

SUN LI  
YU XIAOHUI

METROPOLIS



FOREIGN LANGUAGES PRESS





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## Preface

Literature may reflect the ethos of a country or a nation, while at the same time it can transcend the limits of time and space to most widely resonate a truly universal humanity. Literary works of art that move hearts may even inspire the compassion of strangers toward a people or country...

This "Panda Series" of books, expertly translated into English, compiles the works of well-known modern and contemporary Chinese authors around themes such as the city and the countryside, love and marriage, minority folk stories and historical legends. These works reflect the true spirit and everyday lives of the Chinese people, while widely resonating with their changing spiritual and social horizons.

Published from the 1980s, through more than 100 titles in English, this series continues to open wider the window for readers worldwide to better understand China through its new literature. Many familiar and fond readers await the latest in this "Panda Series." This publication of the "Panda Series" consolidates and looks back at earlier released literary works to draw new readers, while stirring the fond memories of old friends, to let more people share the experiences and views of the Chinese people in recent decades. We express our sincere appreciation to all authors, translators and editors who have engaged in their dedicated and meticulous work over the years to bring out these works. It is their passion and endeavor that have enabled this series to appear now in luminous distinction.

## Forward

Feng Jicai

When God created Man, he must have used the best material to make artists, for Art disdains resemblance and similarity, and an artist must be possessed of a personality different from anyone else's. A good work of art is the embodiment of an independent individual; the case is rare that a masterpiece is successfully produced in cooperation. Common knowledge tells us that cooperation harms or runs contrary to individuality; cooperation neutralizes an individual's powers of imagination and his character and his intelligence, just like a cup of fine tea being poured into a bowl of top-quality chicken soup. If this is a general truth, then the novel *Metropolis* is an extraordinary exception. For this novel, winner of a top literary prize in mainland China, is the product of successful cooperation between husband and wife.

This huge work, with its enormously complicated structure, its protracted yet controlled plot and its myriad of lifelike characters presents a vivid multi-dimensional portrait of social change and reform, tenacious struggle and hopes for the future in an old city in north China. What is particularly striking is the way in which the authors integrate so many individual stories in such a voluminous work, without forfeiting the tightness of the structure as a whole, a tightness that gives depth and breadth to this portrayal of life.

I have read Yu Xiaohui's short stories and have been struck by her sensitivity, wit, conciseness and depth. These stylistic features are found in *Metropolis*, although they are immersed in a kind of grandeur unseen in any of her previous writings. Is this grandeur a reflection of the spirit and character of the other author, Sun Li? *Metropolis* is written in concise, fluent language with a rhythm alternating between tension and relaxation. It is almost impossible to distinguish Sun Li's contribution from Yu Xiaohui's and vice versa.

Once I read by chance an article containing an anecdote about the two authors: Sun Li and Yu Xiaohui were in the same class during their university days. Yu Xiaohui was an acknowledged talent in the university, whose compositions were often cited by teachers as model essays for the class, whereas Sun Li's were frequently criticized or ignored on account of his unacceptable plots and fantastic ideas. Sun Li was not convinced by this criticism and proposed that he and Yu Xiaohui should cooperate in writing. Quite unexpectedly, the idea was a huge success. The essay they wrote embodied the boldness of the male and the tenderness of the female; it was not a simple composition reflecting the strength of two young people but an harmonious blend of the charms of a single personality. This was the beginning of cooperation between the two authors, and it led to love and a life together.

They have co-authored several important books including *May All People Be Happy Forever*, *Honesty* and *Choice*. However, life had not always been easy. Sun Li has been tortured with paralysis and suffers

frequent relapses. The entire burden of housework has therefore fallen upon Yu Xiaohui, who, in addition, has to attend to her sick husband. In spite of their many difficulties they work together to set their experiences down on paper. Is this because a hard life aids co-authorship, or is it that the writing brush sealed to their common faith gives them the power to forge ahead? I was deeply moved when I heard that the couple used to write in turns at a small wooden table. I should not be surprised if this form of cooperation between husband and wife, a kind of giving birth, is the only one of its kind in the history of literary creation.

Two souls come together to create one soul,  
And the soul is presented to you in your hands.

August, 1991



## Characters in Order of Appearance

Gao Bonian	Secretary of the Municipal Party Committee, highest functionary of Metropolis
Yan Honghuan	Mayor of Metropolis
Xu Ke	Predecessor of Gao Bonian, now a member of the Central Advisory Commission
Xu Yuanchao	Xu Ke's son; a ne'er-do-well
Gao Yuan	Gao Bonian's oldest son by his first wife; a soldier
Shen Ping	Gao Bonian's second wife
Gao Di	Younger son of Gao Bonian
Gao Jie	Spoilt daughter of Gao Bonian and Shen Ping
Zhang Yimin	Gao Bonian's secretary, Gao Jie's fiancé, and brother of Zhang Yilan
Zhang Yilan	Zhang Yimin's younger sister, a beautiful but shrewish young woman
Chen Baozhu	A ne'er-do-well, an ex-convict
Yang Yuanzhen	Gao Bonian's first wife, a kindly old woman
Yang Jianhua	Yang Yuanzhen's son by Gao Bonian; an educated labourer
Xiao Meng	or Mengmeng, his son, about eight years old
Shi Chunsheng	Yang Jianhua's friend, Chinese

Liu Ruochun	manager of a joint venture hotel Vice-mayor of Metropolis; a middle aged intellectual
Liu Ruoming	Ne'er-do-well younger brother of Liu Ruochen
Liu Ruofei	Embittered younger sister of Liu Ruochen, former wife of Yang Jianhua
Xiao Ling	A pretty young woman in love with Yang Jianhua
Old Brigade Leader	An irascible old labourer
Old Man Wan	Father of Wan Jiafu; a not entirely honest street peddler
Wan Jiafu	An ex-school teacher convicted of sexual assault, a street peddler
Luo Xiaowei	A young pop singer, a free spirit
Xiao Zhu	Earnest young secretary of Yan Honghuan
Ren Sujuan	Devoted wife of Yan Honghuan
Yan Xiaosong	Spoilt son of Yan Honghuan
Aunt Qin	A maid servant in the home of Liu Ruochen
Xu Lili	An architect, daughter of Xu Ke, and wife of Liu Ruochen
Wang Min	Estranged wife of Shi Chunshung
Yang Dehe	Faithful war-time comrade of Gao Bonian
Huang Jionghui	A famous singer and Gao Jie's seducer
Kang Kejian	A district chief and trusted confidante of Yan Honghuan

<b>Xu Lili</b>	<b>An architect; daughter of Xu ke, and wife of Liu Ruochen</b>
<b>Wang Min</b>	<b>Estranged wife of Shi Chunshung</b>
<b>Yang Dehe</b>	<b>Faithful war-time comrade of Gao Bonian</b>
<b>Huang Jionghui</b>	<b>A famous singer and Gao Jie's seducer</b>
<b>Kang Kejian</b>	<b>A district chief, and trusted confi- dante of Yan Honghuan</b>

## Chapter 1

A stranger would never guess that Metropolis began on Pudian Street, and the hundred and fifty square kilometres of urban sprawl grew out of that mean street. As the population grew and the city prospered, the street became so squalid and over-crowded that people living in the newer areas came to regard it as a blemish on their gleaming Metropolis. They were ashamed of it.

The Zhonghua District with all its glitter became the centre of the city. After Western guns blew open the gates of China, rich merchants rushed in on the heels of the withdrawing armies, eager to settle along the banks of the Yueya River.

They built the ten mile long esplanade on the river bank, and lined it with a row of imposing buildings; department stores, banks, hotels. It was an indication that the foreigners meant to stay. They never dreamt that within half a century the Chinese would take it away from them lock, stock and barrel. The department stores, banks and hotels became places where Chinese came and went at will. That is not to say the ordinary citizen spent his day window shopping, eating in the restaurants, and going in and out of banks with briefcases full of cash. Nevertheless, the area was not fit to be the heart of Metropolis.

The population of the New Town regarded them-

selves as the *creme de la creme*. They had the best libraries, hospitals, theatres, institutions of higher learning. Moreover, New Town was founded after the establishment of the People's Republic. Because it represents the new order, the populace regard it as the true heart of Metropolis. Moreover, since both the Municipal Party Committee and the Municipal Government are located there, it is the undisputed nerve centre of Metropolis.

However, there are still those who disagree, and insist the true heart of Metropolis is in its south-west corner.

If you follow the broadest street of the New Town westward along Shanghai Road, you will eventually reach a suburb known as the Western District. Turn into Wuchang Road and head south, and you come to the local "Wall Street" or Xiamen Road.

The street was re-named, Xiamen Road after the founding of the People's Republic. Along it houses built in the German, Japanese, Italian, French, British, American, Russian and Austrian styles can still be seen. It may seem strange that so many nationalities had once congregated in one area. It is said that the foreign settlers had been advised by a geomancer that this was hallowed ground. The waters of the spring that ran through it would protect the drinker from all manner of evil, and endow him with a long, vigorous life. However, as soon as the ceremonial cannons boomed from the rampart of Tiananmen in 1949, the villas here changed hands. For the last thirty odd years the area had become the residence of high officials. Although it is far removed from the geographic centre of Metropolis, people regarded Xiamen Road with awe.

China has been ruled by personal power for thousands of years. Therefore, the true heart of the city must be wherever power resides.

To find the nucleus of the city you must go further west along Xiamen Road until you reach a four-metre high grey wall. Follow the wall until it turns south, and you will see a heavy iron gate. Beyond the gate is a grove of poplars. Three paths fan out through the trees to three distinctive two-storied villas. The compound is 222 Xiamen Road. Seventy years ago, three Italians built these villas and called them the Lihua Villas. In the intervening years the residents have changed several times. Presently, they are the residences of Gao Bonian, secretary of the Municipal Party Committee, Mayor Yan Honghuan, and former secretary of the Municipal Party Committee and now member of the Central Advisory Committee Xu Ke. Xu Ke had lived here for thirty-five years. When he was moved to the Central Advisory Committee, the villas was temporarily assigned to his son Xu Yuanchao. Thus, it is clear that 222 Xiamen Road has a special significance to Metropolis by the sea. And here our story begins.

## 2

Dawn.

As sunlight pierced through a light veil of mist, the world shimmered and the heart quivered with expectation.

Gao Bonian rose at his usual hour. He was a handsome man and a creature of habit. After brushing his teeth, he rubbed his face hard with a dry towel until it was red and tingling. Then he ran a wooden comb through his hair. The strong, rhythmic strokes soon

made his scalp as red and tingling as his face. Then he gently combed his greying hair backward. There were few men of his age who took such pains with their appearance and health. Four years ago Gao Bonian was different. He did not eat fish, or shrimp, sea cucumber or crab, kelp, clams or frogs. In fact he refused any marine products, animal or vegetable. The smell alone turned his stomach. People used to say he has a pauper's complex. He came from Hebei Province which was arid, where there were no rivers. Few villagers saw marine products let alone tasted them. He had his first taste of fish when he was seven years old. He stole it from the feed bowl of the master's cat and took it where no one would see him. Although its smell made his head spin, he stuffed it into his mouth anyway. Swallowing it was like forcing down a bunch of needles, that stuck in his throat, making him cough and vomit. He thought he would die. After that the mere mention of seafood made him ill. Even after he became Bureau Chief and started his climb to Secretary of the Municipal Party Committee and attended many official banquets, he still could not overcome his loathing of seafood. The doctors warned him his eating habits would result in a shortage of iodine, potassium, sodium, magnesium and other elements essential to the system. He believed them but did not take their advice to heart. He had no fear of death. During the war, he was always in the vanguard. He maintained because he had overcome the fear of death, bullets avoided him.

"Since I'm not concerned about dying, why would I worry about deficiencies?" he scoffed. He was even less aware of his appearance. When he first came

to the city he wore cloth-soled shoes. When he couldn't find them on the market any more, he reluctantly switched to rubber soles, but the tops had to be cloth. In all his life he had owned only one pair of leather shoes, which he bought to attend the Party's Eighth National Congress, because it was an occasion that required some semblance of formality. However, during the sub-committee deliberations he discovered some of the leaders were wearing cloth shoes. The next day he discarded the leather shoes and never wore them again.

In the last four years Gao Bonian changed. Even his daughter teased him that he was for following the fashions.

He read medical books, and started taking better care of himself. It was not a question of following fads. He was discovering that his body parts were not functioning as they used to.

Then he began to work on his appearance. People were saying he looked old, though he didn't feel old. Some kind soul suggested his outmoded clothes made him old. That seemed reasonable. In these times of reform, leaders must set the pace. Gao Bonian took giant strides. He allowed his brush-cut hair to grow, and replaced his drab Chinese tunic suit with Western style suits. The changes were startling and irreversible. However, he balked at leather shoes. Somehow his feet would not adapt to them. He reasoned that clothes served the man, but didn't make the man. Therefore, cloth shoes would have to go with Western suits.

The garden was quiet in the early morning. He took a deep breath, filling his lungs with the fragrance of grass and flowers. Oxygen filled his lungs and expelled



the stale air. He felt instantly invigorated.

He usually practised *taijiquan* every morning on the lawn in front of the house. This morning Gao Bonian skipped all his usual morning regime. He stepped out of his house in his slippers without even brushing his teeth. The world around him sparkled, but he could not dispel the oppressiveness in his chest.

Lately the doctor had warned him his blood pressure was too high, and his heartbeat was erratic. He must have proper rest, sufficient sleep; not get over tired or agitated. It was sensible advice but impracticable.

He couldn't help being agitated. He had passed a sleepless night. He refused to take sleeping pills because he needed solutions to problems more than he needed a means of putting himself into a stupor.

Yesterday he received a letter from his eldest son Gao Yuan, who was serving with the army on the Laoshan front, asking for a photograph of his natural mother. He had left the letter on his desk. When his wife Shen Ping saw it her face turned to chalk. He could hear her crying in the study next door, as he lay in bed. He did not try to comfort her. Shen Ping felt she had already lost a son even if Gao Yuan came back alive from the war.

Gao Bonian was in a bind. He could not comply with Gao Yuan's request, because he did not have a photograph of his first wife. Nor did he have the means of getting one.

In the afternoon, his daughter Gao Jie came home early from work and went straight to her room. When the maid went up to see if she wanted anything, she asked for eggs, milk and spareribs. When the food was brought to her, she refused to eat. The maid went to