into the water; a powerful stroke or two, and he got hold of the boat and pushed it to the bank. The other onlookers started scolding us but there were no words of reprimand from Chi-ming. He simply said to me: "Little Brother, when it gets warmer I'll teach you how to swim."

We had hardly recovered enough to pay much attention to this promise; at the moment all we were hoping for was that Chi-ming would not tell on us, because if our adult relatives should find out about our escapade we would surely get a stiff talking-to, at the very least. Eventually, my grandmother did find out, but it wasn't Brother Chi-ming who'd told her.

While Brother Chi-ming's abilities had left a deep impression on me, Sister Tsui-ling's remark about my getting to be as old as Chi-ming only made me admire him even more. Whenever I could I tried to get close to him, and several times I

reminded him of his promise to teach me how to swim. But he was always busy; I could only get to see him for a few brief moments after the evening meal.

THEN LATER that summer a strange thing happened.

It started with Grandma Hui-chuang coming over one day, greatly agitated, to talk to my grandmother. She said that for several days now Sister Tsui-ling had arisen before daybreak and gone to see Brother Chi-ming at his ox-wheel. The way she talked you'd have thought that this was a matter of life and death. It had been a dry summer, and the parched fields were in great need of irrigation. So early every morning Brother Chi-ming and his ox would go to turn the water-wheel. Sometimes I went there to play, and it was great fun to watch the ox go 'round and 'round at his deliberate pace, turning the water-wheel with a rhythmic noise and thus causing water to flow into the ditch, often with little fishes swimming in it. What could be so wrong with Tsui-ling's going there to take a look that it should so upset Grandma Hui-chuang? I remember my Grandmother's reply:

"Well, Tsui-ling is not getting any younger. What about that prospective family? How come you have not yet even seen a photo? I reckon it's best to marry her off as soon as possible. That way, your mind would be at ease."

Although the grown-ups kept the details from us children, I soon gathered that what was going on was considered to be serious. For the behavior of these people, one and all, seemed to have changed; they talked and gesticulated without end, Uncle Wang pow-wowing with Uncle Chin-fa, Uncle Chin-fa with Grandma Hui-chuang, and Grandma Hui-chuang in turn with my grandmother. But I had no way of knowing or finding out what they were talking about. Every now and then, I'd look up Sister Tsui-ling, but for some reason she no longer greeted me with the same intimacy. Something seemed to be bothering her too; and Brother Chi-ming also seemed to be a bit different from before.

But this period didn't last long. Suddenly, several days went by without Brother Chi-ming being seen. I asked Grandmother about him, and she said: "He's gone home."

And now, as time dragged on I began to see a tangible change in Sister Tsui-ling. She seldom said a word and no longer smiled, just keeping to herself, which made me feel bad. I wanted very much to share her sorrows but found no opportunity to tell her this. One day at dusk, when some pink clouds were floating in the darkening sky, I looked for her and found her alone in the courtyard. She had on a white blouse of summer cloth and black muslin trousers. Her face was deep in thought, with only the big round eyes mobile, and her lips trembled a little. She didn't pay any attention to me, but neither did she resist when I took her by the arm and walked her outside the gate.

The dark green rice stalks had already grown tall in the fields, the crows were jabbering in the trees, and all around us the frogs were breathing out the earth's heat. She followed me silently, and I said: "Sister Tsui-ling, you have not been happy lately. What is the trouble?"

"Nothing much," she said, the corners of her mouth twitching in an unsuccessful attempt to form a smile.

"I know you're unhappy," I said. "Please tell me what it is, Sister Tsui-ling, won't you? Maybe I can help."

She did not respond, so I had to continue.

"Don't take me for a child. I'm grown up now, I can do a lot of things. Just tell me what and I'll be glad to do it for you."

She remained silent.

By this time we had reached the river; the water was crystal clear and flowing rapidly. In the trees the birds and the cicadas created a noisy din, from afar came the low cooing of the rock pigeons, and all around the frogs croaked in chorus. Enwrapped in this world of sound, I had a curious sense of stillness. Turning my head, I saw tear-drop pearls at the corners of Sister Tsui-ling's eyes.

"Sister Tsui-ling," I said to her, "What's the matter? Have I done anything to hurt you?"

"Why would you do anything to hurt me, Little Brother? You are truly my Little Brother, and when you grow older you will understand. . . ." She got only this far and started crying. I could think of nothing to say and in a moment, strangely enough, felt a peculiar sensation in my nose and couldn't stop the tears coming down my cheeks.

## 4

FOUR LI FROM Fengyang-ts'un was the town of White Rainbow where there were all kinds of shops: fruit and vegetable stores, butchers' and fishmongers'. There were also grocery stores and ones that sold foreign goods. There you found the things women wanted—stockings, hair clips, cotton and woollen apparel, woollen yarn and cosmetics—and toys for the children, including tiny figures of men and horses, tin pistols, and multi-colored rubber balls. . . . White Rainbow was where the fair was held, where the people from the surrounding villages came to trade. We children did not visit there often, but would go every two or three weeks to get our hair cut because that was where the nearest barber shop was. I enjoyed the visits to town but hated having my hair cut so much that my grandmother always had to force me to go. Each time she did she gave me a little extra money with which to buy a few small toys and something special to eat.

It was on one of these visits to get a haircut in White Rainbow that I ran into Brother Chi-ming.

He was sitting in a teahouse, in a seat facing the street, and when he saw me he called out:

"Little Brother."

I turned around, recognized him and called back a surprised greeting.

"Come in, come in," he said to me.

I had never been inside a teahouse in White Rainbow, since their purpose was to provide visiting adult villagers a place to talk business and to rest. They also served as an inn for people who came to the town to catch a train or a boat. The teahouse was crowded and I hesitated a while summoning up courage to go in.

Brother Chi-ming bade me sit down, and with his rough-hewn hands poured me a cup of tea. He looked the same as before except that he appeared to have just had a haircut; his face was squarish, his mouth rather broad and ready to smile. He said to me:

"Little Brother, I've been waiting here for you since I left Fengyang-ts'un. I knew you were bound to come to town sooner or later."

"Waiting for me?" I looked at the strange faces all around me, and suddenly knew I should be acting like a man, so I sat up straight and said: "You know, I didn't even know that you had

really left us."

"They didn't want me to stay there anymore."

"Who didn't?" I asked. He smiled and answered casually:

"Oh, Uncle Chin-fa and others."

"Why?"

"Don't you know?" He drank a mouthful of tea, and then continued: "Because they saw me talking with Sister Tsui-ling several times."

"And what's wrong with that?"

"Oh," he smiled again. "Because I'm from another village."

"But you are not a Shanghailander."

"How could I be a Shanghailander?" He laughed, then suddenly added, "But if I worked in Shanghai I think Grandma Hui-chuang would have liked it."

I really didn't quite understand this remark; but still acting as I thought an adult would I said, without bothering too much about the logic of it:

"My Papa, Mama, and elder sisters all live in Shanghai, but I don't like Shanghailanders."

"But Sister Tsui-ling is very nice to me," Brother Chi-ming continued with pride, ignoring the irrelevant interruption. "I know that, like you, she does not care about people who work in Shanghai. I'm sure she will marry me any how so we can be together."

His statement suddenly and dramatically solved the riddle that had been bothering me for weeks. I was so shaken that I had nothing to say but just stared at him as he continued:

"Of course, she has not said this to me quite so plainly, and I cannot be absolutely sure. That's why I've been waiting for you, hoping you would take a message to her for me."

"Message?" I said. "What message?"

"But you mustn't tell anybody," he said. "If you don't want to do it you don't have to, but you mustn't tell anybody else about it."

"I won't tell anybody," I promised. But he changed the subject, asking me:

"Do you know Uncle Wang has been trying to act as a matchmaker for Sister Tsui-ling? It's a fellow who is an apprentice in a hardware store in Shanghai."

"I know that."

"Do you know if Sister Tsui-ling is willing marry this man?"

"No, I don't."

"That's why I want you to deliver a message



for me. Please tell her secretly—let's see, today is the 15th—16th, 17th, 18th—on the morning of the 18th, around five or six o'clock I will come in a boat to Fengyang-ts'un and wait for her at the landing. If she doesn't want to marry that Shanghailanders she can meet me then, and she can come away with me; but if she does want to then, of course, she shouldn't come. I will wait for her until half-past six."

"You mean you want her to marry *you*?" I asked.

"Yes, but I can't force her to," he replied. "If she is not willing to marry me, I will care for her like a sister. But I hope she will marry me."

I hesitated a long time. I was not trying to judge the rights and wrongs of the affair, but I felt that it was a serious matter that required considerable thought. Finally, I said:

"Brother Chi-ming, I promise you I will never tell anyone what you just told me. I know this is very important and I'll have to wait until I've seen Sister Tsui-ling before I know whether I should even tell her."

"In any case," he said, "I will come to the boat-landing on the 18th, for sure. If you should decide not to tell her, would you be good enough to meet me there yourself?"

"Of course I will, certainly," I replied.

"Well, Little Brother, I don't know when I'll be seeing you again."

"Why? Are you going back to Neng-hai?" I asked him. After a moment I added: "When I'm bigger I can go to Neng-hai, maybe."

"I'll be going back there for a visit," he said, "but I'll be leaving again—maybe to Shanghai, to take a look there. I'm strong, and I can make a living anywhere. But Neng-hai is such a poor place that I don't intend to stay there long."

After this exchange I said nothing, a never-before-experienced agitation churning inside me. Nor did Chi-ming say anything further, but gazed at the people scurrying to and fro on the street. I followed his gaze and also watched the street scene. The day's fair was over and the crowds gradually thinned out on the streets and in front of the shops. Presently he asked if I cared for a bowl of won-ton; I thanked him but refused and left.

IT WAS A hot day, and in the sun one felt as though

he was roasting. As I walked back to Fengyang-ts'un in the shade of my umbrella, I debated whether I should deliver Brother Chi-ming's message to Sister Tsui-ling, and before I knew it had covered the trip's four or five *li*.

When I arrived home, Grandma Hui-chuang was there. My grandmother was holding something in her hand and inspecting it.

"A nice-looking lad," she said, then, looking up, added: "An intelligent face."

"His family is asking for a photo also," Grandma Hui-chuang chortled with obvious delight. "Tomorrow or the next day I will go with Tsui-ling to town and have one taken."

"I guess you are reassured now, and won't insist on meeting him in person?"

"You're right. I'm only afraid the other side won't like us. After all, we can't give her much of a dowry."

"I'm sure they'll love to have a fine girl like Tsui-ling for a daughter-in-law."

As the conversation went on, I sidled up close to my grandmother and glanced at the photograph.

It was of a young man in a long gown, a folded fan in one hand, standing against a stone balustrade on which was set a pot of flowers. He had a roly-poly face and shiny hair parted in the middle; his gown fitted tightly around his fat and bulging body. I don't know why, but I disliked him immediately, even in the photograph. I wanted to take it in my own hands for a better look, but Grandmother pushed me aside. She returned the photograph to Grandma Hui-chuang, asking:

"Have you let Tsui-ling look at this?"

"Oh, yes, I have."

"Do you think she was pleased?"

"Of course, she keeps saying she doesn't want to get married, but I am sure she must be pleased in her heart." Grandma Hui-chuang replied. "Just imagine, to be married to a Shanghailanders! How wonderful!"

But I loathed all Shanghailanders, and especially the fat one in the photograph. Suddenly, the question of delivering Chi-ming's message decided itself.

Without waiting for Grandma Hui-chuang to leave, I slipped away and went straight to Sister Tsui-ling's house. I found her alone in her room, sewing. As I came in she raised her head and there was a warm greeting in her big, bright eyes. I

closed the door quietly behind me and said:

"Sister Tsui-ling, Grandma Hui-chuang is over at our place showing my grandmother a photo of a Shanghailander they want you to marry. She says you've seen the photo."

She looked down again quickly and knitted her eyebrows, but said nothing.

"Do you want to marry that Shanghailander?"

"Who says I want to?" she asked softly.

"You really don't want to then?"

She didn't answer, her head still bowed. Then, unexpectedly, she took out a handkerchief and wiped away some tears.

"If you really don't want to marry the fat Shanghailander, I think you had better go away with Brother Chi-ming. This morning he asked me to bring you a message, to say that on the 18th he will come in a boat to meet you at the landing at five o'clock in the morning." And out came, as though it had a will of its own, that which I had been debating whether to say for so many hours.

When she heard this, she quickly raised her head and looked at me with tear-filled eyes. The hand she placed on my arm trembled.

"You've seen him? Then he's still around?"

"I was getting my haircut and saw him in town. He was sitting in a teahouse, and said he'd been waiting for me because he knew I would have to come to town someday soon."

"Really, Little Brother? Really?" Sister Tsui-ling seemed to be burning with impatience to know more.

"Of course." And as I made this inane reply I noticed that Sister Tsui-ling was smiling and the tears made her eyes shine with added brilliance.

"What about it, Sister Tsui-ling?" I asked. "Will you go with Brother Chi-ming?"

"You haven't told anyone else?"

"No, I haven't."

"You mustn't, under any circumstances, tell anybody," she said.

"But Sister Tsui-ling, if you are really going away with Brother Chi-ming, you must tell me. . . ." I felt strangely vulnerable inside, and suddenly I started to cry.

"What's the matter, Little Brother?"

"If you go away with Brother Chi-ming I won't ever see you again," I sobbed.

"I can always come back to visit you, and you

can visit us," she said. "And you will write to me, won't you?"

"I'll do what you say," I told her. Then she stood up, and holding my hand said with determination:

"The morning of the 18th. Would you come to see me off? Please. Come to the landing at five and wait for me there."

## 5

IN THE COUNTRY, everyone went to bed early most of the year, but not in the summer. On hot summer evenings, people gathered in the courtyards and whiled away the hours chatting, telling stories, cracking jokes, or guessing riddles. This was when we enjoyed the most fun and companionship, and when it was bed-time we children would be reluctant to leave and had to be constantly prodded by our elders. I slept in the same room as a servant of Grandmother's, called Granny Pa-tou, who was about her age. She usually went to bed early because she was the first to get up in the morning. I would wait until Grandmother was ready to turn in and would fall asleep as soon as my head hit the pillow no matter how hot it was. When I woke in the morning, Granny Pa-tou had long since been up, started the fire and was cooking breakfast.

However, on the night of the 17th, I went to bed early, at the same time as Granny Pa-tou. I was so determined to get up early the next morning that I didn't dare linger with the others enjoying the evening's fun in the courtyard. But once in bed I couldn't fall asleep no matter how hard I tried, and lay there instead thinking of Sister Tsui-ling one moment and Brother Chi-ming the next. Sister Tsui-ling's house was in the front part of the village, some distance from our compound; I wondered if she too had gone to bed, and regretted not having gone over earlier to see her. I started worrying lest I wouldn't get up early enough; and then worried about the best way to sneak out without being observed if I did wake in time. . . . thus I tossed and turned until the people in the courtyard dispersed. I finally dozed off as I heard Grandmother come.

When I awoke the day had not yet dawned. I waited quietly but impatiently for the murky

sky outside the bedroom window to turn white, and as it did heard Granny Pa-tou arising. I waited till she had left the room and then quickly got up, noticing that by the clock on the table it was already twenty minutes to five. I hurriedly dressed and crept out, only to find the front gate closed—it wouldn't be opened until six, I remembered—so I turned back and went into the kitchen. Granny Pa-tou asked why I was up so early, so I told her mosquitoes had gotten into my net and awakened me. I hung around the kitchen for a few minutes then, saying I was going to catch some crickets, slipped out the back door.

It was so foggy I couldn't see the sky, and the ground was wet with a heavy dew. The damp cold air was shrill with the cries of magpies and sparrows, and among the soggy blades of grass the insects hummed. I hurried along the river-bank to the boat landing, my heart unaccountably pounding inside me. As soon as I walked down the uneven stone steps I spied the moored boat covered with a piece of bamboo matting. It was an ordinary flat-bottomed boat normally used for carrying grain and propelled by a scull set in the stern, the scull presently unmanned. I was about to leap onto the boat to look under the bamboo mat when I heard a voice calling:

"Little Brother."

The voice came from behind me onshore, and as I turned around I saw Brother Chi-ming come out from behind a tree. He was wearing tunic and trousers of blue cotton, a straw hat and black cotton shoes. Before I could say anything, he dashed down the steps to where I stood.

"Does she know I am coming to get her?" he asked.

"I told her. She'll be coming, I think."

Brother Chi-ming took me by the hand and we climbed back onto the bank together; from under a tree we tried to see through the thick morning mist, waiting for Sister Tsui-ling to appear. He said not a word, and neither did I. From the quiet river we occasionally heard the smacking noise of feeding fish, and now and then birds chirped overhead; otherwise all was still—neither breeze nor human form stirred, nor was there a sound of any other kind. Gradually, the fog lifted and I could see the outline of the blue mountains, and the wide expanse of green fields; from the chimneys the wispy smoke of breakfast fires curled skyward.

The day broke clear and bright, and in the east the sun rose radiant, red and perfectly round. . . .

Suddenly, Brother Chi-ming pulled me behind the tree, whispering: "Someone's coming!"

I had also heard the hurried footsteps, and the two of us peered out from behind the tree. I only got a glimpse of someone dressed in white carrying something and going down the stone steps. It was Sister Tsui-ling. Without waiting for me to say anything or saying anything to me, Brother Chi-ming darted out like an arrow, with me only a few steps behind. In an instant we were at Tsui-ling's side and could see that she had a bundle in her hand. Brother Chi-ming wasted no words but swiftly took the bundle from her, tossed it into the hold, and untied the boat from its mooring. By the time I reached Sister Tsui-ling's side, he had already jumped into the boat. I took one of her hands in mine, and she put her other on my shoulder.

"Little Brother!" She broke into tears. The morning sun shone on her wet cheeks; I had never seen her look so fresh and beautiful.

"Sister Tsui-ling, you are going to write to me?" I asked.

"Of course I will. . . . I won't forget you, Little Brother." As she said this, Tsui-ling took from her pocket something wrapped in a flower-patterned handkerchief and handed it to me, saying: "Little Brother, keep this so you will think of me and know that I will never forget you."

Before I could decide whether to accept or to decline politely, she had also jumped into the boat. Chi-ming was standing erect in the stern, scull in hand, just like Juan the Seventh in *The Water Margin*. He called softly:

"Goodbye, Little Brother. Thank you very much."

I stood on the riverbank, dazed by the speed with which it all happened and watched the boat swiftly float away. From where she had crept under the mat, Sister Tsui-ling poked her head out and watched me until the boat was carried further down the river and, in a few moments, disappeared as it made a turn around a clump of trees; at the very last I saw Brother Chi-ming's back and his upstretched arm waving at me.

The heedless river continued to flow quietly as though nothing had occurred; the trees, now clearly awakened, glittered with a fresh brightness as the morning sun hit their dew-drenched leaves.

I stood there for quite a while, as though rooted. As I walked slowly up the stone steps, my heart filled with a nameless sorrow, the sky suddenly darkened, and a little cold wind came up.

THE NEARER I got to the village, the more I began to worry. And suddenly I realized that in my hand was the handkerchief Sister Tsui-ling had given me. I stealthily untied it and found inside a silver ring, wide on one side and narrow on the other, the wider band shaped in the form of a double *ju-i* with a floral pattern, surmounted by two butterflies, one on each side. I quickly put it in my pocket and returned to the kitchen as I had left it, through the back door.

Granny Pa-tou took one look at me and started scolding:

"Look at your feet, Little Brother, they are all wet from the dew. Why go catch crickets so early in the morning anyhow? And without putting on even one additional piece of clothing." She felt my hand and continued: "Look, your hands are frozen like ice. Go warm your feet, quickly!" She pushed me behind the stove where the embers from the wood-fire were still smoldering, and poured hot water for me to wash my face.

I sat still for what seemed a long time absent-mindedly staring at the flickering wood-fire and feeling a vast emptiness inside. Finally Granny Pa-tou insisted I go eat breakfast and I became afraid again. I slowly dragged myself to the table but when my Grandmother looked at me it was with her normal expression. However, at the breakfast table she asked:

"What's the matter with you, Little Brother? Why do you look so bad? Are you not eating because you feel sick?"

Granny Pa-tou hurried over and felt my forehead, saying: "Went to catch crickets first thing in the morning, and didn't have enough sense to put on an extra garment."

"The child doesn't know how to take care of himself. Why did you have to get up so early?"

"I think he has some fever," said Granny Pa-tou.

"If you can't eat, go lie down for a while," Grandmother said.

All this time I was a little afraid; I was particularly afraid that Grandma Hui-chuang would come visit Grandmother. I thought I might as well

keep out of sight. So I went in, undressed and got into my bed. I continued to worry, but having slept so badly and arisen so early, and having used up so much nervous energy in waiting, worrying and just being afraid, I was overcome with weariness and soon fell asleep.

I woke up not knowing what time it was. Grandmother was at my bedside, feeling my forehead and saying:

"The child is really sick."

My mouth was dry as cotton and I felt dizzy; might as well be sick, I thought to myself, then people would not think of asking me about Sister Tsui-ling. I was anxious for news of her, but didn't know how I could ask without raising suspicions. When I got up to go to the toilet my head was so woozy I could hardly walk. Grandmother told me to stay in bed all day, and for lunch Granny Pa-tou brought me porridge. I was greatly tempted to see what news she had, but could not muster up enough courage to open my mouth.

Around two in the afternoon, when Grandmother was in my room keeping me company, Grandma Hui-chuang came, walking straight into my room to look for Grandmother. I turned toward the wall, with my eyes closed feigning sleep, but my heart was pounding hard. I listened attentively to what the two of them had to say.

"What's the matter with Little Brother, sick?"

"What else, when he doesn't know enough to take care of himself? Dashing around early in the morning without putting on enough clothes."

"Isn't it the same in every family," Grandma Hui-chuang said. "Our Tsui-ling has been gone a long time. I'm getting real worried."

"Where did she go?"

"To White Rainbow town," said Grandma Hui-chuang. "Gone since the crack of dawn. She told me last night she was going to shop for dress material and a few other things and said it would be too hot after the sun was out, so she would rather go early and come back early. But look what time it is now, and she's still not back."

"Oh, but she's not a child. Must have met some friends and stopped for a visit. She'll be back soon enough, so don't worry too much." With these words Grandmother tried to comfort her.

When I heard this I felt much relieved. Then their talk drifted again to matchmaking. Grandma Hui-chuang said:

"I told her not to be eager to go to town today. In a couple of days when we go to have her photographed, we could do the shopping at the same time and save a trip—but she wouldn't listen. When a girl grows up—she has a mind of her own. How can I control her, an old woman like me? I'd really rather marry her off early, to save myself so much worry."

"The way I took at it," Grandmother replied, "you should quit changing your mind every other day. If this family is about right, why not settle on it? When you come right down to it, these things depend on a person's own fate."

"You're so right, so right, that's the way I think too. We'll have her picture taken day after tomorrow. Then if everybody is satisfied we'll just consider it settled. After all, her parents are not here to take care of things, and I'm so old. Were it not for Uncle Wang, how on earth would we have found such a nice family?"

When I heard this, I couldn't help laughing inwardly, but already I was losing interest. It seemed as though they talked for ages before Grandma Hui-chuang went home.

But by eight o'clock in the evening Grandma Hui-chuang had returned. This time she found Grandmother in the courtyard and didn't come into my room, but recognized her voice, and soon there were others all talking loudly, and often everybody talking at the same time, so that it created quite a hubbub.

".... and she took all her clothing with her...."

".... Somebody saw Chi-ming over at White Rainbow town, still hanging around.... must have got her to go with him...."

"Who would ever have thought that Chi-ming would be so low...."

"First thing tomorrow morning, report it to the police."

"Better go after her ourselves. After all, she can't have gone too far."

"You'd really lose face if you report to the police. Even if she was brought back who would want her for a wife?"

"Let me hurry back to Neng-hai tomorrow for a look first." I could tell that this was Uncle Chin-fa speaking. "I believe Chi-ming must have gone there."

After much turmoil, the voices began to quiet

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HSU YU

*Drawing by Faye Hou, 1969.*

down. Someone, probably Uncle Wang, had persuaded everybody to discuss the matter calmly. I was quite worried for a while, lying awake and listening intently; but my anxiety gradually eased when, after a long time, not a single voice had mentioned my name and no one seemed to suspect that I had had a hand in this affair.

Then suddenly I, too, shared the dark suspicion that Brother Chi-ming might be a bad man. I had heard tales of bad men kidnapping girls and selling them as bondmaids; what if Brother Chi-ming had sold her to someone? Momentarily I was terrified by this thought, and considered speaking up and telling all I knew; but remembering how clever Sister Tsui-ling was, I was sure she would never let herself be taken in like that, and felt better again.

Of course, I was afraid that if I did speak up they would beat me to death for my part in the matter, and I made up my mind to say nothing. In my pocket I still had the ring and the handkerchief Sister Tsui-ling had given me; this was a danger and I decided that the first chance I got I would put them inside my school-pack, so if they should be found later I could say that they had

been given to me by Sister Tsui-ling long ago.

After this I heard nothing, except when Granny Pa-tou and Grandmother talked about it, which consisted mostly of cursing Brother Chi-ming and heaving a lot of sighs over the fate of Sister Tsui-ling. Occasionally, others would drop by and put in a word or two, invariably expressing sympathy for Grandma Hui-chuang and indignation over what had befallen her. I recovered after staying in bed for three days and then went about my studies and play as usual. I tried to find out from my playmates whether there had been any further developments, but they were not very helpful; they could only actually confirm that Uncle Chin-fa had indeed gone back to Neng-hai.

## 6

UNCLE CHIN-FA was gone four days. When he returned he was surrounded by all the villagers, and I joined the crowd to try to hear what he had to say. But from the few bits and pieces I could hear I couldn't make heads or tails of anything. I got the impression that Uncle Chin-fa was not as angry as before. One moment he dragged Uncle Wang aside for a few words, the next he pulled Grandma Hui-chuang away to whisper together; everything was spoken so quietly that I couldn't hear what was said. Nonetheless by the next day, the general atmosphere in the village seemed to have eased.

Later, piece by piece I put together the story Uncle Chin-fa had brought back: Sister Tsui-ling had gone to live in the home of Brother Chi-ming's maternal uncle and had become his adopted daughter. When Uncle Chin-fa tried to persuade her to come back to Fengyang-ts'un, she cried and refused to leave, saying that she had already picked a date for her marriage with Brother Chi-ming. Further, Uncle Chin-fa assured everybody that Brother Chi-ming had not done Tsui-ling wrong in any way. The next important step, according to Uncle Chin-fa, was for Grandma Hui-chuang to make the trip to see for herself, and he declared he was willing to accompany her.

Sure enough, on the third day after his return, Grandma Hui-chuang, all dressed up for the journey, set out with Uncle Chin-fa. It puzzled me at the time how Uncle Chin-fa and Grandma Hui-chuang

could go to Neng-hai together, without anyone trying to stop them or saying anything against them!

From then on the whole village seemed to take a more tolerant view of the affair. Still people could not get away from the subject; whenever they gathered to talk they would guess at this and speculate about that, some would say bad things while others found positive aspects; there were those who praised Brother Chi-ming as a fine man and those who feared that Grandma Hui-chuang would be "taken in" and worried about her. But the one thing everyone seemed to agree on was that Uncle Chin-fa was a man to be trusted, and the consensus was that with him involved there was little likelihood that anything would go wrong.

While during the day people went about their business as usual, at night, when they sat around cooling themselves, there was no more bantering and swapping of stories. Everyone wanted to discuss this serious matter over and over again, and when seven- or eight-year-old kids clamored for some jokes, the adults would reply, "No, the grown-ups have serious things to discuss." I loved to hear them endlessly discuss and review the affair. Sometimes when I heard people condemning Sister Tsui-ling and Brother Chi-ming I would even raise my voice and argue with them. Fortunately, there were many who stood on my side, including Grandmother; she said that Brother Chi-ming could be regarded as a good man, provided that he really had not deceived Sister Tsui-ling in any way beforehand. Sometimes Uncle Wang also joined the group and indicated his agreement with this statement of Grandmother's, only he laid the blame on Tsui-ling.

Our days thus passed in noisy company until, ten days later, Grandma Hui-chuang returned with Uncle Chin-fa, bringing gifts of different foods for relatives and friends, and the news that Chi-ming and Tsui-ling were already married. And now Grandma Hui-chuang seemed very happy, continually singing the praises of Brother Chi-ming to Grandmother, saying that his Aunt was a very nice person as was his mother, who had insisted that she stay with them longer, adding that although Chi-ming's family's house was not as big as ours it was very neatly kept.

Furthermore, it appeared that an uncle of Chi-ming was an assistant in a plant in Shanghai that

manufactured cooking oil and that he had invited Chi-ming to join him there. Chi-ming was planning to go and to take Tsui-ling with him. It was a few days before Grandma Hui-chuang got me aside for a personal word; she had a message for me from Sister Tsui-ling, saying that she missed me very much and hoped that someday I would visit them.

In view of my opinion of the city and the people who lived here, when I heard that they were going to Shanghai I was, of course, very unhappy.

Their story continued to be Fengyang-ts'un's chief topic of conversation for a long time. But eventually, people stopped talking about it, all except Grandma Hui-chuang who still brought the subject up from time to time or brought around letters from Sister Tsui-ling, which she asked others to read for her. Later, we heard that Brother Chi-ming and Sister Tsui-ling had actually gone to Shanghai.

THE SUMMER vacation was soon over and school reopened, and people gradually forgot about this affair. Of course, I remembered, and everytime I walked to the riverbank or the boat-landing I recalled the scene that early morning, when I saw Sister Tsui-ling off on the boat with Brother Chi-ming standing in its stern looking like Juan the Seventh.

I stayed on in Fengyang-ts'un for another half-year; then my mother wrote saying the family had moved to larger quarters in Shanghai and, much to my disgust, wanted me to join them and attend school there. She also invited Grandmother for a visit. Meanwhile, Sister Tsui-ling had also been urging Grandma Hui-chuang to come to Shanghai. So the three of us, the two old ladies and me, made the trip together.

Grandma Hui-chuang spent the first night in Shanghai in our house. The next morning Brother Chi-ming and Sister Tsui-ling came for her, bringing with them various Shanghai foods as presents for Grandmother and me. Grandmother and Grandma Hui-chuang were delighted to see the happy couple. They chatted and laughed together to their hearts' content, while I acted as though I had been confronted by two utter strangers with whom I could not communicate. Sister Tsui-ling tried her best to engage me in conversation, but I sullenly said nothing.

All the beautiful images which had projected themselves in my child's mind in the preceding months disappeared in the face of realities.

Brother Chi-ming, for instance, had let his hair grow, and it was bright and shiny and parted in the middle. He wore a cotton-padded gown faced with artificial silk, his trouser-cuffs were fashionably narrow and caught at the ankles with silken bands, below which were yellow leather shoes. He reminded me of the Shanghai hardware merchant whose picture had been shown around in connection with his proposed marriage to Tsui-ling.

And Sister Tsui-ling? Her long and beautiful braid had been cut off, leaving her with badly curled bobbed hair, jagged at the edges. She wore a shiny, jade-blue *ch'i-p'ao*, with a short hemline, under which one could see pink silk stockings, and a pair of brand new high-heeled shoes with leather straps so tight over the instep that her flesh bulged like that of a cow's neck straining against a tight halter. Her face, such a pretty face, was powdered and slightly rouged; on one of her fingers she wore a square-shaped ring, making me think of the beautiful silver one she had given me, and still further burdening my already heavy heart. Her arms, which always seemed to me to be perfectly shaped, now looked unnatural in their tight-fitting sleeves and slim golden bracelets were clamped over her forearms, right and left. She had thickened around the waist, and from the conversation I gathered that she was already three months with child. Only her large and vivacious eyes still seemed to belong to the Sister Tsui-ling I once knew but even they had lost their precious meaning for me.

"Little Brother," she called to me, with a voice that was nothing like Sister Tsui-ling's.

I ached, as though oppressed by something strange, lifeless and burdensome inside me. Needing desperately to get rid of this oppressive thing, I forgot myself and said in a loud voice equally unnatural to me:

"I'm grown up now, please don't call me Little Brother anymore. It sounds terrible." As soon as these words were out I knew my face was flushed, and I profoundly regretted having uttered them.

.....  
Now it was time for them to leave with Grandma Hui-chuang. Sister Tsui-ling insisted that I go with them, saying that Chi-ming could bring me back later, but I refused.

Grandmother remarked that I had become shy. Mother engaged rickshaws for them; Grandma Hui-chuang, beaming broadly, got into the one in the middle, with Sister Tsui-ling in the lead rickshaw and Brother Chi-ming bringing up the rear. I watched them being pulled away and once again I thought of him standing astern, handling the scull. I had a strangely uncomfortable feeling inside.

After they had gone, my elder sisters, and even the servants, called them countryfolk. I didn't say anything aloud, but I thought to myself how strange it seemed that almost overnight they should have changed into Shanghailanders.

From that day on I have not seen the two of them again.

May God bless and keep Sister Tsui-ling!

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### *Vocational Guidance*

Sometimes young people come to me for information and advice about translating as a possible career. The gist of what I tell them is this: "It's a useful profession. You would be helping to make foreign literature and thought known to the English-speaking world. It's an exacting profession. It calls for a greater command of your own language than most original writers possess, because a writer only has to be able to say what he personally wants to say, whereas a translator should be able to say what a wide variety of writers say, and say it in their styles. Especially in the field of belles-lettres, it requires a command of the language translated from that can only be gained by years of daily use. It's difficult work, but despite—or because of—the difficulty, it is fascinating. In short, it's a fine profession; but keep away from it unless you have an independent income."

—RALPH MANHEIM  
 translator of Hermann Hesse, Berthold Brecht, Louis-Ferdinand Céline, Günter Grass and others, in "The Trials of Translation", *Publishers Weekly*, September 24, 1973.