

SELECTED STORIES
OF
LU HSIIN



Lu Hsun

*(This picture was taken in September, 1930, in Shanghai
when the author was fifty years old.)*

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PUBLISHER'S NOTE

This collection contains thirteen of Lu Hsun's short stories. *Call to Arms* is his earliest collection of stories, written between 1918 and 1922; *A Madman's Diary*, *Kung I-chi*, *Medicine*, *An Incident*, *Storm in a Teacup*, *My Old Home* and *Village Opera* all belong to this collection. *Wandering* is his second collection of short stories, written between 1924 and 1925, and here represented by *The New Year's Sacrifice*, *In the Wine Shop*, *The Misanthrope*, *A Happy Family* and *Regret for the Past*. The last story printed here, *Forging the Sword*, was written in October 1926; *Old Tales Retold*, the collection from which it comes, includes eight stories based on old myths and legends.

Lu Hsun was a great revolutionary democrat and a great communist, a genius shaped by the revolutionary struggle of the Chinese people in modern times. A concise analysis of his work and a clear account of how he became a revolutionary democrat and developed into a communist can be found in Feng Hsueh-feng's article at the end of this book.

From the stories, written between 1918 and 1926, we can see clearly the characteristics of Lu Hsun's early works, the characteristics of a great revolutionary democrat and a master of realism.

A Madman's Diary, written in 1918, was Lu Hsun's first short story—a powerful accusation and attack on the feudal social system and conventions. "It was the first bugle call of the cultural revolution which was no other than a revolution in ideology." *Medicine*, written in April 1919, tells the story of a revolution-

ary hero, Hsia Yu, before the 1911 Revolution, and at the same time describes the ignorance and darkness of the old China before the masses had awoken. This tale, in spite of its deep gloom, prophesies the dawn of a new society, the awakening of the masses and their victorious future.

My Old Home and *The New Year's Sacrifice* are masterpieces describing the country-side and the peasants. An unforgettable picture is drawn of the bankrupt condition of the country-side in old China and the honest simplicity of the exploited peasants.

Kung I-chi is about a petty-bourgeois intellectual looked down on by others in the old society. Like Jun-tu in *My Old Home* and Hsiang-lin's wife in *The New Year's Sacrifice*, Kung I-chi is another unforgettable character.

In the Wine Shop and *The Misanthrope* both deal with intellectuals in the period after the 1911 Revolution who started life full of hope, only to lose heart because of the inherent drabness and squalor of their environment. These stories reveal both the cool realism of the author and his passionate indignation. "I walked with quickened steps, as if to break through some heavy barrier, but found it impossible. Something struggled in my ears and, after a long time, burst out. It was like a long howl, the howl of a wounded wolf crying in the wilderness in the depth of night, anger and sorrow mingled in its agony. . . ." This is how *The Misanthrope* ends, with a description of the story-teller's feeling after the funeral of his friend, a description not of hopeless grief but of a passionate protest. *In the Wine Shop* describes a life as grey and dull as the winter sky; but "several old plum trees were actually in full blossom in the snow, as if entirely oblivious to winter; while beside the crum-

bling pavilion there was still a camellia, with a dozen crimson blossoms standing out against its thick dark green foliage, blazing in the snow as bright as fire, indignant and arrogant. . . ." The fighting spirit in this description dispels the atmosphere of gloom in this story, lighting up the darkness.

A Happy Family and *Regret for the Past* describe how cruelly reality mocked the dreams of intellectuals. Although a vein of pathos and sentimentality runs through *Regret for the Past*, Lu Hsun's insight into the deep-rooted social causes of unhappiness under the old regime arouses the sympathy and indignation of the reader, and it is made clear that only when men and women have the courage to fight and destroy the fetters of the old society can the ideal of free love be realized.

An Incident tells how a rickshaw man helped an old woman who had fallen on the road, expressing the great selflessness of the working people which is seldom found among the petty bourgeoisie. Thus Lu Hsun writes in this story: "Suddenly I experienced a strange sensation. At that instant his dusty back seemed to grow larger, and the further he walked the larger he loomed, until I had to look up to him. At the same time he seemed gradually to be exerting a pressure on me, which threatened to overpower the small self under my fur-lined gown." Although only a short sketch, *An Incident* is very moving.

The last story, *Forging the Sword*, is based on a folk legend written over a thousand years ago. Lu Hsun uses this legend to express the determination and courage of the new generation in its fight against feudalism. At the time when he wrote this story, the First Revolutionary Civil War had just started in South China and the warlords in North China were

cruelly massacring students and citizens. With *Forging the Sword*, Lu Hsun called on common citizens and students alike to persist in their revolutionary struggle and revenge themselves on the reactionaries.

Lu Hsun said: "We Chinese, because we have never dared to face life, have had to resort to concealment and deceit. Hence arose our literature of concealment and deceit, and through such a literature we have sunk deeper and deeper into the morass of concealment and deceit, to an extent we fail to realize ourselves. The world is changing daily; it is high time for our writers to take off their masks, look life honestly, penetratingly and boldly in the face, and write of blood and flesh. We have long needed a totally new arena for literature, and some fierce fighters." These words may be applied to Lu Hsun's own work at that time and his attitude to writing. He was himself just such a "fierce fighter," who looked life boldly in the face. To tell the truth about life in a dark period, he wrote courageously about the horrors of his time. But he never believed that the darkness could not be conquered, and therefore always in his writings showed some ray of hope.

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PREFACE TO THE FIRST COLLECTION OF SHORT STORIES, "CALL TO ARMS"

When I was young I had many dreams. Most of them are now forgotten, but I see nothing in this to regret; for although recalling the past may bring pleasure, it may also make one lonely, and there is no point in dwelling on it. However, my trouble is that I cannot forget completely, and these stories have resulted from what I have been unable to forget.

For more than four years I used to go, almost daily, to a pawnbroker's and medicine shop. I cannot remember how old I was then; but the counter in the medicine shop was the same height as I, and that in the pawnbroker's twice my height. I used to hand clothes and trinkets up to the counter twice my height, take the money proffered with contempt, then go to the counter the same height as I to buy medicine for my father who was sick. On my return home I had other things to keep me busy, for since the physician who made out the prescriptions was very well-known, he used remarkable drugs: aloe root dug up in winter, sugar-cane that had been three years exposed to frost, twin crickets, and rare aromatic plants. . . for the most part very difficult to procure. But my father's illness went from bad to worse until he died.

I believe those who sink from prosperity to poverty come, in the process, to understand what the world

is really like. I wanted to go to K— school in N—,* perhaps because I was in search of a change of scene and faces. There was nothing for my mother but to raise eight dollars for my travelling expenses, and say I might do as I pleased. That she cried was only natural, for at that time the proper thing was to study the classics and take the official examinations, and anyone studying so-called "foreign subjects" was thought to do so out of desperation, because forced to sell his soul to foreign devils; thus he would be all the more despised. My mother cried, too, because she would miss me. But in spite of that, I went to N— and entered K— school; and it was there that I learned the existence of such subjects as natural science, arithmetic, geography, history, drawing and physical training. They had no physiology course, but we saw copies of such works as *A New Course on the Human Body* and *Essays on Chemistry and Hygiene*. Recalling the talk and prescriptions of physicians I had known and comparing them with what I now knew, I came to the conclusion those physicians must be either unwitting or deliberate charlatans; and I began to sympathize with the invalids and families who suffered at their hands. From translated histories I also learned that the Japanese Reformation had originated, to a great extent, with the introduction of Western medical science to Japan.

These inklings took me to a provincial medical college in Japan. I dreamed that on my return to China I would cure patients like my father, who had been wrongly treated, while if war broke out I would

* The Kiangnan Naval Academy in Nanking.

serve as an army doctor, at the same time strengthening my countrymen's faith in reformation.

I do not know what advanced methods are now used to teach bacteriology, but at that time films were used to show the microbes; and if the lecture ended early, the instructor might show films of natural scenery or newsreels to fill up the time. This was during the Russo-Japanese War, so there were many war films, and I would clap my hands and cheer at these scenes along with the other students. It was a long time since I had seen any compatriots, but one day I saw a film showing some Chinese, one of whom was bound, while many others of my countrymen stood around him. They were all strong fellows but appeared completely apathetic. According to the commentary, the one with his hands bound was a spy working for the Russians, who was to have his head cut off by the Japanese military as a warning to others, while the Chinese beside him had come to enjoy the spectacle.

Before the term was over I had left for Tokyo, because after this film I felt that medical science was not so important after all. The people of a weak and backward country, however strong and healthy they might be, could only serve to be made examples of, or to witness such futile spectacles; and this was worse than dying of sickness. The most important thing, therefore, was to change their spirit, and since at that time I felt that literature was the best means to this end, I determined to promote a literary movement. There were many Chinese students in Tokyo studying law, political science, physics and chemistry, even police work and industry, but not one studying literature or art. However, even in this uncongenial atmosphere I was fortunate enough to

find some kindred spirits. We gathered the few others we needed, and decided of course our first step should be to publish a magazine, the title of which should denote that this was a new birth. As we were then rather classically inclined, we called it Hsin Sheng (New Life).

When the time for publication drew near, some of our contributors dropped out, and then our funds were withdrawn, until finally there were only three of us left, and we were penniless. We had started our magazine at an unlucky hour, so naturally we could not rail against fate; but later even we three were destined to part, and our discussions of a dream future had to cease. So ended this abortive "New Life."

Only later did I feel the futility of it all; at first I had taken all for granted. Later I felt if a man's proposals met with approval, it should encourage him; if they met with opposition, it should make him fight back; but the real tragedy was for him to lift up his voice among the living, and meet with no response, neither approval nor opposition, just as if he were in a boundless desert, with nothing to set his hand to. So I began to feel lonely.

And this feeling of loneliness grew day by day, coiling about my soul like a huge poisonous snake.

But in spite of my unaccountable sadness, I felt no indignation; for this experience had made me reflect and see that I was definitely not the heroic type who could rally multitudes at his call.

However, my loneliness had to be dispelled, for it was causing me agony. So I used various means to dull my senses, both by conforming to the spirit of the time and turning to the past. Later I experienced or witnessed even greater loneliness and sadness,

which I do not like to recall, preferring that it should perish with me. Still my attempt to deaden my senses was not unsuccessful—I had lost the enthusiasm and fervour of my youth.

In S— Hostel there were three rooms where it was said a woman had lived who had hung herself on the locust tree in the courtyard. Now the tree had grown so tall that one could no longer reach its branches, but the rooms had remained vacant. For some years I stayed here, copying ancient inscriptions. I had few visitors, there were no political problems or issues in those inscriptions, and my only desire was that my life should slip quietly away like this. On summer nights, when there were too many mosquitoes, I would sit under the locust tree, waving my fan and looking at the specks of sky through the thick leaves, while the caterpillars which came out in the evening would fall, icy-cold, on my neck.

The only visitor to come for an occasional talk was my old friend Ching Hsing-yi. He would put his big portfolio down on the broken table, take off his long gown, and sit facing me, looking as if his heart was still beating fast after braving the dogs.

"What is the use of copying these?" he demanded one night, after looking through the inscriptions I had copied and considering the matter.

"No use at all."

"Then why copy them?"

"For no particular reason."

"I think, you might write something. . . ."

I understood. They were editing the magazine "New Youth," but hitherto there seemed to have been no reaction, favourable or otherwise, and I guessed they must be feeling lonely. However I said:

"Imagine an iron house without windows, absolutely

indestructible, with many people fast asleep inside who will soon die of asphyxiation. But you know since they will die in their sleep, they will not feel any pain. Now if you cry aloud to wake a few of the lighter sleepers, making those unfortunate few suffer the misery of irrevocable death, do you think you are doing them a good turn?"

"If some awake, you can't say there is no hope of destroying the iron house."

True, in spite of my own conviction, I could not say there was no hope, for hope lies in the future. I could not use my own evidence to refute his assertion that it might exist. So I agreed to write, and the result was my first story *A Madman's Diary*. From that time onwards, I could not stop writing, and would write some sort of short story from time to time at the request of friends, until I had more than a dozen of them.

As for myself, I no longer feel any great urge to express myself; yet, perhaps because I have not entirely forgotten the grief of my past loneliness, I sometimes call out, to encourage those fighters who are galloping on in loneliness, so that they do not lose heart. Whether my cry is brave or sad, repellent or ridiculous, I do not care. However, since it is a call to arms, I naturally have to obey my general's orders; and this is why I do not always stick to the truth, as when I made a wreath appear from nowhere at the son's grave in *Medicine*, while in *Tomorrow* I did not say whether the mother dreamed of her son or not. For our chiefs then were against pessimism. And I, for my part, did not want to infect with the loneliness I had found so bitter those young people who were still dreaming pleasant dreams, just as I had done when young.

It is clear, then, that my short stories fall far short of being works of art; hence I count myself fortunate that they are still known as stories, and are even being compiled in one book. Although such good fortune makes me uneasy, I am nevertheless pleased to think they have readers, for the time being at least.

Since these short stories of mine are being reprinted in one collection, owing to the reasons given above, I have chosen the title "Na Han" (Call to Arms).

December 3, 1922, Peking