



The Family

by Pa Chin

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FOREIGN LANGUAGES PRESS
PEKING

First Edition 1958
Third Edition 1978

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Printed in the People's Republic of China

A Word from the Author

I wrote *The Family* forty-six years ago. Since then, at various times, I have written many prologues, epilogues and articles stating my views of the novel. Mostly I described how I had come to write it, and what had been my thoughts and emotions. Only rarely did I mention the story's weaknesses.

For twenty years I was an author in semi-feudal, semi-colonial China. I wrote millions of words. But even the best of my books were like the prescriptions of a not very competent physician — I could see the evils of the old society, but had no cures. Thirty or forty years ago readers wrote to me, asking me to point out a solution. But my novels, filled with lamentations and groans, with characters stumbling helplessly to their deaths, cast a pall of long, cold night over my readers' hearts.

Many a time I have heard people say that they liked my books, at first. But when they wanted to continue onward, they couldn't find in them what they were seeking. They could only toss them aside and advance without them.

The People's Literature Publishing House asked for permission to re-issue *The Family* and I agreed. I thought it might give readers a better understanding of feudal society. *The Family* is a true story, in that its characters represent people I loved or loathed. Some of the events I personally witnessed or experienced. As I said previously: "I don't write novels in order to be an author. It is my past that forces me to take up my pen." Writing *The Family* was like opening memory's grave. Even as a child I frequently witnessed the ruination of the lives of lovable young people who were driven to a tragic end. When writing this novel, I suffered with them and, like them, struggled in the grip of a demon's talons. It is replete with my deep love, my intense hate.

Of course a novel like this has various shortcomings. My opposition to feudalism wasn't thorough enough. I didn't come to grips with the fundamental problem. I didn't expose the cruel exploitation of the peasants by the landlord class. I sympathized too much with the characters I criticized. At times I let my personal feelings twist the realities of life. . . . All this I admit. But there's no need for me to be long-winded. My present-day readers will reach their own conclusions about a novel first published in 1931. Except for correcting a few misprints here and there I have made no changes in this latest edition.

During the days of the "gang of four," *The Family* was labelled "a poisonous weed" and condemned to oblivion. Fortunately, Chairman Hua Kuo-feng and the Party Central Committee headed by him smashed the gang and rescued China's arts. Were it not for that, this novel would not again have seen the light of day.

Pa Chin

August 9, 1977

I

THE wind was blowing hard; snowflakes, floating like cotton fluff from a ripped quilt, drifted down aimlessly. Layers of white were building up at the foot of the walls on both sides of the streets, providing broad borders for their dark muddy centres.

Pedestrians and sedan-chair porters struggled against the wind and snow, but to no avail. They looked weary, and the snowfall was becoming heavier. Snow filled the sky, falling everywhere — on umbrellas, on the sedan-chairs, on the reed capes of the chair carriers, on the faces of the pedestrians.

The wind buffeted the umbrellas in all directions; it blew one or two out of their owners' hands. Howling mournfully, the wind joined with the sound of footsteps in the snow to form a strange, irritating music. This snowstorm will rule the world a long, long time, it seemed to warn the people on the streets, the bright warm sun of spring will never return. . . .

It was nearly evening, but the street lamps had not yet been lit. Everything was gradually disappearing into a pall of grey. Water and mud filled the streets. The air was icy cold. Only one thought sustained the people struggling through these dismal surroundings — they would soon be back in the warmth and brightness of their homes.

"Walk faster, Chueh-hui, or we'll be late for dinner," said a youth of eighteen. He carried an umbrella in one hand and held up the skirt of his cotton-padded gown with the other. His round face was red with cold as he turned around to speak to his brother; a pair of gold-rimmed spectacles rested on the bridge of his nose.

Chueh-hui, the boy walking behind him, although the same size and wearing the same kind of clothes, was a bit younger. His face was thinner, his eyes were very bright.

"No, we won't," Chueh-hui replied. "We're almost there." But he quickened his pace, mud splashing the legs of his trousers.

The two brothers soon entered a quieter street. Here the oil lamps had been lit, and their dull gleam, casting pale shadows of the lamp posts on the snow, looked particularly lonely in the frigid windy atmosphere. Few persons were abroad, and these walked quickly, leaving their footprints in the snow and silently vanishing. The deep imprints rested exhausted, without even a thought of moving, until new feet pressed down upon them. Then they uttered low sighs and were transformed into queer shapes; on the interminably long, white-mantled street the regular patterns of footprints became only large and small dark shapeless holes.

A row of residential compounds, with large solid wood gates painted black, stood motionless in the icy gale. Pairs of eternally mute stone lions crouched outside their entrances — one on each side. Opened gates gave the appearance of the mouths of fantastic beasts. Within were dark caverns; what was inside them, no one could see.

Each of these residences had a long history; some had changed owners several times. Each had its secrets. When the black veneer peeled off the big gates, they were painted again. But no matter what changes took place, the secrets were kept. No outsider was ever permitted to know them.

In the middle of this street, before the gates of an especially large compound, the two brothers halted. They scuffed their leather shoes on the flagstones, shook the snow from their clothing, and let their robes fall straight. Holding their umbrellas, they strode in, the sound of their footsteps being quickly swallowed up in the dark cavern of the long entrance-way. Silence again descended on the street.

The outside of this compound resembled the others in that a pair of crouching stone lions flanked its entrance and two big red paper lanterns hung from the eaves of its gate. What made the place distinctive was the pair of large rectangular stone vats placed before the gate.

On the walls on either side of the entrance, hung vertically, were red veneered plaques inscribed with black ideographs.

Reading from top to bottom, first the right board then the left, the wishful motto was set forth: *Benevolent rulers, happy family; long life, good harvests.*

II

ALTHOUGH the wind had died down completely, the air was still as cold as before. Night came, but did not bring darkness. The sky remained grey, the ground was paved with snow. In the large snow-covered courtyard, pots of golden plum blossoms were ranged on either side of a raised stone-flagged path. Coated with frosty white, the branches were like lovely jade.

Advancing along this path, Chueh-min, the elder of the two brothers, had just reached the steps of the one-storey wing on the left side of the courtyard, and was about to cross the threshold, when a girl's voice called:

"Second Young Master, Third Young Master, you've come back just in time. Dinner has just started. Hurry. We have guests."

The speaker was the bondmaid Ming-feng, a girl of sixteen. She wore her hair in a long single braid down her back. Her trim young figure was encased in a padded jacket of blue cloth. When she smiled, dimples appeared in the firm healthy flesh of her oval face. She regarded the brothers innocently with bright sparkling eyes, quite free of any timidity or shyness.

Standing behind Chueh-min, Chueh-hui smiled at her.

"Right. We'll get rid of these umbrellas and be there directly," Chueh-min retorted. Without giving her another glance, he entered the door.

"Ming-feng, who are the guests?" Chueh-hui called from the steps.

"Mrs. Chang and Miss Chin. Hurry up." Ming-feng turned and went into the main building.

Chueh-hui smiled after her retreating figure until the door closed behind her. Then he entered his own room, bumping into his brother, who was coming out.

"What were you and Ming-feng talking about that kept you so long?" Chueh-min demanded. "Get a move on! The food will be all gone if you delay much longer."

"I'll go with you now. I don't have to change my clothes. They're not very wet." Chueh-hui tossed his umbrella on the floor.

"Sloppy! Why can't you do things right? The old saying is certainly true — It's easier to move a mountain than change a man's character!" Though he spoke critically, Chueh-min still wore a pleasant expression. He picked up the dripping umbrella, opened it and carefully placed it on the floor again.

"What can I do?" said Chueh-hui, watching with a grin. "That's the way I am. But I thought you were in a hurry. You're the one who's holding us up."

"You've got a sharp tongue. Nobody can out-talk you!" Chueh-min walked out as if in a great huff.

Chueh-hui knew his brother as well as Chueh-min knew him, so he wasn't alarmed. Smiling, he followed behind Chueh-min, his mind filled with the pretty bondmaid. But his thoughts of her vanished at the scene which met his eye as he entered the main building.

Seated around a square table were six people. On the side farthest from the door — the seats of honour — sat his step-mother Madam Chou and his aunt — his father's sister — Mrs. Chang. On the left sat his cousin Chin — Mrs. Chang's daughter — and Jui-chueh, wife of his eldest brother Chueh-hsin. On the near side sat Chueh-hsin and their young sister Shu-hua. The two seats on the right side were vacant.

Chueh-hui and his brother bowed to Mrs. Chang and greeted Chin, then slipped into the two empty seats. A maid quickly served them bowls of rice.

"Why are you so late today?" Madam Chou, holding her rice bowl, asked them kindly. "If your aunt hadn't come for a visit we would have finished eating long ago."

"We had no classes this afternoon, but Mr. Chu wanted us to rehearse our play," Chueh-min replied. "That's what took us so long."

"It must be cold outside after that heavy snowfall," said Mrs. Chang, half concerned, half for the sake of politeness. "Did you take sedan-chairs home?"

"No, we walked. We never take sedan-chairs!" said Chueh-hui quickly.

"Chueh-hui would never let it be said that he rode in a sedan-chair. He's a humanitarian," Chueh-hsin explained with a mocking grin.

Everyone laughed. Angry and embarrassed, Chueh-hui kept his head down, concentrating on his food.

"It's not actually very cold outside, and the wind has stopped," Chueh-min replied courteously to his aunt. "We chatted as we walked, in fact we felt quite comfortable."

"When is your school going to put on that play you mentioned?" Chin asked him. She was a few months younger than Chueh-min. Chin was considered the most beautiful of all the girl relatives of the Kao family, and the most vivacious. She had entered a girls' school at an early age, and was now a third-year student in the provincial Normal School for Girls.

"Probably when the next spring term begins. There's only a little more than a week of this term left. When does your winter vacation start?"

"We started last week. They say the school is short of money, that's why we were let off early this year." Chin had already finished eating and put down her bowl.

"All the provincial educational funds are being used for military purposes. Every school is in the same fix. The only difference with us is that our principal is bound by contracts with our foreign teachers. They get their salaries whether we hold classes or not. We cut our losses by holding class, so to speak. . . . I hear our principal has some connection with the governor, so our money is not so tight."

Chueh-min also put his bowl down. Ming-feng handed him a damp face-cloth.

"As long as you can go to school, what's the difference?" Chueh-hsin said.

"What's the name of their school? I've forgotten," Mrs. Chang asked Chin.

"Mama has a terrible memory," Chin said pleasantly. "They're in the Foreign Languages School. You've already asked several times."

"You're quite right, Chin. I'm getting old; my memory's failing me," Mrs. Chang smiled. "I won a trick at mahjong today and forgot to take it."

By now everyone had finished eating and had wiped their faces with the damp face-cloths. "Let's go into the next room," Madam Chou proposed, pushing back her chair and rising. The others also stood up, and all walked out together.

In the rear of the group, Chueh-min said to Chin in a low voice, "After next summer vacation our school is going to accept girl students."

Chin glowed with pleasure. She fixed her large limpid eyes on him as if he had given her the best possible news.

"Really?" she asked, a trifle doubtfully. She was afraid Chueh-min might be teasing her.

"'Really.' Have I ever lied to you?" Chueh-min looked at his younger brother, standing beside him. "If you don't believe me, you can ask Chueh-hui."

"It's not that I don't believe you, it's just that this good news came too suddenly," Chin replied with an excited laugh.

"It's true all right. But whether the plan can be put through or not is another question," said Chueh-hui. "Szechuan has entirely too many feudal moralists, and their influence is very strong. They're sure to oppose this thing. Boys and girls in the same school? That's something they never thought of in their wildest dreams!" Chueh-hui grew heated.

"It doesn't matter about them. As long as our principal sticks to his guns, we can do it," Chueh-min retorted, thinking to comfort Chin. "Our principal says if no girls have the courage to register, he'll get his wife to put her name down!"

"I'm going to be the first to apply!" Chin said firmly.

"Chin, why don't you come in here?" Mrs. Chang called from the next room. "Why are you still standing there by the door?"

"Ask your mother if you can come to our room," Chueh-min urged Chin quietly. "I'll tell you the whole story in detail."

Chin nodded, then walked over to her mother and said a few words in her ear. Mrs. Chang laughed. "Very well, but don't be too long."

As the girl and the two brothers were leaving the main building, Chin could hear the clicking of the ivory pieces on the wooden table. She knew that her mother was good for at least four games of mahjong.

III

"THIS term we finished reading *Treasure Island*. Next term we're going to do Tolstoy's *Resurrection*," Chueh-min said to Chin with a pleased smile as they walked down the steps. "Our Chinese literature teacher is going to be the man who wrote that article, 'Cannibal Confucian Morality' in the *New Youth* magazine! Isn't that wonderful?"

"You're really lucky," cried Chin, her face flushing with admiration. "We always get old-fashioned scholars for our 'lit' teachers, the kind whose favourite texts are books like *Selected Ancient Chinese Essays*. As for English, we've been on *Chambers' English Reader* for the past few years and now I hear we'll be switching to *Tales from Shakespeare* — always the same dull old antiques! . . . I'd give anything if your school would lift its ban on girl students right now and let me transfer."

"What's wrong with *Chambers' English Reader*?" Chueh-hui queried sarcastically. "It's already been translated into Chinese under the title of *Smiles from the Poets*!"

Chin gave him a severe glance. "You're always joking. We're talking seriously."

"All right, I'll shut up," said Chueh-hui with a grin. "You two go ahead and talk." He slowed down to let Chueh-min and Chin enter the wing first, while he paused in the doorway and gazed around the courtyard.

Lights were burning brightly in both the left and right sections of the main building as well as in the wing opposite the one in which the two brothers lived. Mahjong tiles clicked in the left section of the main building. All sides of the courtyard were alive with voices. How beautiful the snow-covered garden was, how pure! Chueh-hui wanted to shout for joy, to laugh loud and clear. He flung his arms wide, greeting the broad vistas before him. He felt free, unrestrained.

He remembered how the Old Sea Dog whose role he played in their school's dramatization of *Treasure Island* pounded the table at the inn and roared for rum. The gusto of it all surged up within him. Throwing back his head he shouted:

"Ming-feng, bring three cups of tea!"

There was a call of acknowledgement, and a few minutes later the girl emerged from the left section of the main building with the tea.

"Why only two cups? I distinctly asked for three!" Chueh-hui was still shouting and Ming-feng, as she came up to him, was startled. Her hands trembled, spilling some of the tea.

"I've only got two hands," she said, smiling.

"Clever, aren't you? You could have brought a tray." Chueh-hui laughed. "All right, take these in to Miss Chin and Second Young Master." He pressed back against the left side of the doorway to let her go by.

After a moment, hearing her returning footsteps, Chueh-hui planted his legs wide in the doorway and stood facing the courtyard. She came up quietly behind him and, after a pause, said:

"Third Young Master, let me pass." Her voice was not very loud.

Either Chueh-hui didn't hear, or he pretended not to; in any event he continued to stand where he was.

"Ming-feng . . . Ming-feng!" It was the voice of Madam Chou, Chueh-hui's stepmother, calling from the main building.

"Let me go; Madam Chou wants me," Ming-feng pleaded. "She'll scold me if I'm late."

"What if she does?" Chueh-hui turned and smiled. "Just tell her I asked you to do something for me."

"She won't believe me. If I make her angry, she'll give me the devil after the guests leave." The girl's voice was low, audible only to Chueh-hui.

The voice of another girl, Chueh-hui's sister Shu-hua, came ringing across the courtyard. "Ming-feng, Madam wants you to put tobacco in the water-pipes!"

Chueh-hui stepped aside and Ming-feng hurried past.

Shu-hua came out of the main building. "Where have you been?" she demanded of Ming-feng. "Why don't you answer when you're called?"

"I brought some tea for Third Young Master," Ming-feng answered, hanging her head. Her voice was emotionless.

"Bringing tea shouldn't take all that time! You're not a mute. Why didn't you answer when I called you?" Shu-hua was only fourteen, but she had already learned how to scold the bondmaids, just like her elders, and she did it very naturally. "Now get in there. If Madam Chou knew you deliberately refused to answer, she'd tell you a thing or two."

Shu-hua turned and went back into the house. Ming-feng quietly followed her.

Chueh-hui had heard every syllable of this exchange, and the words cut him like the blows of a whip. His face burned with shame. It was he who had brought this on Ming-feng. His sister's attitude sickened him. He had wanted to come forward and defend Ming-feng, but something had held him back. He had stood silently in the dark, watching, as though it had nothing to do with him.

Alone in the courtyard, he could still see Ming-feng's lovely face. It was subservient, uncomplaining. Like the sea, it accepted everything, swallowed everything, without a sound.

From his room, another feminine voice reached his ear, and he pictured another girl. Her face was also beautiful, but it reflected very different kinds of emotion. Resistance, ardour, determination, refusal to submit to the least injustice. The ex-

pressions on the two faces were manifestations of two different ways of life, of two different fates. Somehow, even though the latter girl enjoyed a much greater abundance of happiness and gaiety, more of his sympathy and affection lay with the former.

The face of the first girl again loomed large in his mind, drawing him with its docile, beseeching expression. He wanted to comfort her, to offer her some kind of consolation. But what could he give her? Her fate was predetermined when she came into the world. Many other girls in her circumstances had suffered the same fate. Of course, she couldn't be any exception. Chueh-hui wanted to cry out against the unfairness of this fate, to fight it, to change it. Suddenly, a strange thought came to him. After a moment, a faint laugh escaped him.

"It could never be. That sort of thing just can't be done," he said half-aloud.

Ah, if it only could, he mused. But when he thought of the consequences that might ensue, his courage left him. It's only a dream, he said to himself with a wry smile, only a dream.

Dream or no, the idea fascinated him and he was reluctant to abandon it. Suppose she had Chin's social status? he wondered.

There'd be no question about it! he told himself positively. For the moment it seemed to him that she really was a girl like Chin and that his relationship with her was quite ordinary.

Then he laughed, laughed at himself. Preposterous! . . . Anyhow, who says I love her? She's just fun to be with.

Gradually Ming-feng's submissive face was replaced in Chueh-hui's mind by the stubborn, ardent visage of the other girl. But soon this too faded.

"Can a man remain at home while the Huns are still undefeated?" Although he didn't usually care for that hoary aphorism, it now seemed to contain a miraculous solution to all his problems. He boldly shouted it aloud. His "Huns" were not foreign invaders, nor was he intending to take up sword and spear to slay them on a battlefield. What the cry meant to him was that a real man ought to cast off family ties; he should go out into the world and perform great deeds. As to what kind of deeds these should be, he had only the vaguest notion.

Chueh-hui strode into the room with the heroic quotation still on his lips.

"He's gone crazy again!" Chueh-min, standing beside his desk, had looked round at the sound of Chueh-hui's voice, then laughed and addressed this remark to Chin, who was seated in a cane armchair.

Chin glanced at Chueh-hui. "Don't you know he's a great hero?" she asked with an amused smile.

"More likely than not, he's the Old Sea Dog. The Old Sea Dog was also a great hero!" Chueh-min said, laughing. Chin laughed too.

"Anyhow, the Old Sea Dog was a lot better than Dr. Liversey," Chueh-hui retorted warmly, somewhat angered by their laughter. "Dr. Liversey was only one of the gentry."

"Now what in the world do you mean by that?" Chueh-min queried, half surprised, half in jest. "Aren't you also going to be one of the gentry?"

"No, I'm not!" Chueh-hui cried hotly. "Just because our grandfather and father are members of the gentry, does that mean we, also, have to become gentry?" He clamped his lips together and waited for his brother to reply.

Chueh-min had only been joking at first, but now, seeing that Chueh-hui was really angry, he tried to find words to calm him. For the moment, however, he could think of nothing appropriate, and could only stare at Chueh-hui in stupefaction. Chin, seated off to one side, was observing the two brothers, but she did not speak.

"I've had enough of this kind of life!" Chueh-hui could contain himself no longer. "Why does Chueh-hsin sigh all day long? Isn't it because he can't stand being one of the gentry, because he can't stand the oppressive atmosphere of this gentry household? You know it is. . . . We've got four generations under one roof, only one generation less than the 'ideal' family, but never a day goes by without open quarrels and secret wrangles. They're all trying to grab a bit more of the family property. . . ."

Chueh-hui was almost choking with rage. He had a lot more to say but he couldn't get the words out. What was infuriating

him, in fact, was not his eldest brother's fate, but that of the girl whose expression was so docile. He felt he was being cut off from her by an invisible high wall, and this wall was his gentry family. It prevented him from attaining the object of his desire; therefore he hated it.

Chueh-min looked at his brother's red face and flashing eyes. He came up and grasped Chueh-hui's hand, then patted him on the shoulder.

"I shouldn't have teased you," he said in an agitated voice. "You're right. Your unhappiness is my unhappiness. . . . We two will always stand side by side. . . ." He still didn't know about the girl in Chueh-hui's heart.

Chueh-hui, quickly mollified, mutely nodded his head.

Chin stood up and walked over to them. She addressed Chueh-hui in a voice that trembled. "I shouldn't have laughed at you either. I want to stick together with both of you, always. I have to fight too. My condition is even worse than yours."

They looked at her. There was a melancholy light in her lovely eyes; her usual vivaciousness was gone. A troubled expression bespoke her inner struggle. The boys had never seen her like this before, but they knew at once what was disturbing her. She had spoken correctly—her condition was much worse than theirs. They were touched by this melancholy, so rare in her. They were ready to sacrifice themselves completely, if only it would bring this girl's wishes to an earlier fulfillment. This was just an idle hope, for there was nothing specific they could do, but they felt it was their duty to help her.

The boys immediately forgot their own problems and thought only of Chin.

"Don't worry," Chueh-min assured her, "we'll figure something out for you. I'm a firm believer in 'where there's a will, there's a way.' Remember when we first wanted to go to a public school? *Yeb-yeb*¹ was dead set against it. But in the end we won out."

Chin steadied herself with one hand on the desk. She gazed at them as if out of a dream.

¹ Grandfather.