



B **BETTER TO
STAND AND DIE**

STORY OF CHAO I-MAN, A CHINESE
WOMAN REVOLUTIONARY

Chang Lin and Shu Yang

BETTER TO STAND AND DIE

STORY OF CHAO I-MAN, A CHINESE
WOMAN REVOLUTIONARY

Chang Lin and Shu Yang

FOREIGN LANGUAGES PRESS
PEKING 1960

Translated by
CHIN TI, LIU TI-YING
AND LO HSU-CHAO

Printed in the People's Republic of China

FOREWORD

Chao I-man, one of the heroines most beloved by the Chinese people, was an exemplary member of the Chinese Communist Party and a faithful daughter of her country.

She was born on September 27, 1905, into a feudal landlord family in Paiyangtsui Village, Yipin County, Szechuan Province. In 1923 she joined the Communist Youth League and in 1926 was admitted to the Chinese Communist Party. Her revolutionary activities began in her early school days, when with one of her sisters, she organized in their home town the Women's Liberation Society to lead the village women in their struggle against the feudal forces. She was even more active as a leader in the fight against imperialism and feudalism when she was in secondary school. Because of that, she was estranged at home from her elder brother and his wife and persecuted by the authorities at the school which was in the grip of feudal elements. She had not finished her secondary school when she joined the ranks of the first women soldiers in the Chinese Revolution. After the First Revolutionary Civil War ended in failure in 1927, the Party sent her to the Sun Yat-sen University in the Soviet Union to study. She returned to China in 1929 to find the whole country under the counter-revolutionary White terror. The extremely difficult conditions confronting the revolution did not discourage her from persisting in the underground work of the Party. After the

northeastern provinces of China were occupied by the Japanese invaders in 1931, the Party despatched her to the occupied area to rouse the people to action against the aggressors. She served successively as Secretary of the Trade Union Federation of Harbin, Secretary of the Chinese Communist Party Committee of Chuho District and Political Commissar of the Second Regiment, Third Army of the Anti-Japanese Allied Army. In 1936, she was severely wounded in an engagement with the Japanese invaders and taken prisoner. In prison and on trial she waged an unflinching struggle against the aggressors, enduring all kinds of brutal tortures. Finally, she died a martyr's death.

To facilitate her revolutionary work, she had, like many other Chinese revolutionaries, used different names. Her real name was Li Kun-tai. She was known as Li Shuning or Li I-chao when she worked in the Kuomintang-controlled areas. She changed her name to Chao I-man after she joined the Anti-Japanese Allied Army. For the convenience of the readers, she will be called Chao I-man throughout the book.

The present story consists of a few episodes in the heroine's life, the material of which was furnished by her comrades-in-arms, co-workers and relatives.

CONTENTS

FOREWORD

A HEAD-STRONG CHILD	1
WHAT TO BE?	6
THE FIRST REQUEST	12
AN ENTHUSIASTIC TEACHER	16
LIBERATED	22
CHANGES IN THE FAMILY	29
ON THE WAY TO THE CITY	36
A GIRL STUDENT FROM THE COUNTRY	40
THREE DAYS AND NIGHTS	47
MEDDLING IN OTHER PEOPLE'S BUSINESS	51
A LONG JOURNEY	57
IN UNIFORM	63
TWO ROADS	70
GOING ABROAD	75
STRANGE EXPERIENCES	83
AN OLD FRIEND	88
A SNOWY NIGHT	94
IN A NORTHERN CITY	100
SECRETARY OF THE DISTRICT COMMITTEE	107
"OUR WOMAN COMMISSAR"	114

AFTER THE BREAK-THROUGH	123
THE EXECUTION GROUND	128
IN THE POLICE COURT	135
IN THE HOSPITAL	139
AN IMPREGNABLE DEFENCE	147
ESCAPE	154
A STORMY NIGHT	160
CAPTURED	165
THE FAREWELL SONG	171

A HEAD-STRONG CHILD

A small stream, clear and blue, winds through thickets of bamboo.

It is a tranquil little stream; its clearness does not change even during a sudden rising of mountain torrents in the rainy season. But one would never suspect such a peculiarity from its name: Shih Tou Ho—River of Stones.

Not far from the stream, and half-way up the mountain, there is a small hamlet by the name of Paiyangtsui (White Poplar Point). This isolated mountain hamlet is enclosed by green bamboos on all sides, but strange to say, there is not a single white poplar anywhere around.

It was in this small hamlet of three families in Yipin County, Szechuan Province, that Chao I-man was born. She was the youngest of seven; after her there came a little brother, three years younger. All her elder sisters had been married off and her eldest brother had also settled down to married life. Only these two youngest, the little sister and brother, were left under the parents' care. It seems that little Chao I-man was the cleverer and for that reason the favourite one.

She was a proud and head-strong child and it had somehow become a sort of household rule that it was her right alone to offer the tobacco pipes and tea to the guests. Should anyone infringe upon this privilege, she would, even in the presence of the guests, roll on the

floor in a tantrum. When gifts were brought to the house she must be allowed, as a rule, to make the distribution to the family, otherwise she would scatter the things all over the place. This was not strange, as what spoiled child would not behave the same way?

A private school was set up in the house when she was eight years old. People called it a "hen school"—one teacher with some ten pupils, just like a hen looking after a brood of chicks.

Little I-man was taught the "Three Character Couplets." These she could rattle off fluently, starting from any one point she was asked to; but if the characters were changed around she could not recognize a single one of them. She did not like those things which called for mental exertion.

But what annoyed her most was the way the teacher had of searching her drawer. Sometimes a box of silkworms eating mulberry leaves was discovered and sometimes from another box, a few brilliant-coloured butterflies were dumped out. Once the shrill chirping of a cicada was heard from her desk. The teacher came over, and just as he bent down to hunt for that impertinent singer, little I-man put a praying mantis down his neck.

For such escapades she often had her hand caned. Fortunately those days were soon over.

That summer there was a mutiny in the city and the soldiers invaded the countryside, pillaging everywhere. Her father took the whole family and fled to the town of Wupao where her mother's folks lived.

Her eldest sister also came there from Huahsiangtsui with her husband, Cheng Yu-chih. They all lived in the same house and shared their meals. Everybody took Brother-in-law for a queer fellow, because he had re-

fused to be an official, but instead had gone to enlist as a private. And also, very shortly after his wedding, he had sent her eldest sister to a school to study. But little I-man liked this brother-in-law who had been to so many places and could tell such stories. He also gave her many pictures, one of which, with a smoke-puffing ship in it, sent her a-dreaming. If only she could get on that boat and go sailing on the sea!

Not many days later, she and her little brother started studying again with a few village children as schoolmates. The teacher was none other than Brother-in-law, who had brought out from the city the textbooks, one on arithmetic and the other, a Chinese reader. Little I-man had never seen such things before although she had had two years of schooling. She found them much more intelligible and much more interesting than the "Three Character Couplets."

Now she did not have to worry about being searched. When Brother-in-law found butterflies he did not take them away but would explain how they were transformed from caterpillars and flew about collecting pollen to fertilize the fruit trees. Brother-in-law was real fun: he could tell so much about everything—a straw, a flower or a little worm.

Every evening she and her little brother did their arithmetic exercises, practised their handwriting and made sentences. When supper was over, the teacher would sit at the table either reading or writing to friends. The three of them sat at a square table around a tung oil lamp. Here was something little I-man could not get used to; she would rather have played hide-and-seek with the village children. Could such evenings be the time for study?

"A mosquito!" I-man's little hands slapped noisily.

"It's strange the mosquitoes should bite no one but you," Brother-in-law said giving her a look, and then turning back to his book. I-man would not submit to this.

"But there are mosquitoes! Look, there's blood on my hand."

"All right, all right!" Brother-in-law sounded conciliatory. "Get on with your work. If you concentrate the mosquitoes won't bite you."

She sighed. There was nothing else to do but get down to work on her exercises.

At last one evening her chance came. While Brother-in-law was brewing medicinal herbs for her eldest sister, who had fallen ill, she took her little brother by the hand and they ran out with their exercise-books under their arms.

Outside, the moon shone pure and white and the croaking of frogs rose from afar. The hillside was dotted all over with the flickering glow of fireflies, and the Milky Way stretched across the sky like a gauzy veil. Little I-man suddenly remembered that this was the Double Seventh — the seventh night of the seventh month — when, according to a fairy tale Mama had told them, the Cowherd went to meet the Weaving Maid, crossing the Magpie Bridge over the Milky Way which separated them, and carrying their children in baskets hanging from his shoulder pole.

She and her little brother sat down under a cassia tree and watched the Milky Way with their two pairs of dark unblinking eyes.

"Why isn't there a magpie bridge?" Little Brother asked.

According to what she had heard, the stellar couple at the Milky Way didn't like anyone prying into their secrets, so she put her hand over her brother's mouth.

In a little while he began to yawn.

"I'm sleepy."

"You're a nuisance! Spoiling everything! Go on, go on!" and she gave him a push.

His feelings hurt, her little brother walked away pouting and I-man was left sitting alone under the tree. She held her breath and gazed at the Milky Way. On the Milky Way there was neither the black cow nor the magpies which should have come flying. There were only clusters of twinkling stars. Her eyelids gradually lowered.

Late in the night her father came and carried her in.

The next day in class the teacher asked Little Brother: "Where are your arithmetic exercises?"

"She didn't do them either!" Little Brother said, pointing to his sister.

"I'm asking you and no one else." The teacher for the first time became stern.

Little I-man hurriedly opened her drawer and searched through it, but found nothing. On lifting her head she saw in the teacher's hands the exercise-book, with most of its leaves torn out. So she had dropped it last night! She took the notebook and said hurriedly, as if trying to make up for her misdeeds:

"Don't be angry with me. I'll finish them right now!" Standing there she did five examples almost in one breath.

"What a strange thing: eighteen minus five equals twenty-three! What kind of arithmetic is this?"

The whole class burst into laughter, Little Brother laughing the loudest and making faces too. Little I-man

suddenly sprang at him and grabbed hold of his ear. Little Brother let out a wail.

"What a terror!" the teacher exclaimed as he tried to pacify them. "But even if the ear is pulled off a minus sign is not a plus sign."

She flushed, threw down her pencil and ran out.

In the evening the teacher sat down to read as usual. He asked Little Brother, who had finished his exercises and was going to bed, to tell his sister to come and review her lessons. Little Brother went out, walked around a bit and came back and reported that Sister had gone to sleep. But before the last word was out of his mouth Sister herself cut him short.

"Who's gone to sleep? All you know is to tell tales! I can manage my own lessons. Mind your own business!"

She sat down, bent her head and concentrated on her work, without venturing one glance at Brother-in-law.

WHAT TO BE?

Time went on.

One day in autumn Brother-in-law suddenly left for the city. It was said that a colonel of the local militia had taken ten piculs of rice from his family and that he wanted to sue the colonel. But for several months after, Brother-in-law failed to return. Word came from the city that the colonel had a brother who was a member of the county council and that they had bribed the yamen and had Brother-in-law imprisoned on a charge of slander.

Not until three days before the lunar New Year did

the family succeed in bailing Brother-in-law out by paying another ten piculs of rice.

Little I-man found Brother-in-law completely changed — long hair, a bushy black beard that covered his cheeks and chin, and eyes glinting steely cold — really frightening!

In the evening sitting by the brazier, Brother-in-law was lost in thought as he stirred the charcoal fire. Little I-man stared intently at him, following every movement he made. Suddenly he threw away the fire tongs and exclaimed:

“This society is too dark!”

Little I-man looked around: yes, that little oil lamp was certainly dim enough.

“Do you want me to touch up the wick and make the light brighter?” she asked timidly.

“No, what I want is to light a fire and burn everything up!” He stood up and his tall figure blocked off all the light from the lamp.

These words stunned little I-man. She wondered, “Is he really going to set the house on fire?” She looked up, open-mouthed, unable to utter a word. Brother-in-law, seeing her startled look, realized that she had misunderstood him.

“I meant to say,” he quickly explained, “that all officials are dirt and should be cleared out. Do you understand?”

She didn't really understand, yet she nodded her head, because she felt she ought to let people know that she had sense.

After the Lantern Festival, regular school life started again, only Brother-in-law had become more stern and exacting. If she made a mistake in an exercise, he would

insist on having it done over again. And he would merely say, "It's wrong," without pointing out where the mistakes were. So little I-man often had to do her exercises three, four or five times over. At mealtime if the exercise was not finished she would not be allowed to leave her seat — neither did Brother-in-law leave his seat.

"You have to use your brains more. You shouldn't rely on other people to do your thinking. Do your exercise three times, and you will find out where the mistakes are."

She felt aggrieved, for she was not used to being reprimanded. If it had been in the old days she could have made a scene and that would have been the end of the matter. But now if she threw a tantrum, Brother-in-law would merely sigh and say, "Since you have no patience, you might as well throw away your books. Maybe one can live more peacefully in ignorance. An empty brain doesn't need to think of anything." No! Better do the exercises a hundred times rather than listen to such talk!

In the summer the whole family moved back to Paiyangtsui.

People used to call Paiyangtsui the Middle Paiyang because at the mouth of the gorge there was a Lower Paiyang and in the gorge, an Upper Paiyang. These three little hamlets were separated by no more than a few hundred paces, so that villagers talking outside their doors in one of them could be heard in the others. The poorer families of the clans lived in Upper Paiyang, where there were only a few dozen tumbledown huts, with cow and pig manure spread all over the place. That was a place little I-man never visited.

The family resumed their peaceful and tranquil life. As soon as they were up in the morning, Father would

take his seat, as a rule, by the cupboard where his drugs were kept, waiting to be consulted or to measure out doses. If no patient appeared he would close his eyes and, pipe in mouth, sit there motionless. This went on day after day.

There had been a time, come to speak of it, when Father had had quite some ambition. In his young days he had subscribed forty taels of silver to the Imperial Treasury and obtained a title as a "Student of the Imperial Academy." Having thus won the right to wear the hat of rank, he was privileged to go to the capital to sit for the imperial examinations, and he did not have to kneel before the county magistrate, nor could he be flogged for offences against the law. However, it seemed that Father never actually took advantage of these privileges; for in such a little village isolated from practically all the rest of the world, whom could he get into a dispute with?

The monotonous life ruined him. He became queer and peevish. The people he found within reach were all "country boors" whom he didn't want to set eyes on. Even nodding to such people, not to mention talking to them, was something he thought amounted to an insult to himself. Meanwhile, without his actually realizing it, children were born to him one after another. Woefully he would sigh over the idleness that had wasted his youth. When his depression became unbearable he would furiously lay about his wife with his fists, as if it were she who had ruined his career; or else he would mount his horse and gallop along the mountain paths, half wishing to be thrown off and killed.

Seeking some outlet to appease his restlessness, he began practising medicine. He did not accept any cash

payment for his services, but his patients would always bring him cured meat and vegetables, chickens and ducks to express their appreciation at the time of the New Year or other festivals, in spring or after harvest; and the gifts so presented, usually far exceeded in cost the herb doses he dispensed. However, this did not succeed in delivering him from his misery, and he eventually became convinced that he and society itself were rotting away together, that there was really no place for him in life.

But in little I-man's eyes everything was quite comfortable. The family lacked nothing that was obtainable in the countryside. She had neither sorrows nor worries. It seemed that everything had been nicely provided for her on her arrival in this world. But it grieved her to see her father looking paler every day and his cough becoming worse. One morning when he was resting in a cane chair, he choked and lapsed into a coma.

He died on the twenty-fifth day of the twelfth month. This was little I-man's first experience of life's misfortunes. To meet the expenses of the funeral the family sold land yielding twenty piculs of grain a year in rent. From then on the family affairs were put into the hands of the eldest brother, Li Hsi-ju.

Sorrow gradually lessened; I-man continued her studies under her brother-in-law. From him she learned that the world is vast and that there is something to be learned even about such common things as the wind, the rain, and the rising and setting of the sun. Yet what had all this to do with her? She certainly was not prepared to exert her brain all day long.

And furthermore, was her other work so unimportant? The sheep she kept had grown big with young—one might even expect the lambs to be born in the next few