

陳映真：將軍族

## A Race of Generals

By Chen Yingzhen

SUCH GOOD WEATHER for December. To have the sun so sparkling bright and shining down on everything, especially on Burial Procession Day,<sup>1</sup> gave the mourners a secret delight. An alto saxophone could be faintly heard blowing the tune, "Moon Over the Barren City"—a very Japanese air. It sounded so mournful, but like the weather, there was a pleasant feeling of romance to it. Three Corners had just fixed the slide of Bean Pole's trombone, and now, pursing up his lips, he tried blowing a few notes on it towards the ground. Then he pointed it towards the street and warmly harmonized with "Moon Over the Barren City".

Suddenly he stopped. He had only played three notes. Ordinarily, his little eyes were narrow and squinting, but now they were staring wide open. He kept gazing like this along the direction of the sliding trombone at a woman.

Bean Pole stretched out his hand and took the instrument.

"OK, OK," he said. "Thanks."

There seemed to be something on Bean Pole's mind. He fixed the trombone under his arm with one hand, and with the other pulled out a crumpled cigarette which he stuck before Three Corner's eyes, nearly hitting him on the nose. The cigarette was so wrinkled it looked like a crushed earthworm. Retreating a step, Three Corners shook his head resolutely and screwed up his lips to force a smile. There wasn't much difference between this look and the puckery face he wore when he was about to blow his horn. Bean Pole lipped the cigarette and straightened it with his fingers. There was a flash of light from a struck match, then a sucking sound as he began smoking.

As Three Corners sat on a long wooden bench, his heart was palpitating strangely. Probably it

<sup>1</sup>The day chosen for mourners to accompany the casket of the deceased to the cemetery for burial.

was five years since he had seen her, but he recognized her in a single glance. The woman stood in the sunlight, the weight of her body resting on her left leg, causing her rump to curve seductively leftward like the arc of a mandolin.

"So she still stands in that way," he mused to himself. "But now it's more fetching than ever."

She had stood that way before him several years ago. Then they had been in the Health and Pleasure Musical Troupe,<sup>2</sup> and almost every day they went all about for performances bumping along together in a huge truck.

"HEY, THREE CORNERS, how about singing a tune?" she had called, her hoarse voice rasping like a duck. He had quickly turned his head around to see her standing in that old familiar way, hugging a guitar. She was more scrawny and slight then, and in the moonlight she looked especially funny.

"It's too late! Can't be singing now."

But she kept standing there deliberately, standing in that way. He patted the sand beside him and she sat down amiably. The moonlight in the water was breaking into myriads of flashing fish scales.

"Then just tell a story!"

"Chatterbox."

"Just one story, that's all." She took off her go-aheads, then bored her bare feet into the sand like a pair of crickets.

"At sixteen or seventeen, you shouldn't be listening to stories!"

"Tell one about your home. A story about when you were in China, on the mainland." The girl lifted up her head. The moonlight spread gently over her withered little face, and made her slight undeveloped body appear all the more gawky and clumsy.

<sup>2</sup>A popular military band of semi-professional musicians which plays at public functions and gatherings.

Three Corners gave his slightly thinning scalp a bit of a rub. In the past he had made up a lot of stories—stories about horse thieves, civil wars, and lynchings—ah, but none of these would do for charming a homely girl like her. What a delight it was to look at these girls of the Musical Troupe with their long hair beautifully set and their little mouths gaping as they listened transfixed! But aside from hearing his stories, they were always fooling around with the young male musicians. It made him so forlorn. The musicians were ever poking fun, saying,

“Hey, our Three Corners, he’s nothing but a celibate saint!”<sup>3</sup> And he would always grin and smirk, blushing at each corner of what was most assuredly a triangular shaped face.

He took the guitar and strummed a chord. The sound clanged in the empty darkness. Far away fishermen’s lights were now brightening, now fading. He felt so homesick—how could he tell a story about it?

“I’ll tell a story,” he sighed. “One about a monkey.” It was a story which had appeared in a little Japanese children’s pictorial. His older sister had told it to him while he sat just looking at the inserted colour plates. Then they were living in the northeast part of China that had been occupied by the Japanese.

“Once upon a time there was a monkey who was sold to a circus. His life was very hard and difficult. One night there was a full moon, and the monkey began longing for his dear home in the forest. He longed for his father, mother, elder brother, and elder sister . . . .”

She sat there, hugging her bent legs, weeping quietly.

“It’s all in fun!” he exclaimed in a panic, his lips trembling. “What’s this?”

The girl stood up, so pathetically scrawny, a bony skeleton with a dress on. After a while, her body weight gradually shifted to her left leg—in just that way.

IN JUST that way. Today, however, the woman had on a uniform—one that was just a trifle too

<sup>3</sup>The original text makes an allusion to a scholar of the Spring and Autumn period (the Confucian era), Liu-xia Hui, who was famous for his ability to withstand female temptations.

small for her. Its deep blue colour was embroidered throughout with a gold pattern. She was bathed in the light of the December sun, and it softened the startling blue of the uniform. She was wearing sunglasses, and her face looked more plump and fair than in the past. Her attention was completely focused on pigeons that were flying in elliptical circles across the sky. A red flag was being waved to them.

He could have walked into the sunlight and shouted:

“Little Skinny Maid!”

And she could have used that raspy voice box of hers and called out to him. But he just sat there, watching her. In fact, she was no longer a “Little Skinny Maid”. And as for himself, he sensed that he was indeed aging like an old patched drum or one of those mended brass horns that is misshapen and dolorous sounding. During those years with the Health and Pleasure Musical Troupe, he had gradually reached forty. Yet, while one year followed another, he never had had that feeling of growing old. He hadn’t realized it, but long ago the men and women musicians already considered him as an “Uncle”. He kept on smiling, not because he refused to concede his age. It was just that in both body and mind he had always been a Bohemian. The first time he had really begun to feel old had been that evening.

HE REMEMBERED it very clearly: at first he was alarmed by this girl who was standing there in that way and shedding tears ever so lightly. Then he felt sorry for her. But all this ended when there welled up in him a sense of his age. He realized that he had never experienced this emotion before. In that instant, his heart was transformed into the heart of an older man. Such a stirring immediately made him dignified and self-possessed. He kept assuring her,

“It’s all in fun, Little Skinny Maid! What’s this all about?”

There was no response. The girl made an effort to control herself, and after a while there was no more sound of sobbing. The moonlight was exquisite. Glowing so tranquilly over the long sandy beach, the fort, and the beamed roofs of the barracks, it caused one to wonder: what use was it for Heaven to take this beautiful moment and secretly unfold it in the depth of a night devoid



of human presence?

Three Corners looked over the guitar, then randomly plucked a few chords. Making an effort to please, he sang in a light bantering voice,

*"There once was a man named Gaffer Qi,  
His job was to feed young chicks with tea,  
'Cluck-cluck!' went the sound,  
'Pluck-pluck!' all around."*

The girl couldn't help bursting out laughing. She turned her body about and, using one of her scrawny legs, lightly kicked some sand at him. Immediately she turned around again and blew her nose profusely. Before her childlike vivacity his heart was like a flower bud that bursts into full bloom with the passing of noon. He kept singing,

*"There once was a man named Gaffer Qi  
...."*

She wiped her nose, then folded her legs and sat down cross-legged before him.

"Any smokes?" she asked.

He quickly fished around in his pocket and brought out a single snow-white cigarette and lit it for her. The bright red flame from the lighter illuminated the tip of her nose. For the first time he discovered the girl had a very good one, fine

and strong. He noticed it was running slightly, which made him feel cold. She inhaled deeply, lowered her head, then rested her cheek in the same hand that was grasping the cigarette. With her left hand she drew several small crooked circles in the sand.

"Three Corners. I have something to talk about," she said. "You listen." As she spoke, the smoke came curling about her lowered head and wafted upwards.

"Sure," he answered. "Sure."

"I had a good cry. I feel much better now."

"I was talking about a monkey, not about you."

"Almost."

"Eh? Are you a monkey, Little Skinny Maid?"

"Almost. The moonlight is almost the same too."

"Umm."

"Ay, ay! This moonlight. As soon as I ate dinner, I knew something was wrong," she said. "When the moon grows really big I always get homesick."

"Like me, no? And now I don't even have a home."

"I have one, so what? What good is it?"

Using her buttocks as an axis, she pivoted about in a half circle away from him. Slowly she smoked her cigarette as she faced the full golden moonlight now becoming tinged with red. A faint "sss" could be heard from the burning tobacco. She was tugging at her hair with long strokes. All at once she spoke again:

"Three Corners."

"Hey," he said. "It's very late. Don't you be dreaming and worrying about home. Of course I'm homesick too, big deal." With that he stood up. He used his sleeve to rub the evening dew off the guitar, then released the pegs one by one. The girl continued to sit. She was carefully dragging on the cigarette butt. With a shot, a fine red arc of light broke into a myriad of fiery red stars on the sand.

"I'm homesick, but at the same time I hate home!" she exclaimed. "Do you feel the same way? No, not you."

"Little Skinny Maid," he replied, lifting the body of the guitar and shouldering it like a gun. "Little Skinny Maid, what good is it to think about what's gone? If I were to be like you, always moping, moping, I wouldn't want to go on living a single day!"

The girl jumped up, knocking the sand from her clothes. She stretched and yawned broadly. Her eyes were blinking as she looked at him.

"Three Corners, you have seen a lot," she stated in a quiet voice. She paused a moment, then went on. "But what it feels like to be sold, that's something you know absolutely nothing about."

"I know," he responded fervently, his eyes opening widely. The girl gazed at his balding head, his face which truly was shaped like a triangle. She couldn't resist a smile.

"Sold just like one of our country pigs or a cow," she observed. "For six hundred dollars. I was to be his for two years." She stuck her hands in her pockets, shrugged her stiff little wooden shoulders, and turned her back to Three Corners. As ever, her body weight shifted to the left leg. She kicked at the sand lightly with her right leg, like a pony.

"When that day arrived to take me away, I didn't shed a tear. My mother was hiding in her room crying. She cried real loud, just so I could hear. But I didn't shed a tear. Nothing! Hang it!"

"Little Skinny Maid!" he said soothingly. She

turned to look at him and saw how upset he was. His face was twisted all askew.

"Three Corners!" she laughed. "You think you know: you know as much as a fart!" As she spoke, she bent her head again and wiped her nose. "It's getting late. Time for bed."

They walked towards the Guest House. The moonlight cast two ludicrous silhouettes and illuminated two lone lines of footprints, trailing behind. The girl put her hand through Three Corner's elbow. She was very drowsy, and her mouth broke into an enormous yawn. He could feel her skinny little chest against his elbow, but his own breast was filled with a warmth of a different kind. As they parted, he remarked:

"If my old lady had had a baby girl after I left home, she'd probably be about your age."

The girl made a face and went trudging off towards the women's quarters. The moon was slanting downward in the eastern sky, an inordinately round sphere.

IT WAS the moment for the Drum and Gong cortege to go to work.<sup>4</sup> Tightly drawn brittle skin drums accompanied jolting brass gongs. The afternoon tranquility began to be disrupted. Three Corners pulled his hat lower and stood up. He saw something glittering brightly in the woman's left hand—she was clasping a flashing silver baton which she held under her right arm. The tiny brass tip of the baton gleamed as it began to move, and it made a faint sound like the whinnying of a horse. "So she is a conductor!" he thought.

A number of young female musicians also dressed in blue uniforms were assembled. They began to play the American folk song "Massa's in the Cold Cold Ground" at half tempo.<sup>5</sup> In the spaces between the ear-splitting sound and deafening roar of the gong and drums, the melody floated up unhurriedly. It blended with the moaning cries of filial sons and grandsons which alternately rose and fell. The mournful dirge was interwoven with sparkling sunshine, thus giving form to the human

<sup>4</sup>At a funeral procession there are commonly two musical groups, one Chinese and the other Western. The Drum and Gong cortege is Chinese.

<sup>5</sup>At Taiwanese funerals both Chinese and foreign songs are commonly played.

comedy of life and death. The men's band also assembled and, as though they were joining in the merrymaking, they began to improvise and participate. With a very imposing air, Bean Pole was slipping up and down the trombone slide and mouthing "The Chant of the Wanderer" fervently. He too retarded the tempo by half—as if any tune could serve as a requiem. As long as the tempo was slowed, any tune would be all right.

Three Corners placed his trumpet to his lips, but didn't really blow. He merely pretended that he was playing. He was watching the woman who was such a dignified conductor. The golden yellow tinsel at the tip of the baton flew and danced about following the sweep of her arm. After a while he realized there was a half beat difference between the baton and the music. It was then that he remembered Little Skinny Maid was slightly tone deaf.

YES, SHE was tone deaf. So she couldn't be a vocalist in the Health and Pleasure Musical Troupe. But she could dance very well, and was an excellent female clown. She would take a broken red-lacquered ping-pong ball and stick it on her one beauty spot—her nose, then stand on the stage platform, a skinny wooden figure. A wave of giggling would roll up from the audience. Then she would give one more deadpan wink and a greater guffaw would well up. She really couldn't sing on stage, and even off stage she seldom tried. Unfortunately, if once she started to feel good, she would sing, and for hours on end she would croak in her rasping voice. She would take a good tune and sing it in such a disjointed incoherent way that there was no melody left.

One morning Little Skinny Maid began softly singing. She sang the same song again and again with intense feeling. Three Corners was in the room next door repairing an instrument. He could not help listening to her plaintive song about their homeland.

*"Green Island*

*so like a boat*

*tossed about*

*on a moonlit night . . . ."*

She would sing it through once and stop a while, then sing it again from the beginning. The tenderness with which she sang deepened with each rendition.

"Three Corners," she called out, abruptly.

He made no answer.

She knocked lightly on the plywood wall.

"Hey, Three Corners!"

"Eh?"

"My house is close to Green Island."<sup>6</sup>

"You're sick."

"My home is in Taidong."

He made no response.

"Mother Fuck! Not been back for so long!"

"What did you say?"

"I haven't gone home for many years!"

"What *else* did you say?"

Little Skinny Maid stopped for a while, then began giggling and snickering. There was a sigh, and she called again:

"Three Corners."

"Chatterbox!"

"Got any smokes?" He stood up, felt in his jacket for a cigarette, and threw one over the plywood wall to the girl. He heard the sound of a match striking. A streak of blue-black smoke wafted over from her room and disappeared out his small window.

"The man who bought me took me to Hualian,"<sup>7</sup> she went on, spitting a thread of smoke through her lips. "I told him, 'Smiles for sale, but not my body.' When he said that wasn't good enough, I split."

Three Corners stopped his handiwork on the horn and lay down on his bed. The ceiling leaked, and looked mildewed in places.

"So!" he exclaimed, "you're a fugitive!"

"So what!" she shouted. "You aren't going to report me to the cops, are you?"

He burst out laughing.

"I received a letter from home this morning," she went on. "It says that because I ran away, my family has to sell several plots of land in compensation."

"Oh, oh."

"It serves them right! *It serves them right!*"

<sup>6</sup>Green Island is located off the coast from Taidong, a small town on the east side of Taiwan. Little Skinny Maid's song, "Green Island Serenade", was a popular melody in Taiwan, and signifies the island of Taiwan.

<sup>7</sup>Hualian is another small town on the eastern seacoast of Taiwan. Little Skinny Maid is alluding to being forced into prostitution.

They both fell silent. He sat up and rubbed some rust off his hands. The trumpet that he had been repairing lay on the table. In the sunbeams from the window it glittered quietly with a silver white glow. He didn't know why, but he felt depressed. After a while, the girl spoke in a hushed voice.

"Three Corners."

He swallowed, then said quickly:

"Ay."

"Three Corners, in two days I'm going back home."

He half-closed his eyes and looked out the window. All of a sudden he opened them wide, stood up, and spoke haltingly.

"Little Skinny Maid!" He could hear her yawning resignedly. It seemed she was stretching her limbs.

"With the land," she stated, "life is already no good, but without it, it will be even worse. If they don't sell me then that will be the end of my younger sister."

He walked over to the table and picked up the trumpet. Using a corner of his shirt, he polished it until the brass became bright, gradually producing circles of red and purple light. He thought for a while, then said numbly:

"Little Skinny Maid."

"Um."

"Little Skinny Maid. Listen to me. If there was someone who loaned you money to repay the debt, wouldn't that be OK?"

She fell silent, then suddenly burst out laughing.

"Who's going to loan me the money? It's six hundred and fifty dollars! You!"

He waited for her to stop laughing.

"OK?" he asked.

"OK, OK," she said, rapping on the plywood wall. "OK! You loan me the money, and then I'll be your old lady."

He blushed a deep crimson, as though she were facing him. The girl laughed until she was gasping for breath. She pressed her hands against her stomach and leaned against the bed frame for support.

"Don't be embarrassed, Three Corners," she said. "But I know you scratched a little hole in the wooden wall so you could watch me go to bed." She exploded with laughter.

In the neighbouring room Three Corners hung his head. His ears flooded ochre-red like the colour of pig's liver.

"Little Skinny Maid," he said to himself. "You do not know me."

He could not sleep that evening. The next night, very late, he sneaked into Little Skinny Maid's room and left his bank book of seven hundred and fifty dollars beside her pillow. Then he calmly walked out of the quarters of the Health and Pleasure Musical Troupe. Once on the road he knew for certainty he had no regrets about that military retirement money, but he wasn't sure why his tears would not stop.

SEVERAL DIRGES had been played. And now the woman was again standing there in the sunlight. She gracefully removed her uniform hat, pulled a handkerchief from her rolled up sleeve, and wiped her face. She propped up her sunglasses, and with something of a disdainful air gazed about at the onlookers who were standing in a circle.

Bean Pole sidled up to Three Corners and said, teasingly:

"Hey, get a look at that conductor! What an elegant woman, eh!" Whereupon he pursed up his lips and picked his nose.

Three Corners said nothing, but did chuckle softly. Even when he smiled like this his whole face was covered with wrinkles. The woman's black hair flowed down in an ebony sheen, and at the very top of her head it was brushed into a small bun. Her face looked longer, and it brought into relief especially well her naturally fine nose.

"One grows and develops," he thought. "The other withers. And all within a mere five years!"

The air was warming up gradually. Pigeons lighted on house gables which were opposite one another. No matter how hard their owner waved his red flag, they would not fly again. They merely cocked their heads, flapped their wings, and as usual cuddled close together to roost, dumbly watching the flag. Ashes from paper funeral money curled up in burnt rolls and floated about not far above the ground.

Three Corners stood there and suddenly perceived the woman facing towards him. It was hard to tell whether she was really looking at him because of the sunglasses she was wearing. His face went pale, and his hands trembled a bit. He

noticed the woman was also standing there woodenly, her lips parted. Then he saw her walking in his direction. Three Corners lowered his head and tightly gripped his trumpet.

He sensed a blue figure approaching him, pausing a moment, then standing and leaning against the wall as he was. His eyes were burning, but he kept his head bent down.

"Excuse me," the woman said, addressing him.

He would not answer.

"Is it you?" she asked. "Is it you? Three Corners, is . . . ." Her voice was choking. "It's you. It is *you*."

When he heard her sobbing he immediately felt a deep calm, just like that night on the beach.

"Little Skinny Maid," he said in a low voice. "You dumb Little Skinny Maid!"

He looked up and saw her covering her nose and mouth with a handkerchief. Seeing her hold herself back in this way, he knew that she had really grown up. She looked at him and glowed. He probably hadn't seen a smile like that for decades. The war had ended and he had returned home. His mother had smiled ecstatically then, in that way.

Suddenly there came the sound of wings beating, and the pigeons again flew up, cutting slanting elliptical circles. They both watched the birds and then fell into a silence. He paused before speaking again.

"I've been watching you wave the baton. You certainly look imposing!" She giggled. He studied her face. Beneath the sunglasses there was a small pearl-shaped tear, sparkling finely. He grinned and asked:

"So you still like to cry that way?"

"I am much better than I used to be," she replied, lowering her head.

Again they were quiet for a while, both watching the pigeons slicing elliptical circles farther and farther away.

He clasped the trumpet under his arm and said:

"Let's go. We can have a chat." They walked shoulder to shoulder past the dumbfounded Bean Pole.

"I'll be right back," said Three Corners.

"Oh," stammered Bean Pole. "Yes. Oh, yes!"

The woman walked gracefully, but Three Corners' back was hunched. They strolled out the end of a verandah, past a small stage and a row of

dormitories, and then over a little stone bridge. A strip of cultivated fields greeted them. Flocks of sparrows were perched together on the power lines above. Away from the fragrance of incense and burnt paper money, they felt the air to be exceptionally fresh and brisk. A variety of crops painted the farmland fields into squares of dark and light green. They stood for a long while, neither of them saying anything. A feeling of happiness such as he had never known before flooded Three Corners' chest. Unexpectedly, the woman thrust her hand through his arm as they ambled along a path on an embankment through the fields.

"Three Corners," she said in a quiet voice.

"Hmm?"

"You've aged." He felt his half-bald bony head, then clutched it with a laugh.

"I've aged!" he agreed. "I've aged!"

"But it's only been four or five years."

"Only four or five years, yes. You're the sunrises, and I'm the sunsets!"

"Three Corners . . . ."

"Those days in the Health and Pleasure Musical Troupe, they were good times," he said. He squeezed her hand tightly underneath his arm, and with his free hand he brandished the gleaming trumpet. "After I left," he went on, "I was a vagabond. Then I understood what it feels like to be sold to another."

Suddenly they fell silent. He was vexed with himself for his impertinent remark, and his normally relaxed face grimaced. But she kept on clutching his hand. She lowered her head and watched her two feet strolling along. Some time passed before she spoke again.

"Three Corners . . . ." He hung his head dejectedly and fell silent. "Three Corners, give me a smoke," she requested. He lit a cigarette for her, and then the two of them sat down together. She took a puff and said, "I've really found you at long last." Three Corners sat there rubbing his hands, thinking about something. He lifted his head, looked at her, and then said in a hushed voice:

"Found me. Found me for what?" He was agitated. "To give me back my money, right? . . . Did I say something wrong?"

The woman stared at his anxious face through her sunglasses. All at once she impulsively removed

her uniform hat and stuck it on his bald head. She scrutinized him closely and then laughed with delight.

"Don't make such a face, please!" she explained, adjusting her glasses. "It makes you look exactly like a General!"

"I shouldn't have said that. I've aged. I'm to blame."

"Don't be silly," she said. "I've found you to ask for forgiveness." Then she added, "When I saw your bank book I cried all day long. People said I had been wronged by you, so you ran away." She started to laugh. He began laughing too.

"I honestly never thought that you were a good man," she said. "At that time, you were getting older. You couldn't find anyone else. I was an ugly little thing, so easily pushed about. Three Corners, don't be angry at me for always being on the defensive then."

He blushed awkwardly. It wasn't that he had never had any desire for her. He was the same as any other man in the Health and Pleasure Musical Troupe: an independent bachelor ever fond of whores and gambling. For such a one, lust is not dependent on a pretty face.

"When I took your money and went home," the woman continued, "I expected to end this business. But they took me again to Hualian to see some big fatso of a man who drilled me with his sharp tongue. Still, his accent reminded me of you and that made me happy. 'Smiles for sale, but not my body!' I insisted. Jelly-belly giggled like crazy. They blinded me in my left eye shortly after."

Three Corners grabbed her sunglasses and saw that her left eye was shrivelled up and closed. The woman put out her hand and took back the glasses. She put them on again very calmly.

"But I don't have any resentment," she said. "A long time ago I decided that somehow I was going to go on living just to see you one more time. Returning the money wasn't the main thing—I wanted to tell you that I finally understood. I made enough money to pay them back, and, more than that," she added, "I even saved up seven hundred and fifty dollars. Finally, two months ago I joined a music group, and unexpectedly found you here."

"Little Skinny Maid!" he said.

"I said before I'd be your old lady," she said, smiling somewhat. "Too bad, I'm unclean now, so it's no good."

"How about the next life?" he suggested. "My body stinks more than yours."<sup>8</sup> From afar the shaking clamour of funeral music began to rise up and reverberate. He glanced at his watch—it was the moment for the mourners to accompany the Burial Procession.

"Perfect!" she exclaimed. "Let it be the next life. Then we'll both be pure as babes!"

With that they both stood up and wended their way more deeply along the embankment. Before long, he began to play the tune, "The March of the Prince", and as he did so, he goose-stepped on the path, waving from side to side. Peals of laughter came from the woman. She retrieved her uniform hat and put it on, and wielding her silver baton, she went before him, likewise goose-stepping. Young farmers and village youth waved to them in the fields and cheered. Dogs began to bark from every direction. In the slanting light of the afternoon sun, their ecstatic silhouettes disappeared down the long embankment.

THE NEXT MORNING a pair of bodies was discovered in the sugar-cane. The man and woman both wore the uniforms of band musicians. Their hands were crossed over their chests. A trumpet and a baton were laid neatly at their feet, giving off sparkling flashes of light. They looked both composed and ludicrous, but there was a kind of dignity in their absurd appearance.

After stopping to look at the corpses where they lay within a circle of onlookers, a big lanky farmer rode his bicycle on down the road. He met a squat little peasant who was shouldering buckets of liquid excrement on a pole.

"They were both laid out at attention!" he exclaimed. "So dignified and straight. Just like a pair of Generals!" With that, the two of them, the big farmer and the little peasant, laughed uproariously.

<sup>8</sup>An earlier version of the story has Three Corners say at this point: "In this life and generation, there is some force pushing us towards tragedy, shame and ruin."