

陳若曦：丁雲

Ting Yun

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I WAS HOME in Hangchou only a couple of days when my parents began to urge me to go and call on the Tings. Ting Yun and her younger brother Ting Feng were sure to be home over the lunar New Year holidays, they said, and would expect to see me and my younger brother. Besides, we should present ourselves to the older generation and offer them our New Year greetings. My brother showed no inclination to follow the suggestion; he even made a wry face to show his distaste. I myself was not keen about going either; the train had been crowded and I'd had to stand most of the way from Heilungkiang. I was tired and did not feel like doing anything just now. However, my mother kept nagging at me and talking about Ting Yun until I felt obliged to go, which I did on New Year's Day after lunch.

We did not know the Tings too well. Though Uncle Ting and my father were old colleagues at the Chekiang Provincial University, they had little to do with each other since one taught political history and the other chemistry. We of the younger generation, however, went to the same elementary and middle schools; Ting Yun was one year ahead of me while Ting Feng and my younger brother were classmates. We often visited one another outside of school. Because of the similarity of our background, Ting Yun and I were together a great deal during the Cultural Revolution, dreaming the same dreams and were rudely awakened to the same harsh realities. We were sent one after another to Heilungkiang to settle in the communes. Our common fate drew us even closer together, though we saw little of each other since we lived far apart and communications

were poor. On our annual home leaves, we often managed to take the same train, and while in Hangchou, we visited each other as much as we could to swap news and gossip, such as who among our acquaintances had been recalled from exile through "backdoor" influence and who had been lucky enough to be admitted into some university. Occasionally we corresponded but being lazy and unsure of the future, I was often slow in writing back. I had so little to report.

Last year around harvest time, I suddenly received a letter from Ting Yun saying that she was going back to Hanchou to be married. She added that her fiancé worked in Shanghai, that she might be transferred there herself and that she would let me know when the transfer did take place. I did not hear from her again, but the news of her marriage made quite a sensation where we were in Heilungkiang, and was the chief topic of conversation among the young intellectuals sent down there. The girls, being catty, laughed at the idea of a former Red Guard and active rebel ending up in a marriage arranged through matchmakers, though in truth there was hardly one who did not envy her for having married the son of a high-level cadre and thus achieving instant "salvation". Some felt sorry for my schoolmate Ah San. He had courted Ting Yun faithfully for three years but had been cast aside by her because he was not able to gain admittance into some college. I realized that Ah San's love was one-sided, and that Ting Yun was really not to blame. Still, Ah San was a well-featured young man and had a way with the pen. He had attracted quite a bit of attention in the Cultural Revolution with

his poem praising the Red Sun. After he was sent down to the commune, he wrote many love poems to Ting Yun but failed to win her heart.

I felt sorry for Ah San and was naturally curious to know what Ting Yun's "loved one"¹ was like. Because of this and my mother's repeated urging, I went to call on Ting Yun before I was invited.

THE TINGS HAD recently moved to a neighborhood of foreign-style houses on the slope of a hill. I was not familiar with the area, but I had no difficulty in locating the house by following my father's directions. It was easy to spot the freshly painted brown two-story building. On the balcony there were wash rags and upended mops set out to dry. Clothes lines and mops could also be seen behind the building. Behind the large downstairs windows on either side of the front door were hung orange curtains bright with sunshine. In the courtyard there was a bent and gnarled willow, together with some evergreen shrubs and a few barren rose bushes. It was easy to imagine what an attractive garden the yard would make when spring arrived, and how much more impressive the house would be.

On the other side of the road two young men were chatting under a locust tree. From their looks I concluded that they must be young intellectuals who had been sent down to the countryside. Their complexion was dark and weather beaten; their hands were thick and coarse, their nails so black that they resisted cleaning.

I decided to make sure by asking.

"Would you tell me which is Ting Yun's house?"

"Ting Yun has gone to live in Shanghai! She's flying high!" One of the young men answered rather curtly and with a note of envy in his voice. He gave me a stare as if surprised at my ignorance.

"Right across the road, downstairs," the other answered more helpfully, pointing at the house. I thanked him, walked across the courtyard and knocked.

Auntie Ting opened the door.

"What a surprise, Hsin Hsin! When did you

come back? Ting Yun was speaking of you only last night. Come in, come in." She was all smiles and most cordial.

"I came to offer you and Uncle Ting New Year greetings," I said as I followed her inside. "How is Uncle Ting? Has Ting Feng come back? You look better than I ever saw you before, Auntie Ting; you actually look younger."

"Really? Ting Yun also said that I look well. But I am an old woman and cannot possibly look younger." She looked pleased in spite of her denial. "Uncle Ting and Hsiao Feng have gone to the Liu Ho Pagoda. Do sit down, Hsin Hsin."

We were in the room with the orange curtains. As Auntie Ting pulled back the curtains the sun shone on the floor and brightened up the entire room. The room was a large one. Even with bed, dresser and wardrobe, and a round table with four chairs it did not seem crowded. The windows were clean and the furniture well polished and neatly arranged. It gives one a pleasant feeling to be in such a room, the like of which I have not seen in many years. The table and chairs must have been bought recently, for I had not seen them before. The table was covered with a glass top and there was in the center a tray with a tea pot and cups in it. Beside the ash tray was a package of Chung Hua cigarettes, a rare and expensive brand not sold on the general market. How lucky is Uncle Ting, I thought with envy. Even his cigarettes are the best.

Noticing that my eyes were on the cigarettes, Auntie Ting hastened to say, "Ting Yun gave her papa a carton of Chung Hua cigarettes for the New Year. The old man was pleased beyond words!"

"I bet he was!" I agreed but I felt a little sad, for even if I could save up the money by skimping on food and things, where was I to get a carton of this rare brand for my father?

"Has Ting Yun been back long?"

"*Hai*, she got home only yesterday!" Auntie Ting said with a tinge of regret. "They have two days off for the Spring Festival, three days altogether with Sunday. They came home yesterday and have to go back tomorrow. Today her father-in-law has guests for dinner and Ting Yun has to be on hand to help. She was here with Yao-wu all afternoon yesterday."

"In her position she must be very busy indeed. I have not heard from her for some time."

¹*Ai-jeu*, literally "beloved person", a term that has supplanted "husband" or "wife" in the speech of Communist China.

"She is busy all right," Auntie Ting said with emphasis, trying to make excuses for Ting Yun, as she poured me a cup of tea. "Have some tea, Hsin Hsin. It was made just a few minutes ago and is still warm. This is Hsiao Yun's first visit after she moved to Shanghai. She works somewhere in the suburbs of Shanghai but we have no idea what she does and we couldn't very well ask since it has something to do with the Liberation Army. Your Uncle Ting says that she will come to visit us when she can and that there is no use asking her. How are your papa and mama, Hsin Hsin. Has your brother come back also?"

I answered her questions one by one and told her about the harvest in Heilungkiang and how the crop was apportioned in the commune at the end of the year. Auntie Ting was a good hostess and offered me refreshments. I discovered then the goodies that were piled up on top of the sideboard at one corner of the room: "T'ai-k'ang" biscuits in tins and assorted candies in colorful wrappings, boxes of candied fruits from Peking and Tientsin, oranges arranged in the form of a pyramid, and banana-apples² in a basket covered with cellophane. What a feast for the eye! Every year there had been parades with gongs and drums to celebrate the bumper crops but only here and now did I see actual evidence of plentifulness and realize what it means.

"Have some biscuits, Hsin Hsin. Hsiao Yun brought all these from Shanghai." Auntie Ting brought over an opened tin of cream biscuits and placed it in front of me. She then went back to the sideboard for candies and fruits. Her steps were springy and her face wreathed in smiles; she definitely looked younger than the year before. She had a few more strands of white hair but her sunken cheeks of the last few years had filled out and her face reflected a joy that seemed to come directly from the heart. Seeing her joyful countenance now, it is hard to imagine her lamentations and tears when she got news that her daughter had been ordered to far-off Heilungkiang in the Northeast. She had high blood pressure and Ting Yun was fearful of what might happen if she went to the railroad station to see her off. But she

managed to calm herself and took sedatives every night before going to bed. On the day of departure, she not only was able to restrain her tears, but even waved with vigor the red banner she had in her hand as everyone else did. Only after the train had gone out of sight and the tearful well-wishers had gradually left the station did Auntie Ting's eyes suddenly roll up and she fainted and fell into her husband's arms.

"Have some candy, Hsin Hsin. Hsiao Yun bought it in Shanghai. Take some home for your brother when you go."

She took a handful of candy and urged it upon me. Everyone loves Shanghai candy, so beautifully wrapped. I took a piece and unwrapped the two layers of paper and looked at it admiringly before I put it in my mouth. It was so superior to the poorly made candy sold without wrappers in the commissary of our commune. When someone received a parcel from Hangchou and distributed a few pieces of high-grade candy, how gratefully and with what joy were they received!

"What a large room this is, Auntie," I said as I munched on the candy. "How many rooms are there altogether?"

"Just two. This one facing south is the largest. The one to the north is a bit smaller and is used by Uncle as a study. Hsiao Feng sleeps in there when he comes back for a visit. The kitchen is good-sized, large enough for us to eat in. The bath room is under the stairs, with a small tub and running water toilet."

"How nice it is! Since you occupy the entire downstairs, it is like having a whole house to yourselves. And it's so much quieter than living in a large dormitory. How long have you been here?"

"About three months now," Auntie Ting answered as she counted with her finger. When General Services said that new quarters were being arranged for us, we thought it was only talk and paid no attention to it. But they really meant business and two days later told us that we could move whenever we were ready. So I had Hsiao Feng come back to help. This was done by the Party in accordance with Chairman Mao's policy of taking care of aged intellectuals. It is nice to have such large rooms, of course, but what I am most thankful for is that now I don't have to cook on the veranda."

²A variety of apple with a banana flavor, a hybrid developed in Shantung Province.

I nodded in agreement, though I knew perfectly well that the fact they got new quarters had nothing to do with Chairman Mao's policy toward aged intellectuals. There were quite a few professors at Chekiang University who were older than Uncle Ting and none of them had been assigned new quarters. I was home only two days when I learned from the neighbors about the moving. After Ting Yun's marriage to the son of a high-level cadre of the Hangchou military district, and her husband's family began to visit the Tings, the latter's apartment seemed pitifully inadequate. Everytime a jeep or a sedan appeared at the gate of the dormitory, not only were the passengers subjected to the scrutiny of the curious onlookers but even what they carried in their hands did not escape notice. Rumor had it that upon receiving a brief note from the headquarters of the military, the authorities at the University immediately shifted people around and made the larger apartment available. Now the Tings had for their upstairs neighbor a member of the standing committee of the Party; they were the envy of the entire university.

"Uncle Ting must be well pleased with this apartment."

"I am not sure," Auntie Ting answered, shaking her head.

"He never could forget the first house we were assigned to."

The Tings lived in the same dormitory compound as we did at first. They had a parlor and two bed rooms. The rooms were small but the unit consisted of only one level and had its own kitchen and toilet. It was very comfortable. However, at the beginning of the Cultural Revolution the younger members of the faculty rose in rebellion and arrogated to themselves the authority of shifting people around. The Tings were moved to another dormitory and their own three rooms were made available for seven or eight people. Uncle Ting's new home had only one large room. This he partitioned into two long, narrow sections with lumber he managed to get. The kitchen and toilet were shared with neighbors. To save herself from the inconvenience of cooking in the public kitchen, Auntie Ting put her stove on the public veranda. Even then it was a great bother to have to go in and out of the room innumerable times before she could get a meal ready.

At the time when all the teachers were objects of criticism and attack, Uncle Ting was comparatively lucky. For thirty years he was faithful in his work. He never served as an official and was discreet in speech. He had a few scares during the 1958 anti-rightist campaign but was never in real danger. He went through the campaign safely without being branded a rightist as so many of his colleagues were. If he had not been a little too outspoken on the subject of population, he probably would not have been dragged upon the stage and subjected to criticism in the early days of the Cultural Revolution. But unluckily for him, he heartily applauded Ma Yin-ch'u's "New Approach to the Population Problem" when it was first published.³ Then came the Cultural Revolution and the campaign against the reactionary academic authorities. Professor Ma was severely criticized and "struggled against" by his students at the Peking University until he was completely silenced. The students at Chekiang University mounted a campaign of its own in the course of which it was recalled that Uncle Ting had approved of Professor Ma's views in the classroom. In a big character poster he was accused of having viciously suggested that Chairman Mao was wrong in asserting that the solution of China's population problem lies in revolution and increased production. He was also accused of having criticised in private conversation the Communist Party for its laxity in pushing planned parenthood, with the result that in the villages "children were born litter after litter like pigs." There was a great outcry against him when this private conversation was revealed and he was dragged on the stage the very next day.

I HAVE NO WAY of knowing how Uncle Ting reacted to the public denunciation against him but I remember very well that Ting Yun considered it a great humiliation. She was a good student and was well liked by her schoolmates. She was among the first to join the Red Guards. The "struggle" against her father was a great blow to her pride, and though she was not expelled from the Red Guards, she lost prestige and was denied

³Ma Yin-ch'u was an American-educated economist who taught at Peking University and, in 1957, advocated birth control as a means of curbing population growth in the People's Republic of China.

a significant role in the organization. I was drafted into a group known as "Joyous Spring", a second string of Red Guards responsible for such menial chores as putting up wall posters and slogans. Ting Yun was also assigned to this group and it was through this association that I came to know her. Being inarticulate and without ambition, I rather welcomed this undemanding work. Ting Yun, however, bemoaned her fate and felt bitterly that she should be denied the chance to show her talents. She could sing and dance and was able to win hearty applause even with the simplest and most stilted of revolutionary songs and dances and dressed in clothing no more elaborate than khaki uniform. She had a nice voice too, but unfortunately she did not like Peking opera, especially Chiang Ching's version of it. If not for this, she could have easily distinguished herself by taking part in the "model revolutionary operas". But in spite of everything she was more capable than any of us. Once she was able to win for our group the opportunity to go up north for "revolutionary exchanges" with other Red Guard groups.

Five of us girls were able to visit several cities—Nanking, Tsinan and Peking—and enjoy their famous sights. We accomplished little official business, however. I myself did not even copy down a single big character poster or arrive at the Tienanmen Square in time for the review by Chairman Mao, to say nothing of bringing back revolutionary messages from other schools or lighting the fire of revolution anywhere. When we returned to Hangchou, Ting Yun drew up the report of our mission all by herself and won for us the approval and commendation of the authorities. This was the first time in my life—and probably will remain the only time—that I had a chance to do any sightseeing. Whenever I think of it, I am full of admiration and gratitude for Ting Yun. When I heard of her unexpected marriage, I was again impressed by her ability to get what she wanted, though I knew nothing of the circumstances.

"Ting Yun's wedding must have been quite an affair," I prompted the old lady.

"Her husband's family took care of everything; we didn't have to lift a finger. We lived in such close quarters; we couldn't possibly have had a reception. I had hoped to invite at least a few of our closest friends and relatives for a dinner party

at the Lou-wai-lou but neither Hsiao Yun nor her papa wanted to make an occasion of it, with the result that all we did was to buy twenty pounds of high-grade candy and distributed it among our friends. It has been on Hsiao Yun's mind to invite her schoolmates here for a get-together, but she has been so busy ever since the wedding. Only three days off for the lunar New Year. She hasn't had time to call on anyone at all."

"After all, they are newlyweds, Auntie Ting. As long as we are in Hangchou, we can come over anytime convenient to you. You must be well satisfied with the son-in-law, Auntie. His name Yao-wu makes one immediately think of a dauntless soldier."

"The important thing is that the young ones should get along," Auntie Ting said with a broad smile. "Who are we old folks to pick and choose? Yao-wu seems to be a gentle lad, and quite obliging. If it weren't for his uniform, no one would take him for a military man. He looks more like a college student. He is so good to Hsiao Yun, and to Hsiao Feng, too. As you know Hsiao Yun has always been a good elder sister and has worried about Hsiao Feng ever since he was ordered to the western part of the province. She did everything she could to have him recalled to Hangchou. She has mentioned it several times to Yao-wu since her marriage and he, like the good brother-in-law he is, soon arranged to have him transferred from his commune to a rice mill in the county seat. Hsiao Yun says that from that vantage point, Hsiao Feng would be able to take the entrance examinations for the University. If that should fail, Yao-wu would try to get him called back to Hangchou. By the way, Hsin Hsin, why didn't your brother come? Is he planning to take entrance examinations also?"

"Mmm . . ." I answered evasively, picking up my tea-cup for a sip.

My brother had answered the call for "volunteers" to take the university entrance examination, but his name was eliminated from the list of applicants by his own brigade. He was so disappointed and disgusted he hated the very mention of university exams.

"Ting Yun is a good sister indeed," I resumed the conversation. "And how did you and Uncle manage to find such a fine son-in-law?"

"We had nothing to do with it. She did it all

by herself. That's the truth, Hsin Hsin."

She was suddenly serious as she said this, as if she were impressed anew by her daughter's capability.

"How is that?" I asked. "Didn't a doctor at the People's Hospital act as matchmaker?"

"That's true, but in the end it was Hsiao Yun herself who made the key move."

I persisted somewhat barefacedly with my questioning, and in the end got from her all that had happened.

One day Uncle Ting went to the hospital because of a severe attack of insomnia. He was examined by Dr. Chu, head of the cardiology department, who happened to be on duty at the clinic. When the doctor advised him not to worry too much, Uncle Ting shook his head and said that his daughter had been in the countryside for four years with no prospect of being recalled or admitted into a university, that she did not even have any prospect for a suitable marriage and that under the circumstances how could he keep from worrying? Dr. Chu asked him half jokingly if his daughter was pretty and Uncle Ting answered in a like spirit that she had large eyes, an oval face and was inferior to none. The doctor volunteered to act as matchmaker, but Uncle Ting took it as a jest and thought no more about it. Not long afterwards Dr. Chu actually called on Uncle Ting with the news that the son of a cadre of the military district was looking for a wife and said that if Uncle Ting were interested, he should let him have a few photographs of the girl. He would pass them on and would arrange for a meeting if the other side were interested. The young people could be friends at first, and if marriage should not materialize, the affair would be kept confidential. When Uncle Ting heard that the young man was connected with the Liberation Army, he politely refused the offer, saying that it was too far above his station. Auntie Ting happened to write her daughter that evening and mentioned the incident in passing. Ting Yun saw in this her opportunity to get away from her surroundings. She answered right away and asked her mother to send on the photographs as soon as possible. Then, being afraid that her father might balk, she went to the county seat, had some photographs taken and sent them to Dr. Chu by registered mail. The upshot was that Dr. Chu came to call on the Tings,

even as they were still debating whether self-respecting people like themselves should enter such a contest by photo. He reported that the other side was very much interested and hoped that an early meeting could be arranged. Under the circumstances Uncle Ting found it necessary to forget his scruples. He telegraphed Ting Yun and told her to ask for leave and come back to Hangchou on some family emergency. Ting Yun got her leave, though it was then in the midst of summer, a busy time in the commune. The young people met at Dr. Chu's house and the next day they went by themselves for an excursion on West Lake. They hit it off well and a week later they became engaged. Yao-wu worked in Shanghai, where it was extremely difficult for people from elsewhere to establish residence. So it was arranged for Ting Yun to be transferred to Hangchou for the time being. After her wedding on the October First national holiday, she sent in a request for permission to transfer to Shanghai as the wife of a member of the Liberation Army, and because of the "requirements of her work". The request was granted and the transfer effected before the end of the year. Auntie Ting did not explain how her work required her to live in Shanghai and I did not see fit to ask.

"As a matter of fact, Hsiao Yun was not too anxious to be transferred to Shanghai," Auntie Ting explained sort of in confidence. "After four years in the Northeast, she was so homesick and she liked Hangchou much better than Shanghai. The child is most dutiful and is worried about my high blood pressure. I told her not to worry. With my children living near me and such a fine son-in-law, what more could I possibly want? I am so happy and contented that I have gained weight. My clothes are all too tight for me. Moreover, Yao-wu had had a serious illness a few years ago and needed someone to look after him. Naturally he wants his 'loved one' near him. During the first two months of her marriage, she had to make the trip to Shanghai every week. I was worried that she would overtire herself, but she did not seem to mind and insisted that she would like to stay in Hangchou as long as possible so as to be near us."

"Shanghai is only two and half hours from Hangchou by train. It's no trouble at all for her to come back for visits. From now on Auntie doesn't have to worry at all."

"Quite right. It is not like Heilungkiang, where she could come back only once a year." Then she thought of my problem and said, "Hsin Hsin, you should also try to find a way to be recalled to Hangchou. It would be wonderful to have you back here."

I evaded the question the best I could. To hide my embarrassment, I again took up my tea cup and sipped from it.

"Do you have their wedding pictures?" I was on the point of taking my leave but was reluctant to do so without seeing Ting Yun. It would be better than nothing if I could see what this "loved one" of hers looks like.

"We do. It's in the next room. Come and take a look."

We went into the north room. It was small, rather dark and there was a chill in the air. The bed, chairs, desk and bookcase were neatly arranged. There were several photographs on top of the bookcase, the most prominent and best framed being that of the bride and groom. Auntie Ting took this down carefully and handed it to me. In the picture Ting Yun's hair was cut short for the first time in her life and you could tell right away that it had been fashioned by the masterful hands of some hair stylists on Shanghai's Nanking Road. It complemented her small face perfectly and made it seem more full. Her eyebrows had been meticulously trimmed, like crescents over her large round eyes, which seemed to be fixed on me no matter how I turned the photograph. Ting Yun has a beautiful mouth too. Her lips were slightly parted in a smile of serenity and contentment. Her "loved one" suffered by comparison; he was neither as lively as she nor as dignified. His eyes were lacklustre and had a worried look which even his glasses could not hide; the dark picture frame accentuated his narrow, pointed face and made it seem thin and elongated. His uniform did not lend him a martial aspect; it made him look a little incongruous instead. His lips were firmly held together, which gave a suggestion of stubbornness. The photograph was taken only above the waist but from the position of his arm I would say that he must have it tightly around Ting Yun's waist.

"It's a fine picture!" I remarked. "From the looks of it I would say that he is very fond of Ting Yun and is good to her."

Auntie laughed.

"He certainly is. You should see the way he follows her around. Before Hsiao Yun was transferred to Shanghai, he would telephone Friday evening to make sure that she went to Shanghai the next day. Once she had to work overtime at the factory and did not get home until late. She did not want to go that weekend, but he telephoned again and in the end she had to go. It is good thing that she was transferred to Shanghai; married couples should be together if at all possible."

Auntie Ting put the photograph back on the bookcase. There was another picture of Ting Yun in her lower middle school days, her hair in two large braids, her eyes bright and full of innocent laughter. There was a third photo which I had seen before but which I couldn't resist taking down for a closer look.

This was taken by Ah San. It showed Ting Yun on the threshold of the peasant's house where she lived. She had a hoe over her shoulder and was on the way to work. Her sleeves were rolled up, her blue cotton trousers patched at the knee. She wore her hair in braids also for convenience but they were cut short and reached only to her shoulders. There was a smile on her face but it was a forced smile, a smile which reflected the feeling of helplessness of the young intellectuals of our generation. Looking at the photo, I was reminded of another time when that face was covered with tears.

Our group were sent down to Heilungkiang in 1970. Shortly after our arrival, with the sound of gongs and drums still ringing in our ears, Ah San, another girl and I got leave to visit Ting Yun. She had settled at Station No. 3 the year before and we wanted to have the benefit of her experience in our future life at the commune. We did not notify her in advance of our coming. It was late in the afternoon when we arrived at the home of the peasant she was living with and found that she was still out in the fields. I went to look for her with a boy as guide, while Ah San and the other girl went about drawing water and gathering firewood and helped the mistress of the house prepare dinner. Ting Yun worked at quite a distance away on the other side of a hill and it took us half an hour to get there. From the distance I descried a black figure, small and lonely against the horizon, and on getting nearer I found that it was Ting Yun

digging from a kneeling position. She was so surprised to see me that she dropped her cultivator and sat back on the soil. After we exchanged joyful greetings, she suddenly burst out crying. When she wiped away her tears, her hand left a streak of dirt on her sunburned face. Not knowing what to say to comfort her, I asked why she had not stopped working with the others. She said that she was not as strong as the others and that she could not finish her share even though she worked from sunrise to sunset. So how could she dare to stop working. I was deeply moved and was in tears myself. Thus we wept and commiserated with each other until the boy, puzzled by our behavior, left us for home.

"Hsin Hsin, what crimes have we committed that we should be exiled here so far away from home?"

I had, of course, no answer to that question.

Ting Yun was a strong-willed girl; her tears went away quickly like a summer storm. And before they were hardly dry, she took a cigarette from her pocket and began to smoke. I was surprised by this, for it was rare for girls of our family background to smoke. Even during the Cultural Revolution, when the young rebels stopped at nothing, none of us got into the habit of smoking or drinking or being free about sex. After only a year's absence, I was not prepared to see her puffing away, her brows knitted and her gaze fixed on the waning sun over the distant hills. Being of a weaker mold, I felt overwhelmed by the vast loneliness of the place and my uncertain future and there seemed no end to my tears.

SOME PEOPLE SAY that Ting Yun was hard heart-

ed—pretty, yes, but rather cold emotionally. Ah San loved her at first sight and pursued her for several years. But she was indifferent, and did not give him much encouragement. Quite a few of the cadres in the neighboring brigades sought to win her but she rejected them all. Some of the girls said behind her back that she probably would end up as an old maid. Last summer on our way home together, I finally asked her in what respect she found my schoolmate Ah San wanting. "There is nothing wrong with him," she said with a bitter smile. "But I love Hangchow too much to be reconciled to the idea of living and dying in this forsaken place in the Northeast. Once you get married, your status is fixed, and there's no hope of change. As long as I live, I'll never give up hope of returning to the south."

And now, only a short time later, she has realized her ambition.

Gently I put the photo back on the top of the book case.

"I must go now, Auntie. Give Ting Yun my best regards when she comes back."

The old lady walked me to the door and said cordially, "How about coming back tomorrow, Hsin Hsin? She won't be leaving for Shanghai until evening and I am sure she'll be here tomorrow afternoon. You come and have supper with us. Bring your brother too."

I knew that the invitation was sincerely meant but I refused it on some pretext nevertheless. Then I took my leave.

The two young men were still there under the locust tree. As I passed by one of them said: "These days it's best to have a papa with influence, but short of that a good sister will do."