

老舍：貓城記

City of Cats

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I

If the flies hadn't awakened me, I might have slept on and on, perhaps forever. They looked like little green butterflies, very pretty, but they were many times more bothersome than ordinary flies. Every time I moved my hand they rose in a swarm.

I was very dirty from having slept on the floor. These people probably didn't even have a word for "bed." Swatting flies with one hand and scratching myself with the other, I examined the room. The dirt floor served as a bed, thus making unnecessary the most important item of a bedroom. I looked for a basin, hoping to wash off some of the dirt and sweat that had collected on my body, but there was none to be found. The walls and roof were made entirely of mud, without any ornamentation. The room consisted simply of four walls enclosing a mass of putrid air, nothing else.

In one wall there was an opening about three feet high. This was the door, and if a window was wanted it was that too. I crawled out through this little opening and found myself in a dark forest—probably the one I had seen yesterday before I lost consciousness. The forest was so dense that the rays of the sun could not penetrate it, but there was no breeze and it was steaming hot.

The cat-like man who had rescued me was hiding in a tree and refused to come down until I started to climb the tree after him. I pointed to

my mouth to let him know I was hungry and thirsty. He understood and pointed to the trees. I thought he meant that I should eat fruit, but there was no fruit on the trees. He climbed a tree and with great care pulled four or five leaves. He put one of these into his mouth, then laid the others on the ground and pointed at me and at the leaves.

I didn't like being fed as if I were a sheep, but I saw that neither of us would benefit by my getting angry. I picked up the leaves and brushed them off with my hand. My hands were dirty and were covered with blood stains from the scratches received getting out of the wrecked airplane, but I thought nothing of this as I tried to brush the leaves clean. I put a leaf into my mouth. It was very fragrant and juicy. Some of the juice dripped from the corners of my mouth and the cat man looked as if he wanted to come over and catch the drops that fell. These leaves must be very valuable, I thought, though I couldn't understand why one or two leaves should be so important when there was a whole forest of them here.

Eating two more leaves in quick succession, I began to feel dizzy, though not at all uncomfortable. I felt as if that little bit of precious juice had not only gone to my stomach but had penetrated throughout my body, immediately relaxing all my muscles. My stomach no longer felt empty and my mind was becoming muddled. I felt

sleepy, but knew I couldn't sleep, and in my befuddlement I felt a slight itchiness. It was like a mild drunkenness. I still held one leaf in my hand but the hand was as relaxed and lazy as though it had just awakened from a good sleep; it didn't have the energy to raise itself up again. In my mind I wanted to laugh, but I couldn't say for sure whether there was a smile on my face. I leaned against a big tree and closed my eyes. In a moment I felt a couple of gentle flashes go through my head and the drunkenness was gone. The pores of my skin all felt as light and relaxed as if they had been about to laugh—if pores can laugh. I no longer felt hungry or thirsty, and my body no longer wanted to be washed. The mud, sweat and blood stuck comfortably to my flesh, and I felt that if I weren't to wash again for a lifetime it would still be comfortable.

The forest atmosphere that had been unbearably hot was now neither too hot nor too cold, and the air no longer stank but had a thick, sweet fragrance like a ripe muskmelon. "Happy" would not describe my mood. Numb. Yes, numb, that was it.

I squatted against the tree and looked at my cat friend. (I had never liked to squat, but now that was the only way I was comfortable.) He wore no clothes. His waist was very long and very thin. His arms and legs were very short, as were his fingers and toes. His neck was long and he could turn his head around to the back. His face was large, with two very, very large eyes set very low, leaving a great broad forehead. The forehead was covered with fine hair, which grew right up to the hair on the top of his head. The nose and mouth were joined together, but not into a handsome muzzle like a cat's; more like a pig's. The ears were small and set on the top of his head. His whole body was covered with fine, very glossy hair which changed colors like a piece of camlet, appearing gray at close range, taking on a green tint when seen from a distance. His torso was round (he could probably roll sideways very easily) and on his breast there were four pairs of nipples—eight little black spots.

What his internal construction was like, I had no way of knowing.

I wondered why he had brought me here, but as we didn't speak the same language I had no way of asking him.

II

After three or four months time I had learned the language of the cat people. It was extremely simple; with four or five hundred words turned one way and another you could say everything. Naturally there were many affairs and principles that could not be made clear this easily, but the cat people had a way—ignore them. There were not many adjectives and adverbs, nor was there a wealth of nouns. Everything that looked like a poppi tree (the leaf of the poppi tree was that treasure that had the power to make people numb) was a poppi tree: big poppi tree, small poppi tree, round poppi tree, pointed poppi tree, foreign poppi tree, big foreign poppi tree—though these were definitely different trees. As most verbs were taken care of by gestures, one need only remember a few nouns in order to carry on a conversation. Their writing system, on the other hand, was terribly complicated—little tower-like characters that were very difficult to recognize. The common people of Catland could remember only ten or so.

Big Sye—that was my cat friend's name—knew quite a number of characters and could even write poetry. Just put a few nice-sounding nouns together—they needn't carry the simplest thought—and you have a cat poem. Precious leaf, precious flower, precious mountain, precious cat, precious belly—this was Big Sye's "Feelings Engendered by the Study of History."

As soon as I learned the language I understood everything. Big Sye was an important personage of Catland. He was a big landlord, a politician, a poet and a military officer. He was a big landlord because he had a big grove of poppi trees and the poppi leaf was *the* food in Catland. And his taking me in had a definite connection with the poppi leaf.

Big Sye got out his history books to tell me the story. (The books were all made of stone, each tablet about two feet square by a half an inch thick, with ten or fifteen extremely complicated characters on each one.) Five hundred years ago the cat people had planted and harvested and had never heard of anything called poppi. Then a foreigner brought it into Catland. At first only the upper classes could afford to eat it, then later the poppi tree was imported and everyone became addicted to it. In less than fifty years time anyone

who didn't eat it was exceptional. Eating poppi was so comforting and so trouble-saving . . . but there was one drawback. After eating it, no matter how energetic a person's spirit might be his arms and legs didn't want to move. Therefore the farmers quit farming and the workers quit working. Everybody just relaxed. Then the government issued an order: "Eating poppi is forbidden." But at noon on the day the order was issued the Empress's craving for poppi led her to give the Emperor three slaps on the mouth (Big Sye moved one of the history tablets aside), and the Emperor himself so hungered for it that the tears flowed. In the afternoon of the same day another order was issued: "Poppi is proclaimed the national food."

Big Sye said that in all the history of Catland there was no event more glorious or more benevolent than this. In the four hundred odd years since the poppi leaf was made the national food, Catland's cultural advance had accelerated several fold. When people eat poppi they don't do physical labor and therefore have more time for mental activities. Poetry, for example, had made great advances. In all the preceding twenty thousand years of Catland's history there had never before been a poet, for instance, who had turned that beautiful phrase "precious belly."

However, this is not to say that there had not been any political or social disturbances. Three hundred years ago the cultivation of poppi trees was widespread, but the more poppi people ate the lazier they got, until finally many people were too lazy even to grow poppi trees. Then there was a big flood—Big Sye's gray face paled; the cat people are deathly afraid of water for any purpose—and many poppi groves were destroyed. If they are without anything else to eat, cat people can get along all right, but when they have no poppi they can't rest. Thievery sprang up everywhere. There were more cases of theft than the police could handle, so the government made a very humane proclamation: stealing poppi to eat was not to be considered a crime. Thus these past three hundred years have been a time of thievery. Nor is this a bad thing. Thievery is a very fitting indicator of individual freedom and freedom has since the beginning of history been the cat people's most exalted principle.

"Then why do you still raise trees?" I asked in cat language. In real cat language terms this

sentence was: a twist of the neck (to indicate "then"), roll my eyes twice ("why"), point ("you"), "tree" (a verb), "tree" (noun). There was no way to express "still."

Big Sye's mouth closed for a moment. The cat people's mouths are always open; if one of them suddenly closes his mouth it is a sign of satisfaction or deep thought. His reply was: "There are only a few score men who raise trees now, and they are all men with a lot of power—men who are at one and the same time politicians, army officers, poets and landowners. If they didn't raise trees they would lose their power. To get along in politics poppi is necessary, otherwise there is no way to get audience with the emperor. To be an army officer poppi is necessary because it is the ration for the troops. A poet must have poppi because it has the power to make him have dreams in the daytime. In sum, the poppi leaf is all-powerful. If you have it you can walk sideways across the world." ("Walk sideways" was the cat men's most admired *bon mot*.)

Thinking of ways to protect the poppi groves was the most absorbing task Big Sye and the other landowners had. Although they had soldiers, the soldiers could not do this work for them. As the cat soldiers were firm believers in freedom, they didn't hesitate to disobey orders and steal from the men who hired them—according to the cat people's way of thinking this was all quite logical. Then who protected the poppi groves? Foreigners. Every landowner had to hire a few foreigners to protect the groves. Fear of foreigners was a peculiarity of cat men's natures. Because of their belief in freedom, five soldiers could not live together three days without the life of one of them being in danger, but to fight with a foreigner was an impossibility. Big Sye added, with a satisfied expression: "Day by day our talent for self-massacre increases. Thinking of ways to kill people exercises the ingenuity almost as much as composing poetry."

"Killing people has become an art," I said. Cat language didn't have the term "art," and after I had spent an hour trying to explain it he still didn't understand, although he remembered the Chinese word I used.

In ancient times they had fought with foreign countries and had won victories but during the past five hundred years they had been quite

content with self-massacre, which had made them forget all thought of fighting with foreigners and turn their total attention inward. Therefore they were terribly afraid of all foreigners. If it weren't for the services of foreigners their emperor wouldn't even be able to eat poppi.

Big Sye explained to me that at the time of my arrival several landowners were without foreigners to protect their poppi groves and there was stiff competition to secure my services. When my plane crashed they knew a foreigner had arrived. They got together and agreed to hire me as a group and take turns using me. They were shocked and frightened when they saw me because they had expected me to look like other foreigners. They had no idea there were other planets; they thought I would be from some other country on Mars. But they would lose their poppi groves if they didn't find someone to guard them, so they summoned all their courage and captured me. After they had put leg-irons on me and locked me in a little hut by the river they all went home to eat poppi and recuperate. Big Sye went back, thinking to take me home with him and make me his own, but when he arrived at the hut he saw that some of the others had had the same idea. It was only because the others had been frightened away when I fired my pistol that Big Sye had managed to bring me home with him. "We are lucky to have that art," he said, pointing to my pistol. He had taken to applying the term "art" to anything he didn't understand or couldn't easily describe.

I asked him what the strange material that my leg-irons had been made of was. He shook his head and told me only that it was something from abroad. "Many very useful things come from abroad," he said, "but we don't condescend to imitate them. We are the most ancient of all countries."

I asked him where he lived. As there was nothing in the poppi grove except the little hut I was staying in, I thought he surely must have a house someplace else. He appeared unwilling to answer—asked me for an art to take and show to the Emperor. I gave him a match and questioned him no further. I thought that in such a freedom-loving society as this everyone should have a few secrets.

"After we harvest the poppi leaves I'll return home. You can go with me."

He has still other uses for me, I thought. "Where is your home?" I asked.

"In the capital. The Emperor lives there. There are many foreigners. You can see your friends."

"I'm from Earth and I don't know anyone on Mars."

"In any case, you're a foreigner, and all foreigners are friends."

No use trying to explain further to him. I only hoped that the poppi would soon be harvested and I could have a look at the Cat City.

III

I saw that I could never be good friends with Big Sye. It was soon clear to me that if the cat people had any concept of sincerity it must mean something like "self-centeredness." Their only reason for making friends was to use them for their own profit. I wanted to return to the place where our plane had come down. The friend who had come from China with me had been killed in the crash and I had had no chance to bury his remains before the cat people captured me. Big Sye wouldn't tell me where the place was, nor would he let me out of his sight. He couldn't understand why I wanted to go back. He said, "He's dead. He's already dead. Why do you still want to go see him?" Whenever I brought the subject up he would start complaining about his own troubles, trying to get sympathy from me and to make me forget what I had on my mind.

I decided that I would not eat poppi any more. Big Sye said this was impossible. If I didn't eat poppi I would be thirsty, and water was not easy to obtain. Furthermore I would want to bathe, and think how much trouble that would be! And other foods were expensive. Not only were they expensive, they didn't taste good either. And there was poison in the air, which would slowly kill me if I didn't eat poppi for protection against it. But all his arguments were of no avail. I had made up my mind. I knew that if I ate poppi I would become just like the cat people, and I didn't want that. I wanted to live like a human being, to eat and to bathe. I didn't want to become a person half dead. I'd rather live like a human if only for ten or fifteen days than live half dead for a

thousand years.

I explained this to Big Sye, but he refused to understand my point of view. Finally I threatened him with my pistol and he arranged to have food brought to me every day.

My next battle was to persuade Big Sye to let me go to the river every day to bathe. Of course, he didn't want to take such a long walk with me every morning, and he didn't want to let me go alone for fear I wouldn't come back to him.

"You needn't go with me. I'll promise not to run away," I said.

He shook his head: "Only children at play make promises."

My temper flared. This was a direct insult. I grabbed a handful of the fine hair on the top of his head. This was the first time I had used physical force and my action took him completely by surprise, because what he had said was, after all, true. Sacrificing a few hairs and perhaps a little piece of skin from the top of his head, he pulled loose and ran off some distance. Then he explained to me that at one time cat people honored promises but the practice had fallen into disuse. Although it was not a bad thing to trust people, it was not always convenient. And now there were no promises made in Catland except when children made them as a joke.

"Whether or not you trust people is not my affair, but my word is still good," I said very forcefully. "I won't run away. If at any time I decide to leave you, I will tell you openly."

"Then you won't let me go with you to the river?" he asked uncertainly.

"Suit yourself!" And I considered the question settled.

After that I went out before daylight every morning and went to the river to bathe.

One morning as I was bathing I noticed several shadows on the bank in the dim light of the dawn. I paid no attention to them until full daylight came and I saw that a big crowd had collected. I wondered if something was happening nearby that had attracted so many people. Then I noticed that every time I went under the water a loud "Oh!" went up from the people on the shore, and finally I realized that they had all come to watch me bathe.

For people who had never seen anyone bathe before, perhaps it would be an interesting

spectacle. Certainly they did not come to see my body. A nude body was nothing to them, as they wore no clothes at all. I wondered whether I should entertain them with a few more dives or come out of the water. Then I saw Big Sye. He was standing near the water's edge, several yards in front of the rest of the crowd, as if to show that he was not afraid of me. When he saw me looking at him he motioned for me to dive again. I already knew the ways of the cat people well enough now to know that it would give him a lot of face if I would follow his directions. But I was in no mood to give him this satisfaction. I walked out of the water, whereupon the spectators scattered and disappeared.

I caught hold of Big Sye and asked him what he meant by bringing people to watch me, but I could get no coherent answer from him.

When this continued morning after morning and I could not get Big Sye to make the people stay away so that I could have privacy, I decided to take some action myself. One morning I suddenly ran out of the water, intending to catch one of the spectators and make him tell me why they persisted in coming to watch me. The crowd stampeded in terror, scattering in all directions—except for a few who were left lying on the ground. I looked at one of these and saw that his eyes were closed. Apparently he had been frightened to death. Another was crawling away with a broken leg, and another lay dead. This was almost too much for me to bear. I regretted what I had done. I had had no idea my action would have such disastrous results.

As there was nothing I could do to repair the damage I had done, I decided to take advantage of being left alone and go look for the bones of my dead friend. But before I had gone far I heard a shout and looked around to see Big Sye running after me. He was terribly excited and was shouting for me to come back to the poppi grove with him. He was being robbed. Other cat men were plundering his poppi grove.

I told him that I would go back with him if he would explain the affair at the river to me. After much pleading with me not to bargain but to come immediately to save his property, he finally agreed to this. I started back with him and on the way he told his story: The crowd at the river were all people from the city, upper class people. Naturally

upper class people did not ordinarily get up so early in the morning, but they rarely had an opportunity to see anyone bathe. In addition Big Sye brought out every morning a supply of his most luscious poppi leaves for the guests. For meal and floor show he charged each of them ten "national souls" (Catland's unit of money), and so made a handsome profit by displaying me.

Hearing this didn't make me any more fond of Big Sye, but I dropped the matter for the time being. I was more concerned at the moment about the two people who had been killed at the river. I asked Big Sye who would bear the responsibility for their deaths.

"You scared them to death—no matter. If I killed someone, I would lose a few poppi leaves over it. Poppi is everything; the law is nothing more than a few lines of characters carved on a stone. Anyone who has poppi can kill with impunity. But if *you* kill a person no one will

bother you. Catland's laws do not apply to foreigners. You won't have to pay even one poppi leaf. Oh, how I wish I were a foreigner!"

IV

When we arrived at the grove the thieves had disappeared. No doubt they had seen us coming. The poppi grove was beautiful, with the leaves ripe and succulent looking, some of them as big as the palm of my hand. Every day from morning till night big crowds of people stood outside the grove looking at it. No, they weren't "looking," because they all had their eyes closed. They were poking their noses out as far as they could to breathe in the thick fragrance of the leaves. Saliva dribbled from their slack mouths, and every time a leaf fell from a tree—they seemed to be able to sense this

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with their noses—they all opened their eyes and made as if to move forward, though they knew they couldn't go into the grove.

Big Sye had brought in five hundred soldiers to protect the poppi, but they were all stationed at least a mile away from the grove. If they had been any closer they could not have resisted the temptation to steal. Soldiers had to be brought in, however, because according to the customs of Catland the poppi harvest was a most important affair and it must be protected by soldiers. Everyone knew that Catland's soldiers could protect nothing for anyone, but Big Sye was an important personage in the public eye and wasn't one to flaunt custom.

Whenever the breeze rose a little and blew in the direction of the soldiers' camp Big Sye immediately ordered them to withdraw another half mile. The only reason the soldiers obeyed Big Sye's orders was because I was there. If it hadn't been for my presence they would have been unmanageable. "One cough from a foreigner panics five hundred Catland soldiers," was a common saying.

Besides the five hundred soldiers, Big Sye had twenty personal officers who were really protecting the grove. These twenty were all loyal and dependable men, though sometimes when they were in high spirits they would tie Big Sye up and steal a few poppi leaves. In reality it was because I was there and they didn't dare let their spirits get high so that they couldn't loyally and dependably protect the poppi.

V

The poppi was harvested. The temperature had dropped ten or fifteen degrees and there was a breeze every day. Black clouds floated in the gray sky but there was no rain. The beginning of winter was the time when landowners took their poppi into the city. Although Big Sye wasn't exactly content with my behavior, he had to put on an air of friendliness because he needed me on the trip into the city. Without me he could not make the trip in safety. He would be in danger of losing his life for protecting his poppi.

When the poppi leaves had all been dried they were tied in bundles and soldiers formed in teams

of two to carry them, the two soldiers taking turns carrying one bundle of leaves on their heads. At the front of the procession four soldiers raised Big Sye off the ground. He stretched out horizontally. Four cat heads supported his back, two other cat soldiers carried his legs, and another brought up the rear supporting his head. In Catland this method of travel was the most esteemed, even if it wasn't the most comfortable. The twenty personal officers carried musical instruments and marched along both sides of the column. If the soldiers did not behave themselves—for example if one of them should scratch a hole in a bundle in order to smell the fragrance of the poppi—these officers would immediately report them to Big Sye. In Catland everything had to have a discernible purpose; thus the musicians were also proctors or informers.

My position was in the middle of the procession so that I could look after the front and the rear. Big Sye also ordered seven men to carry me, but I preferred to walk on the ground. Quoting the classics as proof, he insisted that this was the only proper way for a person of standing to travel. He explained that the Emperor had twenty-one bearers, a prince had fifteen, and an important personage had seven. This was an ancient tradition, an indication of social standing, and it could not be broken.

I was still not willing to be carried, and Big Sye quoted a proverb: "When a man of importance walks on the ground the spirits of his ancestors are disturbed."

I told him that the spirits of my ancestors would certainly not be disturbed, and almost in tears, he quoted more poetry: "Lift your face and eat poppi leaves; travel lying down and be a man of standing."

"You men of standing are a lying bunch of bastards!" I couldn't quote an appropriate line of verse, so I replied with crudity. Big Sye gasped. I knew he was cursing me under his breath, but he dared not speak out so that I could hear him.

More than two hours had been wasted getting the column in order. Big Sye took his position on the seven cat heads then climbed to the ground again to go back and try to get the soldiers in straight lines. The soldiers had seen that relations between Big Sye and me were not completely smooth and now they were not as much afraid of him as they had been. After climbing up seven

times and getting back down again six, he gave up and ordered the march to begin.

Just as we started to move several big white-tailed vultures flew over. Again Big Sye jumped down. "When vultures fly over a party just setting out, it is a bad omen. We'll wait until tomorrow to go."

I pulled out my pistol. "Whoever doesn't go now, will never go again."

Big Sye's face turned green. He gasped once or twice but couldn't say a word. He knew he'd get nowhere arguing with me but he knew also that it was dangerous to ignore omens. He hesitated for a few minutes then climbed up on his perch again and we moved off. He was so upset that his whole body was trembling and before we had gone far he had fallen to the ground a half dozen times. He was not one to break the ancient traditions, however, and every time he fell he climbed right back up.

Every place along the road that had enough smooth space to write a few characters—trees, rocks, broken-down walls—had been covered with big white characters: "Welcome Big Sye!" "Big Sye: A Great Man; the Farmer's Friend." "Big Sye's soldiers carry the clubs of orthodox principle!" "Thanks to Big Sye we have a bounteous harvest!" Of course all these were written by people Big Sye had sent ahead to prepare the way.

As we passed through several small villages I noticed the villagers were all sitting with their backs against broken-down walls and when the soldiers passed they would close their eyes. This puzzled me at first. If they were afraid of the soldiers, why didn't they run and hide; if they weren't afraid, why did they close their eyes? Then I looked closer and saw what was going on. This was the village's way of welcoming Big Sye. Faint characters were written in the fine grey hair on the top of their heads. There was one character atop each head and several heads together spelled out the slogan: "Welcome Big Sye!"

If I had been alone it would have taken me only half a day to walk to the Cat City, but walking with cat soldiers was an exercise in patience. Cat people can move very fast when they want to, but as soon as they become soldiers they lose all their speed. Since marching into battle at high speed just sent them to death that much sooner, they

have learned how to hide slowness behind an appearance of speed. They move very slowly until they sight the enemy, then with a burst of speed they retreat.

There were scattered black clouds in the sky, but by one o'clock in the afternoon the rays of the sun were scorching hot. The soldiers' mouths were hanging open and the fine hair on their bodies was plastered down with sweat. I've never seen a sorer looking lot of soldiers. When we came in sight of a poppi grove, Big Sye gave the order to turn and march in that direction. I thought he was doing this out of consideration for the troops, in order to give them a chance to rest in the shade for a while, but when we had almost reached the trees he jumped to the ground and came back to talk to me. He wanted to know if I would help him sack this poppi grove. "To steal a few poppi leaves is not so important, but it would be a very good thing to give the soldiers a little fighting practice," he explained. I told him that if he wanted to plunder someone else's grove that was his affair, I wanted nothing to do with it.

The soldiers had not waited for Big Sye's order but had already begun to put down their bundles and run toward the poppi grove. Soon they all disappeared into the trees. But no sooner had the last soldier gone into the grove than there was a great outcry and they all came running back. They had dropped their clubs and were beating the tops of their heads with both hands, running for all they were worth and yelling, "Foreigners! Foreigners!"

A troop of soldiers emerged from the grove. Leading them were two tall men who had white hair all over their bodies and were carrying shiny sticks. These two are surely foreigners, I thought to myself. Foreigners know enough chemistry to manufacture things that look like metal. I felt a bit uneasy. Suppose Big Sye asked me to stop them, what would I do? How did I know what sort of weapon these shiny sticks were? Though sacking the grove hadn't been my idea, I was still Big Sye's body-guard and if I should desert him I would lose my position. And for all I knew I might have to depend on him for everything as long as I was in Catland.

"Quickly, go stop them!" Big Sye said to me.

I took my pistol in hand and started out to meet them. To my surprise, as soon as the two saw

me start toward them they stopped. Then Big Sye caught up with me and I knew there was no danger here. "Talk peace with them. Talk peace," Big Sye said in a low voice from behind my back. This confused me. Why wasn't he telling me to fight them? Talk peace? What was I to say?

The two white men spoke: "There'll be a fine of six bundles of poppi leaves—to be divided among the three of us."

I looked around. There were only two white ones. Why did they say three? Big Sye urged me from behind: "Bargain with them."

How was I to bargain? Feeling like an idiot, I said: "Six bundles—to be divided among the three of us."

When the two of them heard this they smiled and nodded, as though they were very well satisfied. I was more perplexed than ever, but Big Sye shouted an order and his soldiers brought over six bundles of poppi leaves. The two white cat men very politely asked me to select my two first. Then I understood, I was included in the "three". Naturally I asked them to pick theirs first. They took out four bundles at random and handed them over to their cat soldiers, then they said to me, "We too have just finished harvesting. See you again in the city." Like a simpleton, I replied, "See you in the city," and they turned and went back to the poppi grove.

I was completely fogged in. What kind of a farce was this?

Not until after I had arrived in the Cat City and talked with a few foreigners did I understand the ins and outs of the situation. Since the people of Catland could never defeat foreigners in a fight their only hope was to egg them into fighting among themselves, so they took advantage of every opportunity to make trouble between one foreigner and another. The foreigners were aware of this and although they often had conflicts of interest, they would never attack each other and thus profit the Catlanders. They knew that if they fought each other both the victim and the victor would lose in the long run, but if they stuck together and cooperated in bilking Catland, none would suffer the slightest loss. Not only did their international policies operate this way but their nationals in Catland lived by these principles. Protecting poppi groves was the foreigners' profession, but all had agreed to protect the groves

only from other Catlanders. Whenever landlords on both sides had foreign protectors, each landlord was to keep his own men away from the other's poppi. If a landlord violated this condition, the foreigners on both sides would decide together what his punishment should be. Thus the possibility that foreigners might fight foreigners, all to the profit of Catlanders, was avoided.

This was all very well for those who worked as protectors, but how about the cat man's point of view? Of course it was unfair to them, but still they suffered it voluntarily. They didn't exert themselves to fight the system, they hired foreigners to beat and kill people of their own country. Whose fault was this?

As we moved on toward the city Big Sye—knowing I had no use for poppi leaves—mentioned that if I wanted to sell my two bundles he would buy them back for thirty national souls. I knew very well they were worth at least three hundred souls, but I didn't say I would or wouldn't sell. Trying to show my contempt by ignoring him, I didn't utter a word.

As the sun dropped in the west the Cat City came in sight.

VI

The city was bustling. There were people everywhere. The arrangement of the city was the simplest I had ever seen. There were no "streets" because except for row upon endless row of houses as far as the eye could see, everything else was "street." The city looked exactly like an army camp—one great open space covered by rows of low, colorless houses. Outside the houses cat people were as thick as ants. There was no knowing what they were all doing or where they were going. There wasn't a single one who walked straight along the street; not a single one who walked without getting in others' way. If anyone did know where he wanted to go he had no control over the direction of his movement. He would be carried first one direction then the other, like a piece of driftwood in the surf. Once a man left his house he went where the press of the crowd carried him; he could consider himself lucky if he got back home the same day.

I thought surely Big Sye would take his procession around this human sea, but instead he ploughed right through the middle of it. The soldiers used their clubs on the crowd, cracking cat heads right and left to open a passageway for Big Sye on his seven bearers and the rest of the column carrying the bundles of poppi.

We soon reached Big Sye's house, which was in the middle of the city. All that could be seen of the house was four plain, high walls, without door or windows. As the sun went down the people on the streets began to thin out, and I took my first close look at the houses all around. They were all plain, square structures with no windows and no doors. I wondered how people got into them.

Several heads appeared over the top of the wall of Big Sye's house and he shouted something to them. The heads disappeared then reappeared a moment later. Ropes were lowered and the people above began hauling up the bundles of poppi leaves. By the time half the bundles had been taken up it had become quite dark. There was no one left on the streets now and the soldiers who were working with the poppi bundles were getting very restless. I decided that for some reason the cat people didn't like to be out of doors after dark.

In his most polite manner Big Sye asked me, "Would you be willing to watch the remaining bundles of poppi through the night? It's already very late and the soldiers must go home."

I said I would. I wanted very much to see the inside of his house, but I thought that if it was anything like the hut in the poppi grove I would be much more comfortable spending the night under the open sky. Big Sye, pleased at my ready acquiescence, dismissed the soldiers, climbed a rope, and disappeared over the top of the wall.

I moved several bundles of poppi away from the stinking gutter that ran along the street and arranged them into a bed. Then I lay down and looked up at the stars, feeling quite comfortable. Just as I was about to drop off to sleep, someone tapped me on the shoulder. I sat up with a start; then I thought maybe I was only dreaming. I rubbed my eyes and started to lie down again. Then I saw two cat men standing in the darkness in front of me.

Though I hadn't had a close look at them I knew for certain that they were not ordinary cat

men, for if they had been they would never have had the courage to tap me on the shoulder. Without thinking, I said, "Please sit down." This came out automatically, from force of habit. It was as if I had forgotten that I was on Mars and not at home in China.

With great dignity the two sat down, and immediately I began to feel good. As long as I had been in Catland, I had never before met anyone who treated me with any dignity.

"We are foreigners." The fatter of the two spoke. "You know why we mention that we are 'foreigners'?"

I knew what he meant.

"You too are a foreigner," said the thinner one. They didn't speak as if they had worked out ahead of time what they were going to say, but they seemed to have mutual respect for each other—so different from Big Sye's way of saying everything himself and giving no one else a chance to open his mouth.

"I'm from Earth," I said.

"Oh!" They were astonished. "We have long wanted to communicate with other planets but we've never been able to do it. How fortunate we are to meet a man from Earth!" They both stood up, as if to show their respect for me.

They sat down again and began asking me questions about life on Earth. I liked these two men. Their speech was simple and clear, without too many "polite" expressions, but at the same time showing respect for others. Their country—Brightland—was about seven days journey from here. Their occupation was the same as mine—protecting poppi groves for Catlanders.

After I had talked to them for a while about Brightland they said to me, "Mr. Earthman," (Addressing me this way showed that they paid me the fullest respect.) "We had two purposes in coming here. The first was to invite you to come and live with us. The other was to steal these poppi leaves."

This startled me.

"You explain the second purpose to Mr. Earthman," said the fat one to the thin one. "He doesn't seem to understand our intent."

"Mr. Earthman," began the thin one, smiling, "I'm afraid we startled you. Don't worry, we aren't going to use force; we came to talk it over with you. Big Sye's poppi leaves are entrusted to

your hands, but if you protect them faithfully you won't get any special thanks from him; and if, on the other hand, you allow them to be stolen he isn't going to dislike you any more. The people of Catland, you must understand, have a unique way of doing things."

"You are all cat people," I said to myself.

He seemed to guess what was going through my mind. Again he smiled. "Right, the ancestors of all of us were cats, just as . . ."

"My ancestors were apes." And I laughed too.

"Yes, we are all animals quite capable of entertaining evil ideas—our ancestors were not of the highest quality." They looked intently at me, apparently thinking that I did resemble an ape. Then they continued: "Back to Big Sye's affair—if you are faithful to him he won't thank you, but if you let us take half of this poppi he can then broadcast the fact that he has been robbed and raise the price of his remaining goods. When rich men are robbed it is always the poor who lose. Big Sye will never suffer."

"But that is Big Sye's affair. He has given me a charge and I cannot cheat him. His character is one thing; my conscience is another."

"Right, Mr. Earthman. When we are in our own country we look at matters this way too. However, here in Catland for us to be honest when all are deceitful hardly seems fair. To be frank with you, that such a country as this exists is a shame to the race of men on Mars. We actually don't consider the people of Catland human beings."

"That's all the more reason why I should be honest. Even if they are not men, I still am," I replied firmly.

The thin one took over: "You're right, Mr. Earthman. And we aren't going to insist that you act against your conscience. We just wanted to warn you—don't let yourself be cheated. We foreigners have to look out for this."

"Forgive me for asking," I said, "but is Catland so poor and weak *because* the foreign countries unite in exploiting her?"

"That is a point. However, on Mars lack of power is never reason for a country's international position to be lowered. Only when the people of a country lose their personal honesty, does that country gradually lose its national integrity, and no one wants anything to do with a country that has no integrity. We admit there are many ways in

which other countries are not reasonable in their treatment of Catland, but then who wants to speak up in favor of a country without integrity and run the risk of injuring relations between themselves and respectable countries? There are many other weak countries on Mars which have not lost their international standing because of their weakness. There are many reasons why a country might not be powerful. Lack of natural resources, disasters of nature—either is sufficient to make a country weak. But lack of personal character is produced by the people themselves.

"Take Big Sye for example. You came from Earth and are his guest, not his slave. He could have asked you to come into his house and rest. He could have asked you if you would like something to eat. But he ordered you to guard the poppi! I'm not trying to explain why foreigners despise Cats. Now let's talk about our first purpose." The fat one took a breath and turned the speech over to the thin one.

"If you ask Big Sye tomorrow to let you live with him, it's certain that he will not grant your request. Why? You'll find out for yourself later. For the present we'll just talk about why we came. All the foreigners here live in a separate area to the west of this city. Only foreigners live there and they observe no international boundaries; it's like one big household. We have organized ourselves into a group this way because there is no hope of reforming the filthy habits of the natives of this place. Their food is practically the same as poison, their doctors are—argh! They don't *have* doctors! And there are many other reasons, but we needn't go into the details now. Our purpose in coming to you was only to protect you. You believe this, don't you, Mr. Earthman?"

I granted their sincerity and I thought that I could also guess some reasons they hadn't told me, but I felt that since I was here I ought first of all to see what the Cat City was like. Perhaps it would have been more profitable to see some other countries first. From what these two men told me I could see that Brightland must certainly be more cultured than Catland. But it is not often one has the opportunity to witness the destruction of a culture. Not that I had the attitude of a spectator at a tragic play. I really had hope that I might be of some service to Catland. I won't say I had any love for Big Sye, but surely he couldn't be re-

presentative of all the people. I didn't doubt that what these two white men told me, but I still wanted to see for myself.

The two guessed what I was thinking. The fat one said, "We don't have to decide it now. Whenever you want to see us we will always welcome you. Go straight west from here—it's best to go at night and avoid the crowds—and when you get to the western border, keep going and you will soon see where we live. See you later, Mr. Earthman." They didn't seem to be at all resentful, only sincere and considerate. I was grateful to them.

"Thank you!" I called after them. "I'll certainly come to see you. I just want to have a better look at the people here first."

"Be careful about eating their food! See you later!" They said together.

No, I couldn't go to the foreign settlement to live. The cat people could be improved. Just look how submissive they were. Soldiers beat on their heads as if they were drums, and still they laughed. And as soon as it grew dark they went to bed and there was not a sound in the city. Could a people such as this be hard to manage? If they but had good leaders they would certainly make a most peaceful and law-abiding citizenry.

I couldn't go to sleep because of visions of a reformed and beautified Cat City.

VII

The next morning Big Sye came out and without a word of thanks to me took the remaining bundles of poppi inside.

I explained to him that I wanted to live here a while to see how the people of the city lived. He said I couldn't stay with him, and I ought to live with the rest of the foreigners. If it was inconvenient for me to live with him, might I just see what the inside of his house was like, I wanted to know. No, that would be impossible. When I pressed him for reasons he said finally, that it would damage my personal standing if I were to enter his house.

Just then an old cat head appeared at the top of the wall. The head was covered with white hair and the piglike snout was as wrinkled as a dried-up papaya. The old cat yelled down, "We don't want any foreigners! No foreigners here! No! No foreign-

ers!" I thought this surely must be Big Sye's father.

As I stood wondering what to say next a youthful-looking cat man called me aside. (Big Sye took the opportunity to climb up the wall and disappear over the top.) A cat youth—here was the kind of a person I had been hoping to meet. The young man was Big Sye's son, so now I had seen three generations.

"Have you come from far away?" Young Sye asked me.

"Very far away. Tell me, is that old man up there your grandfather?"

"Yes. Grandfather believes all our misfortunes were brought by foreigners and therefore hates all foreigners."

A crowd began to collect around us, all standing with their mouths open and staring.

"Could we find a quiet place to talk?" I asked.

"Wherever we go they will follow us. We can talk right here. They aren't interested in what we say; they just want to see how you open your mouth and how you blink your eyes."

"All right." I liked Young Sye's frankness. I

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asked him to tell me about his family.

He began, "Grandfather doesn't understand anything at all about foreign countries, so he takes the traditions of our ancestors as a standard of conduct for the whole world. Father on the other hand, knows just a little about foreign matters. When he was young he imitated foreigners in everything and now he uses the knowledge he gained then as a tool for his own profit. Where new methods can be used to advantage he uses them. He's not obstinate like Grandfather. However, this is merely a change in immediate method; it's not a reform in principle. As far as principle is concerned, Father and Grandfather are exactly alike."

Still thinking of the possibilities for real reform, I looked Young Sye over carefully, wondering how strong a character he had.

"Do you also eat Poppi?" I don't know why I hit upon this as a measure of men.

"Yes," Young Sye replied.

"Why?" I was too impolite. "Please excuse my frankness."

"If I didn't eat poppi I couldn't live in a society such as this."

My hope that Young Sye might be useful to his country began to diminish, but I continued to question him. "Couldn't reforms be undertaken? How about individual effort?"

"There's no use thinking of such a thing. Individual effort from the stupid, pitiful, submissive, impoverished and yet contented people? The club-carrying soldiers who know nothing except stealing poppi and raping women? The intelligent, selfish, near-sighted, shameless, scheming politicians who care not a whit for society? Individual effort? Impossible!"

"Do all the youth think this way?" I asked.

"Youth? In Catland we don't have any 'youth.' Of course those who haven't lived long are 'young,' and we all grow older as the years pass, but we have no concept of 'youth' as a group. Some of our young people are older in spirit than my grandfather; others are already more crafty than my father. Age doesn't really mean anything."

I had many more questions I wanted to ask Young Sye, but I was tired and needed a rest. I asked him if he could find me a place to stay. He too tried to persuade me to live in the foreign

settlement, but when he saw I was determined to stay here and see my fill of the city he said that he knew of a place.

"There is only one good thing about the place," he said. "They don't eat poppi."

"As long as I have a place to live I won't worry about conditions," I said. "Thank you for your trouble."

VIII

My landlady was the widow of an ambassador who had died many years earlier and there were two things in her life which set her off from the common run of Catlanders. She had been abroad and she didn't eat poppi.

But now I had no time to think about who the landlady was; I was intent on climbing her wall. I was proud as a kitten trying out his claws—now I could see what things were like inside one of these square houses. As I climbed, my heart began to pound. Dirt fell with each movement of my hands and feet and the wall wobbled so I was afraid I might get dizzy and fall. Finally I reached the top.

The house had no roof! What happens when it rains? I couldn't guess—and this made me even more determined to live here for a while. About five feet below the top of the wall there was a floor and in the middle of this floor was a big hole. The Ambassador's wife awaited me, her head sticking up through this hole.

Madam Ambassador had a big, broad face, set with very fierce eyes. A thick coating of white powder covered her face but could not hide the fine gray hairs that grew there. She looked like a whiskery old melon with eyes.

"Whatever luggage you have, just put it on the floor. The upper side is all yours. Don't come below. As soon as it's daylight we eat; as soon as it's dark we eat. Don't be late. We don't eat poppi! Bring the rent money." Madam was adept at foreign relations.

I paid the rent. I had in my pocket the five hundred national souls given me by Big Sye.

This was really convenient—my only luggage being myself, I had only to have a place to live and there was nothing else to fret about. As for my

house—just a floor, four walls; none of the trouble even, of having to move tables and fiddle with chairs. As long as I didn't make a misstep and fall through the hole all was right with the world. The mud on the floor was at least two inches thick and the aroma coming from it was not at all suitable for an ambassador's house. The surface had dried and cracked and it stank. I thought I'd better go out for another walk. I understood now why the cat people spent all the daylight hours in the streets.

As I was about to leave, the Madam and eight melon-faced women came crawling out of the hole. These eight females crawled over the wall first, not one of them looking at me. Then finally, with her body outside the wall and her head at a level with it, Madam Ambassador issued a communiqué:

"We're going out. We'll see you this evening. There's no help for it. When the Ambassador died the responsibility all fell upon me. I have to look after these eight creatures for him. No money. No man. From dawn till dark I have to look after these eight vixen! But we don't eat poppi! My husband was an ambassador. I am the Ambassador's wife. I've been abroad. I don't eat poppi. From dawn to dark I have to look after eight female cats," and she promptly dropped out of sight.

Again I was completely at sea! What was this? Eight daughters? Eight younger sisters of the husband? Eight concubines? Aha! Eight concubines. This was probably the reason Big Sye would not let me go into his house.

Below the floor there was no air. One cat woman with a bunch of "female cats"—to use Madam Ambassador's official language—stench, disorder, obscenity, ugliness. . . . It no longer seemed important whether I lived with a family like this! But I had already handed over my rent money; and also I would find a way to get below for a look around no matter how intolerable it might turn out to be.

Since they had all gone out, perhaps now would be a good time to go down. No, Madam had ordered me not to go below, and to pry in secret would be dishonorable. At my thought, her head popped up over the top of the wall again.

"Out you go, quickly! No stealing a look below. That wouldn't be honorable."

I climbed down at once. Where should I go? The only one I could talk to was Young Sye and he was too pessimistic for good company. Where should I look for him? Not at home, naturally, and to look for anyone on the street was probably as hopeless as feeling for a needle in the ocean. I squeezed out of the crowd sideways and looked at the streets around me. I saw clearly now: in the center of the city were the residences of the upper classes and the government organs, for the buildings were much higher than those to the left and right. Further away from the center, houses were lower and poorer, surely poor people's homes and small shops. I recollected that this was what Big Sye considered *the* Cat City.

While I was thinking, ten or fifteen girls squeezed out of the crowd and came directly toward me. (As white-faced ones are certain to be women, I could distinguish them a long way off.) I felt a bit uneasy, for from the impression the Madam Ambassador and Big Sye had given me, I understood that the women of this place were certain to be extremely obedient, extremely honest, and very well controlled. Running around at will, as these girls were doing, surely could not be proper behavior. If I didn't want people to look down on me my first day here, I must be careful. I was just about to retreat.

"Time for observation has begun, eh?" Young Sye's voice.

I looked carefully. He was in the middle of this group of women. It was useless for me to run. In the wink of an eye Young Sye and I were surrounded.

"How about one?" asked Young Sye, laughing and glancing about. "This is Flower. This is Poppi—even more bewitching than poppi. This is Star . . ." He supplied me with the names of them all, but I don't remember the list.

Poppi walked toward me, winking as she came. I stepped back, not knowing what I ought to do. I couldn't figure out what this bevy of females was up to. If they were all bad ones I shouldn't be reckless about my reputation my first day here, but if they were good girls I couldn't offend them. To tell the truth, although I am not a woman hater, I've never had any special love for them: I always felt women's fondness for makeup was an indication of their addiction to falsity. Naturally I have met women who don't use makeup, but

they don't seem to be any less capricious. However, this attitude does not lessen the due respect I hold for women. "Respectful but distant," is my attitude toward women, so I had no desire to offend this group of girls.

Young Sye saw my dilemma. He gave them a playful shove. "Be off! When two philosophers get together they don't want you around." All tittered and very tactfully disappeared into the crowd. I was still baffled.

"Men of old took concubines, modern men take wives," Young Sye began to explain, "I detesting the old and hating the new, take neither wife nor concubine, but just play around as I please. If this is finagling, then finagling it shall be. Who does not finagle with women?"

"Those girls seem . . ." I didn't know how to say it.

"Them? They seem . . ." Young Sye took it up, "seem . . . like women. You can be overbearing with them, kind and loving to them, respectful toward them, infatuated with them, or you can support them; it's all according to a man's wishes. Women themselves will never change. My great-grandmother used makeup, my grandmother used makeup, my mother uses makeup, my younger sister uses makeup, these girls' granddaughters will use makeup. Lock them in a room and they'll use makeup, put them on the street and they'll use makeup."

"Pessimism is here again," I said.

"This is not pessimism. This is exalting women, respecting women. It's only women who never change, who from beginning to end are always pure, always women. The face they have from heaven is not good enough, so it must be covered with white powder."

This joking tone made me reflect.

Young Sye continued smugly, "Those were all so-called 'modern' girls. They are the enemies of my father and the Ambassador's wife. It's not that they want to fight with my father, but he hates them because he would not be able to make them poppi addicts if they were his daughters and would not be able to lock them in the house if they were his wives or concubines. Nor is this to say that they have more power or more ability than my mother or Madam Ambassador. They are merely more like women—more able to do nothing, more able not to think, but extremely talented at

powdering their faces. They're all very lovable. I only finagle with them because I'm a person who doesn't love anything."

"They've all had a modern education?" I asked.

This question convulsed Young Sye so much he couldn't speak for some time.

"Education? Hoo! Education . . . education . . . education!" He seemed to have gone out of his head. "In Catland, except for the 'non' education of the schools, everything is education! Grandfather's cursing—education; father's selling poppi leaves—education; Madam Ambassador caring for eight living-dead female cats—education; the stinking gutters of the big streets—education; soldiers thumping people's heads—education; the more powder applied the thicker it'll be—women's education. Everything is education. When I hear the word 'education' I have to take ten poppi leaves or I vomit."

"Are there many schools here?"

"Many. You haven't yet been over to that side of the street to look?"

"No."

"You ought to have a look. That side of the street is nothing but cultural organizations." Young Sye laughed again. "Don't ask me whether there is any connection between cultural organizations and culture. The organizations are there." He suddenly looked up at the sky. "That's bad. It's going to rain."

There were no heavy clouds in the sky, but an east wind was blowing very cool.

"Hurry home while the sky is still clear!" Young Sye seemed to be very much afraid of rain.

Like the tide in a storm the mass of people rolled toward their houses, and I ran after them, though I knew very well that having returned home I would still get wet, since my room had no roof. It was interesting to watch the people climbing the walls like so many madmen. I had seen obstacle races before, but never had I seen a city's entire population climbing walls at once.

There came another gust of east wind and the sky suddenly darkened. A great red flash dragged the heavens to the earth and, with the rows of houses, united to form a big triangle. Following a peal of thunder, drops of rain the size of hens' eggs came beating down and a loud brushing sound could be heard in the distance. The raindrops became finer, the gray space at the horizon lightened.

ed, there was a gust of cool wind, and another great flash. The sound of single raindrops could no longer be heard—a solid sheet of rain poured down from the heavens. The sky, nothing, could be seen; only the increasing fierceness of flashing light. The stream of rain was suddenly split open from its peak; a frantic snake cut the black space open for an instant, shuddered twice, and disappeared. Everything was dark again. I arrived at the base of a wall completely soaked.

Which was the Ambassador's house? I retreated a few steps to look with the aid of a flash of lightning. It came, a great white-brightness, as if an enormous black demon in the sky had opened his eyes for a few flashing glances. No use. I still couldn't make it out. The devil with whose house it is! Climb up and then talk about it! Half way up I knew that this was indeed the Ambassador's house because the wall wobbled in a familiar way.

A big flash, a wait that seemed like several centuries, and then a peal of thunder like the collapse of the sky—the wall and I left the vertical and assumed the oblique. I closed my eyes; another roar of sound; where am I going!

IX

The sound of thunder rolled away into the distance. Was I really hearing this, or was I dreaming? As I opened my eyes—no, I couldn't open my eyes—the wall of the Ambassador's house was plastered over my face. Yes, it was still thundering. I had come to. I tried to feel about, but both arms were held down by stones, and my feet and legs had disappeared—for all the world as though I'd been planted.

I finally worked my hands free and scraped my face clear. The Ambassador's house had become a great mound of mud. I pulled my legs free, calling frantically for help. I was all right, but Madam and her eight foxes were surely buried under the bottommost layer. A few raindrops were still flying around in the air, so no matter how I yelled, not a soul came. Cat people are afraid of water, and of course wouldn't come out before the sky was completely clear.

Pulling free the half of myself still buried, I began to dig at the heap of dirt like a mad dog, heedless of my wounds. The sky cleared, and

cat people came out again. I clawed at the dirt and cried for help. Soon many people came and stood to one side watching. Thinking they hadn't understood me, I explained:

"It's not I who needs help. Save the nine women buried underneath!"

They had understood. They crowded forward but did nothing. I knew it was useless to depend on entreaty. I felt in my pockets for national souls.

"A soul to anyone who helps me dig." They were startled. No one believed me. I pulled out two souls for them to see, and they came on like a swarm of bees. But one picked up a stone and left, another took a brick and left. Then it got through to me: it was the practice of cat people never to miss a bargain. All right, suit yourselves. Whatever the motive, bricks and stones will be carried away and the people underneath will be saved. They moved very rapidly—like ants moving a pile of rice—one wouldn't have thought it could be done so quickly. A sound came from beneath and my mind was a bit easier. But it was the voice of only one person, Madam Ambassador and my heart sank again. Everything was cleared away and there sat the Madam in the center of the space. The other eight girls were sprawled in the corners and had already ceased all movement. I wanted to help Madam Ambassador up but as soon as my hand touched her arm she cried out:

"Ai-yo! Don't touch me! I am the Ambassador's wife! Steal my house, will you? I'll go see the Emperor! Behave now, and bring my bricks back!"

With light hands and whispering feet, people were still searching all over the ground. The bricks had all been taken away and now some were carrying dirt away by handfuls. The pressure of their economy made them feel that to carry away a handful of dirt from another's disaster was better than to go home empty-handed—thus I figured it.

The Ambassador's wife scraped the mud off her face. There were two wounds on her jaw and a big lump on her forehead. Her eyes were wide and staring, as if afire. She got up with an effort and lunged at one of the scavengers. I don't know how she so quickly and accurately got a biting hold on his ear. As she gnawed she snarled from the corner of her mouth like a cat mouthing a rat. The one who was being bitten screamed and lashed des-

perately at her belly. The two turned round and round for a long time, then the Ambassador's wife saw the girls lying on the ground. Her jaw dropped and the victim shot off like an arrow. The people standing around cried out and retreated to a distance of ten or fifteen feet. Madam Ambassador embraced one of the girls and began to wail.

My heart softened—so she wasn't completely inhuman. I wanted to go over and hearten her, but I was afraid she might repeat her feat and bite my ear. She seemed to be somewhat deranged.

After crying a long time, she spied me again.

"It's all because of you! You! You dragged my house down! You won't get away! Those who took my things won't get away either. I'll see the Emperor. You'll all be killed!"

"I'm not running away," I said slowly. "I'm helping you the best I can."

"You're a foreigner. I believe what *you* say. But *those* creatures! There's only one thing to do—ask the Emperor to send soldiers to search their homes. Wherever a brick is found a man must die! I am the Ambassador's wife!" She slobbered as she screamed, and finally spit out a mouthful of blood.

I didn't know whether she had that much influence or not. I tried to comfort her, fearing only that she'd gone mad. "First, these eight girls. . . ?" I asked.

"You again—what would you do with these eight foxes? I care only about the living; never mind the dead. Do you have a way to take care of them?"

This stopped my questions. Did I know what to do? I had yet to manage a funeral in Catland.

Madam Ambassador's eyes grew more and more terrifying. Clear water covered her eyeballs and they shone with the wild fire of madness, a procelain-like, floating brightness.

"I'll tell you!" she cried, "I have no place to go to complain. No money, no husband. I don't eat poppi. Ambassador's wife. I'll tell you!"

"This one," she pinched the skin on the face of one of the dead girls, "this dead fox—when she was only ten years old she was gotten by the Ambassador. Ten years old! Her flesh and bones had not yet got their full growth, and she was used by the Ambassador! The first month she didn't want it to get dark. As soon as darkness came she—this little dead fox—she would cry out—call for

father and mother—clutch my hand and wouldn't let go. She called me Mother—called me Ancestor—wouldn't let me leave her. But I'm a virtuous wife. I couldn't quarrel with the Ambassador over a ten-year-old slave girl. If the Ambassador wanted his pleasure, I couldn't interfere. I was his wife and I had to have a wifely attitude. This little fox—as soon as the Ambassador started toward her, she would scream to heaven and earth, yell with an inhuman sound. When the Ambassador was taking his pleasure—oh, how she screamed. "Dear Madam Ambassador! Good Ancestor! come, save me!" When the thing was done, she would lie motionless. Pretending to be dead? Really in a faint? I didn't know; nor did I investigate much. I gave her medicine, gave her food—this dead thing—and she thanked me not at all for my kindness! Later, when she had grown up—oh, what an ingrate—she was only sorry that she couldn't swallow the Ambassador whole. And when the Ambassador bought another one, this one cried from dawn to dark, blaming me because the Ambassador bought women. I was the Ambassador's wife—a virtuous and proper wife—but this little fox blamed me for not controlling the Ambassador. Worthless, stinking vixen!"

She shoved that dead cat's head to one side and took hold of another.

"This creature was a prostitute. From dawn to dark she ate poppi—and she seduced the Ambassador into eating it. If an ambassador gets addicted to poppi, how can he go abroad? Look at the trouble she caused! What could I do? I couldn't keep the Ambassador from playing with prostitutes, nor could I see him eat poppi and be unable to go abroad. My difficulties—you can't imagine how great are the difficulties of being an Ambassador's wife. In the daytime I had to watch she didn't steal poppi; when evening came I had to prevent her starting quarrels between the Ambassador and myself. Beast! Every minute of every hour she tried to run off. I had to keep my eyes on her all the time. If an ambassador's concubine should run away, where would everybody's face be?"

Madam's eyes looked as if they were actually on fire. She took up the head of another dead girl:

"This thing—she was the most horrible! A *modern* fox! Before she came in the door she was

telling the Ambassador to drive us all out. She wanted to be the Ambassador's wife . . . Ha! Can you imagine such gall! She wanted the Ambassador just because he was the Ambassador. The other vixen were bought with money; this thing came to him of her own will. He didn't spend the first cent. He had her for nothing. She disgraced womankind—all of us! As soon as she arrived the Ambassador quit talking to the rest of us. When he went out she had to go along; when he entertained guests she had to be with him. It was as if she were his wife. What could I do? An ambassador should have women, but the Ambassador's wife—there could be only one—myself! I had to discipline her. I tied her on the top of the house and let the rain wet her. Little fox! Then she demanded the Ambassador let her go home—said he had deceived her. Could I let her go—let a cheap whore force the Ambassador into separation? Who ever heard of such a thing! Marry her off to someone else? It wasn't as easy as all that. Being the wife of the Ambassador is not an easy thing. Day and night I watched her. Fortunately, the Ambassador then brought this thing in."

She turned around and picked out another dead girl from the ground. "The 'modern' one figured she was close to me—thought she'd cooperate with me and together we'd oppose this new fox. Women are all alike. When their hold slips on a man they get panicky. When the Ambassador would sleep with this new fox, the other one would cry all night. Then I had something to say: 'You still want to be Madam Ambassador, eh? Why you can't part from him! Look at me, the real wife! If you want to be the Ambassador's wife, don't think you can have him all to yourself. An ambassador is no pedlar who embraces only one woman all his life!'"

Her eyeballs were now completely red. She took hold of another dead cat head and beat it on the ground several times. She let out a laugh, glared at me, and I involuntarily retreated a few steps.

"When the Ambassador was living they didn't give me a minute's peace. Watch this one, look out for that one, curse this one, beat that one—all day long. They spent all the Ambassador's money and sucked him dry. Then he died—without leaving even one male child. Not that there were none born. All eight of them had boy babies, but

not one lived. How could they live? When one vixen whelped, there were seven plotting to destroy it. Their only fear was that the one who had a male child would become the Ambassador's wife. I, the real wife, was not jealous like the others. I just didn't care. Who killed whose child was their affair; it was no concern of mine. I didn't kill their children, nor did I bother about their murdering each other's babies. A wife must have a wifely attitude.

"The Ambassador died. No money, no man, eight foxes on my hands. Could I let them run off and marry some one? I could not. From dawn till dark I watched them. From dawn till dark I tried to pound responsibilities into their heads. Did they understand? Not likely! But I didn't give up. Day and night I took care of them. What could I hope for? There was nothing to hope for—only, perhaps, that the Emperor would notice my trials, my great purpose, my character, and reward me—bestow on me one of those big tablets engraved with the words 'Continent Action.' But—but—didn't you hear me crying before? Did you hear me?"

I nodded.

"What was I crying about? Crying for this bunch of dead foxes? Ha! That I should have time to cry for them! No, I was crying over my fate. Wife of the Ambassador—I never ate poppi. Now my house has fallen down and all my 'continent acts' are completely obliterated. If I go now to see the Emperor, what can I say? Suppose the Emperor sits on the throne and asks me: 'Madam Ambassador, what have you done that you ask for reward and commendation?' What will I say? Can I say that in the dead Ambassador's place I have cared for his eight women—done nothing ugly—not sneaked away? The Emperor will ask, 'Where are they?' Then shall I tell him they have all died? Where is the proof that I deserve a reward? What will I say? Ambassador's wife . . ." Her head rested on her breast. I wanted to go to her but I was afraid she would revile me.

She lifted her head again. Her eyes had already stopped moving. "Wife of the Ambassador—been abroad—don't eat poppi—reward—big plaque—wife of the Ambassador . . ."

Her head lowered again, her body toppled slowly to one side, and she lay between two of the women.

X

I was terribly disturbed. Madam Ambassador's story of sorrow made tears flow for the women of many centuries. My hand lay on history's blackest page and my eyes couldn't look down at it.

I should have gone to the foreign city to live. Again I had become a homeless ghost. Where could I go? That bunch of cat people who had helped were still looking at me. They were no doubt waiting to get more money. They had carried off the Ambassador's wife's property, yes, but that didn't make them discard the hope of getting a soul. My head ached terribly—two teeth had been knocked loose. I was gradually losing my ability to think, becoming ill. My mind sounded a warning. The money that was in my pockets—whether there was ten dollars apiece or five dollars apiece I would throw it all on the ground and let them divide it among themselves—or fight over it. I didn't have the energy to deal with this. There was no hope for the eight women, and the Ambassador's wife was finished—blood flowed out from under her body, forming a big pool. Her eyes were open, as if even in death she was still watching her eight vixen. I had no way to bury them and I knew that the people standing round about would not bother about it. Depression and disappointment made me want to dash my head to pieces.

I sat on the ground for a while. Though I was extremely loathe to move, I knew I must get up. I couldn't see these women rot before my eyes. I walked away, limping and staggering, no doubt causing foreigners in general more than a little loss of prestige. The streets were again crowded with people. I saw a group of young ones carrying pieces of chalk and going from house to house writing on the walls. The walls were still very wet and after the writing was done and had been dried by the slight breeze it turned extraordinarily white. "Cleanliness Movement." "Wash the Whole City." On the wall of every house was written a phrase such as this. In spite of my headache, I burst out laughing. After it has rained, propose that the whole city be washed. No need to waste any energy. Yes, the cat people really knew how to do things. The stinking gutters were cleaned by the rainwater. Cleanliness movement. Ha, Ha! No doubt I had gone a bit crazy too. It was all I could do to keep from pulling out my pistol and shoot-

ing some of those creatures who were writing white characters.

I still remembered Young Sye's words: "On that side of the street are the cultural organizations." I wandered over—not in order to see the cultural organizations but in hopes of finding a clean place to rest awhile. I had always thought that the houses on the two sides of a street ought to be face to face; but the houses along these streets were precisely back to back. This novel method of alignment made me forget my headache. Only the cat people, with their dislike for fresh air and sunlight, would be able to hit upon this happy idea, the back of one house leaning against the back of another, without the least open air between. It was not so much a street as a breeding ground for disease. My headache returned. Being ill in a foreign country makes a man extremely pessimistic. I had lost all hope of ever returning to China alive.

Unable to observe anything more carefully, I found some cool shade and fell to the ground.

I didn't know how long I had slept. When I opened my eyes I was in an extremely clean room. I thought I must be dreaming—or I had developed such a fever that I was having hallucinations. I felt my head but it was not hot. I was puzzled, but my body was still so tired that I closed my eyes again. I heard the sound of a very light step and opened my eyes the least bit. It was Poppi, 'even more bewitching than poppi.' She came over, felt my head, and nodded hers just a little. "Good!" she said to herself.

Not daring to open my eyes again, I waited for the situation to explain itself. After a short while I heard Young Sye and stopped worrying.

"How goes it?" I heard him ask in a low voice.

Without waiting for Poppi to answer, I opened my eyes.

"Are you all right?" he asked.

I sat up. "This is your house?" I asked, not trying to hide my puzzlement.

"Ours," he said, pointing at Poppi. "At first I thought of letting you come here to live, but I was afraid my father wouldn't like it. You are Father's man, you know—at least he thinks you are. He didn't want me to be friendly with you. He says I've already learned too many foreign ways."

"Thank you." Again I glanced toward the center of the room.

"You're wondering why we're so clean here? This is what Father calls foreign ways." Young Sye and Poppi both laughed.

"Is this your home?" I asked.

"This is one of the cultural organizations. We two live here. People who have power can take over the buildings of the cultural organizations whenever they want to. As long as we keep the place clean we can face the organization without shame. Other people don't ask whether or not private individuals ought to take over a public place and we don't go into it very deeply either. Finagle—again we have to use this most interesting word. Poppi, give him some more poppi to eat."

"Have I already eaten some?" I asked.

"If we hadn't given you some poppi juice a while ago, do you think you would have awakened? You see, poppi is truly a great medicine. Here it is the queen of all the medicines. If it can't cure a disease then there is nothing to do but wait for death. It has just one flaw—it can save the life of an individual but can kill a country. Such a little shortcoming!" Young Sye was playing the philosopher again.

I ate some more poppi and was greatly revived, though I still felt very lazy. I saw the wisdom of Brightlanders and other foreigners who lived in an area set apart from the Cat City. This culture of Catland is dangerous. Once you get close to it, it holds you fast, like glue, and you can't move unless you go its way. If you want to go into Catland, then be sure you would become a cat man; otherwise, stay completely clear of it. With all my strength I had tried to keep from eating poppi—and the result? I was eating it. If you're here you'll eat it; you can avoid it only by staying clear of the place. Filth, corruption, disease, confusion, and darkness were the marks of this culture. Although some elements of Catland's civilization might carry a little light, still such tiny gleams of light could never hold out against the powers of its darkness. I could see that some day, either by some real light or by its own poison, this civilization was bound to be exterminated—just as one would kill off so many germs. However, the cat people did not see it this way at all. Young Sye probably saw this far, but because he saw that the game was already lost he gave it up and laughed at his own defeat. Big Sye and the others just went on dream-

ing.

There were many, many questions I wanted to ask Young Sye. Politics, education, the military, finances, production, society, home and family. . .

"I don't understand politics," Young Sye said. "Father is a specialist in politics. Go ask him. As for the others, some things I know, some I don't. You'd better first go see for yourself, then come and ask me. Only concerning things cultural can I give you comprehensive help. Father has some connection with all branches of the government, and since he can't take care of everything I act as his representative in dealing with cultural organizations. If you want to see the schools, the museums, the libraries, just say so and I'll see that you're satisfied."

This made me very happy. I could go ask Big Sye about political matters and I could ask Young Sye about cultural affairs. Having access to these two, I could get a pretty good idea of what things in Catland were like.

Young Sye asked me what I wanted to see first. I was mortified because I was totally disinclined to move.

"Tell me a little about your own life," I said, hoping that from his words I would be able to see something of the affairs of Big Sye's house.

Young Sye laughed. Every time I heard that laugh I admired and hated him. He knew he was better than the other cat people and he would not lift a finger to help them for fear of dirtying his hands. He seemed to feel that it was a great misfortune to have been born in Catland—a single rose among the thorns. I didn't like this attitude.

"My parents brought me into the world," Young Sye began, as Poppi sat beside him watching his eyes, "but I had nothing to do with that. They loved me greatly, and I was not responsible for that either. Grandfather also loved me greatly—all grandfathers love their grandsons—again, nothing new or strange. About my life as a child there doesn't seem to be anything to tell."

He tilted back his head and thought. Poppi still looked up at him. "Yes, there is one little matter that is worth your hearing, even though it's not worth my telling: My wet-nurse was a prostitute. I had a prostitute for a wet-nurse and I was not allowed to play with other children. This was our family's special brand of education. Why get a

prostitute to take care of the children? Because we had money and could afford it. We have a saying, 'Money can buy the devil himself.' Grandfather believed that it was only proper to have prostitutes to take care of the boy children and soldiers to look after the girls—they could best teach the boys and girls the facts of life. Being well acquainted with the facts of life, they could marry early, have children early, and thus would not be ashamed before their ancestors.

"As for my schooling, there were five teachers who taught me my lessons—five dry sticks taught me all of Catland's learning. Later one of these sticks suddenly turned out not so wooden—he ran away with my wet-nurse. The other four were then thrown out.

"I grew up and Father sent me abroad. Father had an idea any one who could speak a few sentences of a foreign language could understand anything—and one should have a son who understood everything. After living abroad for four years I was sure I did understand everything, and I returned home. But to Father's consternation I really didn't understand—I had just increased my foreign flavor. However, he didn't love me the less because of this; he still gave me my allowance. As for myself, I was happy to have money to spend, from dawn till dark to make merry with Star, Flower and Poppi.

"Ostensibly I am Father's representative, managing cultural affairs, but actually I'm just a parasite. Evil I don't consider worth doing and good I'm not capable of doing. Finagle—the more this precious word is handled the glossier it becomes." He laughed again and Poppi joined him.

"Poppi is my friend." Again Young Sye guessed my thoughts. "My friend in cohabitation. This is another foreign influence. At home I have a wife—married her when I was twelve years old. By six, my prostitute wet-nurse had taught me a thing or two, and by the time I had reached the age of twelve and was married I was positively talented. My wife also could do everything—especially bear children—the best of women, to hear Father tell it. But I wanted Poppi. Father told me to take her as a concubine, but I didn't want that. Father has twelve concubines, so taking concubines is the only proper thing.

"Father hates Poppi poisonously, but he doesn't hate me too much. He considers foreign

influences baleful but he's reached the point where he recognizes that there is bound to be this sort of influence in the world, and he can deal with it by simply calling it 'foreign influence.' Grandfather hates Poppi *and* me because he doesn't even recognize foreign influence. My living with Poppi wouldn't amount to much except that it has a great influence on Catland's youth. Cats, you know, believe that the only possible relationship between men and women is that of copulation. We call it 'that.' Take a wife—'that.' Take concubines—'that.' Play with prostitutes—'that.' Nowadays insisting on free choice is also just 'that.'

"However that may be, I set the example for young people. Everybody first marries and afterwards takes up free choice just as I've done. But the old people hate me to the bone because if you take a wife and concubines everybody lives in one place and the only relationship possible is 'that.' Playing 'that,' there are a bunch of children born and the whole thing remains very simple. But when a man forms a free love alliance, since he can't discard his wife he must have a separate place for his mistress; otherwise the demands of the foreign customs are not really satisfied. Doing things this way, the amount of money that has to be spent is extraordinarily great. Naturally the parents can't afford it and when they don't supply the money the young ones quarrel with them. Poppi and I have fixed things indeed!"

"Couldn't you break completely with the old family?" I asked.

"Oh, that won't do. No money! Free love is a foreign custom, but we won't give up our own country's excellent custom of getting money from our elders."

"Can't the older generation think of a solution?"

"What can they do? They insist that 'that' is what women were made for. They themselves take concubines and don't oppose young people doing it, so how can they prohibit free love? Nobody has a solution. Whether it's wives, concubines or love mates it all results in children. The old ones take concubines for all they are worth, the young ones chase freedom for all they are worth, and on the surface they all have a great time; but it always involves 'that' and the result of 'that' is more little cats—with no one to look after them, no one to

raise them and no one to educate them. Here's the biggest finagle of all. My grandfather finagled, my father finagled, I finagle, and these young people finagle. 'Responsibility' is a most bothersome word for us cats!"

"How do the women feel about it? You don't mean they willingly admit that they're good only for 'that'?" I asked.

"Poppi? You're a woman, you tell us."

"Me? I love you, there's nothing else to tell. If you want to go home and see that prolific wife, go ahead. I don't care. But when you stop loving me, I'll eat forty poppi leaves at once and that will be the end of Poppi!"

I waited for her to continue, but she said no more.

XI

The next day I began my inspection. As I had no idea what I ought to see first, I thought I would just look at whatever I happened to run into when I went out.

I was pleased to see that all the cat children I saw were on the near side of the street, where the cultural organizations were. Evidently they were on their way to school.

The kittens were the happiest little people in the world. Dirty—extraordinarily dirty, indescribably dirty—skinny, stinking, ugly, with maimed noses and deformed eyes, heads and faces completely covered with sores—but all of them were extraordinarily happy. I saw one whose face was puffed up like a pot-bellied jug, with his mouth swollen shut and bloody marks on his cheeks. But he was still laughing and he was still running and jumping with the other children. The faint hope I had for the cat people fluttered and died. I could not think of this swollen child and good homes and schools at the same time. Only when the homes, schools, society, and the country were in complete confusion could these swollen, ugly, maimed, yet happy children be raised. They were an index to the society and country, a shrieking indictment of the adults. When they grew up what could they make the country but dirty, straitened, stinking, and ugly. Again I saw the thumb of extermination pressing on the hopes of this nation

of cat people. There was no hope! Wives and concubines—caring only for "that"—nobody willing to think of his race—free love. Love! Under the thumb of extermination, to talk of love? Death would be too good for them.

But I was jumping to conclusions. First I should get a better look. I followed a group of children until we came to a school—a big door and four walls enclosing an empty plot of ground. The children all went in while I watched from outside the door. Some immediately rolled themselves into a lump on the ground, some climbed up the walls, some drew pictures on the walls, others were in the corners carefully inspecting each other's secrets. All of them were very happy. But there was no teacher. I waited and waited and finally three adults came in. They looked like sample items from a skeleton sale—as if they'd not eaten a full meal since they were born. They came scraping along slowly, holding up the walls with their hands. At each little puff of wind they stopped still for a long time.

They scraped slowly in the door of the school, but the children continued to lump, climb, play and look at secrets. The three sat on the ground panting for breath. The children became even more noisy, so the three samples closed their eyes and stopped up their ears, seemingly afraid only of offending the students. After what seemed like hours, the three arose together and tried to get the children seated, but the little cats had apparently made up their minds never to quiet down. Fortunately the three teachers—they must have been teachers—caught sight of me.

"There's a foreigner outside the door!"

Just this sentence, and the children immediately sat down facing the wall, not one daring to turn his head. The skeleton in the middle seemed to be the headmaster, for he spoke: "First we shall sing the national anthem." But no one sang; they all just stared. Then the headmaster said, "Next we shall salute the Emperor." Again only stares. "Pray to the great spirits." This time the students seemed to have forgotten the foreigner. They began to play "you shove me, and I'll shove you," and to call each other names. "There's the foreigner!" Again they all got quiet. "The Headmaster will now instruct."

The headmaster took a step forward and said to the back of their heads: "Today is the day when

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all of you graduate from college. What a glorious occasion it is!"

I almost fainted. This bunch of . . . graduating from college? Steady, let's not get excited too soon. Listen carefully.

The headmaster continued: "How glorious is your graduation from this highest of schools! Having graduated from here, you understand everything, all knowledge is yours. In the years to come the, ah . . . the great affairs of the country will all descend upon your shoulders. What a glorious, ah . . . thing this is!" The headmaster yawned long and noisily. "That's all!"

The two unoccupied teachers applauded for all they were worth. The children started playing again.

"Foreigner. . . !" Silence. "The teachers will instruct."

The two teachers humbly deferred to each other for a long time. Finally the one with a face as thin and drawn as a dried dwarf-melon took a step forward. I saw that this teacher was a pessi-

mist; there was a great teardrop in the corner of each eye.

Very lugubriously he began: "What a glorious affair is today's graduation from this highest of schools!" One of the tears detached itself. "All our country's schools are schools of the highest level. What a glorious thing!" Another tear fell. "Please do not forget the kindness of your schoolmaster and the teachers. It is a glorious thing that we can be your teachers, but yesterday my wife died of starvation. What a . . ." His tears fell like raindrops. He struggled for a long time before he was able to continue. "Don't forget the goodness of your teachers. Those of you who have money, help with a little money. Those who have poppi, help us with poppi. You know that it has been twenty-five years since we were paid. You . . ." He couldn't say any more. He crooked his body so that it sat on the ground again.

"The diplomas will be given out." The headmaster took some thin stone tablets from the base of the wall. There were words engraved on

the tablets but I didn't get a good look at them. The headmaster put the stone tablets in front of his feet and said, "At this graduation everybody is first. How . . . ah . . . glorious! Now I have put the diplomas here. You can come and take them as you like. Since everyone is first, naturally there is no need to receive them in order. Dismissed."

The headmaster and the one teacher helped to his feet the sad one who was sitting awry on the ground and they walked slowly out. The students didn't even bother to pick up the diplomas but went on as before—wall climbers climbing walls, ground rollers rolling into lumps, etc.

What kind of a farce was this? I was terribly muddled. I would have to ask Young Sye about it.

Diagonally across from the school I had just visited there was another where the students were all about fifteen or sixteen years old. There were seven or eight cats on the ground, holding another down and cutting with something. To one side more students had just caught two others. Probably practice in dissection, I thought. However, trussing up fellow cats for vivisection did seem pretty cruel. I steeled myself and watched, thinking that the true nature of things would be revealed in time. Shortly, the second group had its two tied up and thrown down at the base of a wall. The two victims didn't let out a sound, having doubtless died of fright. Those doing the dissecting swore as they cut.

"We'll see who's the boss—throw away that arm. Tell us to study will you. No fornication during working hours, eh? Things this bad all over and you tell us to study! No 'that' in school! Cut your heart out, you bastard!" There was a flash of fresh red flesh. . . .

"Have you got those two bastards tied up good? Bring one here."

"The headmaster or the history teacher?"

"Headmaster!"

My heart almost jumped out of my mouth! They were dissecting the headmaster and teachers!

Maybe the headmaster and the teachers had long deserved to be shot, but I could not watch students slaughter living people. No matter who was right and who was wrong, I couldn't watch students—or anyone else—commit murder. I pulled out my pistol. Actually, if I had just yelled they would all have run away. But I'd lost my temper. This bunch of things could be dealt with

only with a gun.

With the blast of my first shot the wall on three sides fell down. Of course! After a big rain the walls could not stand a shock—I'd made another mistake. Thinking to save the headmaster, I'd buried him and the students under the debris of his school. What was I to do now?

Fortunately the walls were just made of loose dirt. (I had a totally unworthy thought at this point—doubtless the headmaster was asking for his own demise, for from the looks of the school, he had sold all the solid parts of it for his own profit, using loose dirt to fill in the enclosing walls. A headmaster making private use of public funds deserves to be killed.) While I was making these conjectures my hands and feet were not idle. Pulling and hauling, I soon had most of them out. Everytime I pulled one of the mud-sprites out, without so much as a glance at me he would run off like a crazed homing pigeon. None seemed seriously injured, and I felt better. Furthermore, this farce began to interest me. Finally I unearthed the headmaster and the teacher. Their hands and feet were bound so they couldn't run. Dragging them aside, I scuffed around with my feet to see if there was anyone left in the pile. I went back to unbind my last two mud-sprites.

I waited a long time before the two opened their eyes. Not having any emergency medicine or pacifying and reviving liquors at hand, I could only watch them. Although I was anxious to ask them about many things, I didn't have the heart to prod them immediately. The two teachers sat up slowly, their eyes still glazed with terror. I smiled at them, and asked in a gentle voice, "Which is the headmaster?"

Both their faces screwed up with fear and they simultaneously stabbed at each other with their index fingers.

Their minds are disordered, I thought.

The two teachers—stealthily, slowly, lightly—stood up. I didn't move, thinking they wanted to loosen up their bodies. They stood up, nodded to each other, and then, as fast as a pair of dragonflies flash by your eyes, they had disappeared far down the street. There was no use chasing them; in a footrace with cat men I could have no hope of victory. I heaved a sigh and sat on the pile of dirt.

What a state of affairs—suspicion, contempt,

cunning. Who was the headmaster? They pointed to each other. Just saved from death, each instantly prepared to sacrifice the other to save himself. I burst into mad laughter, though not at those two; I was laughing at their society. Everywhere suspicion, contempt, selfishness, cruelty. No glimmer of honesty, liberality, integrity, generosity. Students were dissecting the headmaster; the head-

master unwilling to admit he was the headmaster—darkness, darkness, total darkness. Was it surprising they couldn't understand I'd saved their lives? I thought of the Ambassador's wife and her eight little foxes, still lying there rotting.

Headmaster, teachers, Ambassador's wife, eight little foxes—what price life? I sat down and wept.

Cats, Black and White

Sooner or later every satirist will feel a compulsion to create his own fantasy-land, such as Jonathan Swift did in *Gulliver's Travels* and Li Ju-chen 李汝珍 in his *Ching-hua yüan* 鏡花緣 (*Flowers in the Mirror*).* Lao She yielded to it in 1932 when he began writing *City of Cats*. It was the year after the Japanese military invaded China's Northeastern Provinces (Manchuria) and of its attack on the city of Shanghai. The author, writing in the white heat of rage, castigated every weakness and ugliness that modern China, its people and institutions, had manifested up to that time. Critics, and Lao She himself, agreed that the work was more pamphleteering than successful fiction. Still, readers should find the account in the foregoing pages of Earthman's first adventures in the feline kingdom on Mars not a little diverting, and in spots humorous as well.

The story goes on to tell of Catland's political and economic system, or lack of same; its "People's Brawl (Party)" and "Everybodyovskism"; and ultimately the Cat people's surrender to the "dwarf invaders", while all the time fighting among themselves until "the last two cat men alive [locked in a wooden cage] had completed their own extermination". It was then that Lao She, in the guise of the traveler, makes this last entry in his journal: "I remained on Mars another half year before I came upon a French exploration plane and was able to return to my great, glorious, free China."

Mao-ch'eng chi was first rendered into English in slightly abridged form by James E. Dew in 1958 and published by the Center for Chinese Studies of the University of Michigan in 1964. We are grateful to Prof. Dew for his kind permission to reprint the first 11 of 20 chapters in his translation, and to Mr. William A. Lewis, Professor of Art at Michigan, for some of his madly appropriate drawings, which illustrated the original edition. Another English translation is that of William A. Lyell, *Cat Country, A Satirical Novel of China in the 1930's*, Ohio State University Press, 1970.

When he wrote this novel, Lao She could hardly have expected that it would one day become an instrument of political attack between the USSR and Communist China. Nor could he have foreseen that when he himself returned from abroad, in 1949, to his "great, glorious, free China", it was to be managed, so to speak, by a different breed of cats.

*Translated by Lin Taiyi for the UNESCO Collection of Representative Works, Chinese Series, Peter Owen, London, 1965.
