

RACING TOWARDS VICTORY

STORIES FROM THE KOREAN FRONT.



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FOREIGN LANGUAGES PRESS

PEKING 1954

First Edition March 1954

Printed in the People's Republic of China

FOREWORD

The victory achieved by the Korean People's Army and the Chinese People's Volunteers in resisting American aggression is an event of world significance.

The seven stories in this book are all about the war in Korea. Their authors are commanders and fighters of the Chinese People's Volunteers, or reporters attached to the Volunteers. This book, therefore, speaks mainly of the life and struggles of the Chinese People's Volunteers. We must remember, however, that the activities of the Chinese People's Volunteers are inseparable from those of the heroic Korean People's Army and the Korean people.

The stories in this book, it is hoped, will enable the reader to appreciate the heroism of the Chinese People's Volunteers. They will also enable him to realize that these men and women are imbued with the nobility of a patriotic spirit as well as internationalism. He will understand the profound friendship that has bound the people of China and the people of Korea, in their common struggle to resist foreign aggression in defence of both national independence and world peace.

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ARMY NURSE CHEN MING

Hsu Kang

It was a bitter winter night. The cold pierced everything, like so many sharp needles. The earth was frozen, dead. A young army nurse was sitting on the threshold of a thatched cottage, holding a rifle but swaying from side to side, because, sitting there, she had dozed off.

The girl, Chen Ming by name, was a nurse in a field hospital of the Chinese People's Volunteers. When the hospital unit moved forward with the advancing Volunteers after they broke through the Chingchon River line, the superintendent had ordered her to remain in a village with eleven wounded men whom they had not yet had time to send back to China. For nine days she worked non-stop, cooking for the wounded and changing their dressings by day and standing on guard at night, and was able to snatch only two or three hours of sleep a day.

She was nodding in her sleep when she suddenly heard the horn of a car which was presently seen heading for the village. It came to a halt and out jumped the superintendent. She was thrilled, certain that he had come back in person to fetch the

wounded. But he walked up and pointed an accusing finger at her, thundering, "Chen Ming! You have not fulfilled your task! Why are the wounded left starving?" Startled, she jumped to her feet and opened her eyes; but the superintendent and his car had disappeared. It was pitch-dark, except for the glimmer of snow in front of the cottage.

"For shame! Fancy dozing off the moment you sit down!" she murmured, and straightway rubbed her face with a handful of snow. That woke her up completely, and her immediate problem rose to her mind again.

Before he went away, the superintendent had promised Cheng Ming to send within five days at the latest a doctor along in a car to treat the wounded. But ten days had passed without anybody showing up. The food left in the hospital had been finished two days ago, so that she had had to borrow grain from the village chairman, who generously helped her out. But today—yes, what about today? Looking eastward at the brightening horizon, the food problem weighed on her more and more heavily. "There is nothing for it but to see the chairman again," she concluded rather helplessly.

At dawn, Chen Ming went into the cottage to wake up the wounded one after another. As a precaution against air raids, she always carried them one at a time on her back up a slope into a sheltered cave. This morning she started her trips while it was barely light, and by the time the sun rose from behind the mountain she had managed to carry nine

of the wounded in rapid succession, but she was panting with exhaustion. When the ninth man was safe in the cave and she was resting on a rock, two enemy Mustangs swept low overhead, with their hideous whine, and began to circle over the village. After two or three passes, the second plane dipped and strafed the ground with its machine-guns.

Chen Ming looked uneasily at the cottage where two of the wounded still were. Their faces flashed before her.

One of them was Li Kan, a tall, broad-shouldered machine-gunner. His feet had been frost-bitten, with the result that gangrene developed in the affected parts. When he first came to the hospital, his feet, discoloured by frostbite, were swollen enormously, and he had lost one toe. Chen Ming massaged his feet day and night, and before long the gangrene was checked. Every time she came to him, he would look at her intently with deep gratitude in his eyes, and one day he suddenly said, "My feet are getting better, but you've worn yourself to a shadow!"

The other was Young Sung, wounded in the shin and hip. The down on his cheeks had never known a razor. In fact, he was the youngest of the wounded, and his daily ways revealed the bashfulness of a country lad. Once, when Chen Ming changed his bloodstained clothes for him, the lad felt so embarrassed that even his bloodless cheeks flushed. On the very day he was invalided, his regiment had sent a message through the commissariat general, asking the hospital to notify Young

Sung that he had been awarded the Second Class Merit. When Chen Ming told him this, she asked, "How did you win the merit?"

At once excited and embarrassed, Young Sung mumbled, "It's nothing much. I merely charged together with the others, and got a little ahead of them. Really nothing to speak of."

Chen Ming was going to get up and rush to the cottage, regardless of danger, when another plane dived and dropped two black objects; and when these exploded, flames burst out in the street and on the two rows of cottages. She could hear nothing but one explosion after another. "Napalm!" She rushed up to the fire.

The cottage where the wounded stayed had already caught fire. Flames were blazing on the thatched roof and wooden framework of the house. A huge column of smoke was billowing up, and the wood was crackling as it burned. A swift leap carried her into the burning house, where the smoke made her eyes water and her throat choke with coughing; but she saw Li Kan and Young Sung, both driven into a corner by the flames. She turned round, offering her back to Li Kan, the nearer of the two, but he pushed her away, pointing to Young Sung. Intending to carry both of them to safety in any case, she immediately helped Young Sung onto her back and, staggering and crawling by turns, got out of the cottage to deposit her load in a nearby gully. Losing not a second, she raced back; but by now the fire was burning more fiercely than ever. Several times she rushed to the door,

only to be repulsed by the flames; until, straining her eyes into the fire, she thought she saw Li Kan making ready to crawl out. Then, after another swift leap into the house, she dashed out through the flames with Li Kan on her back. She had run only a few steps when an enemy plane dived obliquely, tearing along like a whirlwind, all its heavy motors in full throttle. It was followed by yet another plane, which came in from behind with an even more deafening roar. "Shouldn't run any more," she decided, and immediately stopped to place Li Kan on the ground. But before she herself could lie down, machine-guns could be heard firing rapidly overhead.

Chen Ming felt a sudden hot sting in her waist, and when she felt it with her fingers, they came away wet and sticky. She did not utter a word, but after the plane had swept by, holding Li firmly in her arms, she rolled with him along the ground to the gully. She rested a little and felt somewhat relieved. But all of a sudden the strength that had come to her so unexpectedly while she was rescuing the wounded disappeared altogether. She felt weak and limp, and her head swam, while her eyes closed, as though in a coma. Li Kan too had dropped into the gully unconscious. When he came to, he remembered what had happened and at once raised his eyes to look for Chen Ming. He found her lying on her back, half the hair on her forehead scorched, and her jacket sleeves still smoking. But what dismayed him most was the patch of red at her waist, where blood had soaked through the

padded cotton uniform. He crawled over and extinguished the sparks on her sleeves.

“Comrade Chen! You are wounded—for my sake!” Li Kan called out with difficulty, choking with emotion.

Young Sung also crawled over, making a great effort to tear off his own sleeve, to be used as bandage for Chen Ming.

Chen Ming opened her eyes, and turned back her jacket to look at the wound. It was a pulp of flesh and blood, but she could not tell whether or not the bone was hit. Half to console herself, half to reassure the others, she said, “It’s nothing serious—only a scratch.”

She struggled to her feet, took out a first-aid kit, and bandaged her wound. Seeing that the enemy planes had flown away with tilted wings, and finding, after a careful scrutiny, that the two wounded were none the worse for the fire and the strafing, she felt relieved, even cheerful. But this lasted only a minute, for suddenly she became tense again at the thought that not only had she to take care of the eleven wounded single-handed, but she was wounded herself, and on top of that there was the unsolved problem of finding food for them. Looking at the sun that had now scaled the mountain on the east, she could not help feeling worried.

* * *

Having helped Li Kan and Young Sung into the cave, Chen Ming stretched out on soft pine needles for a short rest before setting out to borrow grain.

But the moment she closed her eyes, the lashes became as if soldered together. So dizzy did she feel, she wanted only to sleep.

The wounded were much upset. So far the hospital had sent them nobody, and here Little Comrade Chen was wounded. How should they manage without her? It was out of the question for them to try to help each other, they were all serious cases.

Li Kan turned over on one side and stared long at Chen Ming, who seemed to be fast asleep. To him, her face seemed particularly pale and thin. "What a comrade!" he thought. "So young and yet so responsible. These days she has had more than her fill of backbreaking work! And now she is suffering from a bad burn and a bullet wound. We must see to it that she gets a good rest." He nudged Young Sung and said:

"I'm going out for a while. Tell Comrade Chen when she wakes."

Young Sung stared, and asked in surprise, "Where to?"

"To look for potatoes. Can't let her do any more running about."

"Right. Then I'll come with you," Young Sung said earnestly.

"But can you stand it? You still have two unhealed wounds."

"Oh that's nothing. In any case, what is looking for potatoes compared with crawling forward to join the attack after I was wounded? Let's get going."

Young Sung began to move forward, support-

ing his body on his hands. Li Kan crawled after him.

As if in a dream, Chen Ming had heard their conversation. When she opened her eyes, she found they had actually managed to get to the mouth of the cave. She called out loudly:

“You can’t go!”

In her agitation, she got up, forgetting the wound in her waist. The pain, however, was so acute that she almost fainted. Frowning a little, she stifled a groan and quickly walked to the opening, to block their way, and remonstrated:

“All this crawling about! What if your wounds were affected?”

There was reproach in her voice, but inwardly she felt deep gratitude for their concern for her. However, she spoke with finality:

“As far as responsibility is concerned, I am the nurse. As for the wound, mine is by no means serious. Therefore, the responsibility for borrowing grain rests wholly with me.”

Chen Ming glanced round at all the wounded in the cave, who looked back with warm solicitude. “Can you take it?” they seemed to be asking. She meant to answer, “So long as I can stir, I will see to it that every comrade gets food.” Meeting their eyes, however, she comforted them instead by saying,

“Comrades, I can still walk. Don’t you worry about me. And I shan’t be long either.”

With this, and despite the smarting pain in the wound, she hurried out of the cave. Warm voices

called after her, "Little Comrade Chen, don't walk so fast!" "Little Comrade Chen. . . ."

She looked back to find Li Kan and Young Sung gazing after her compassionately. With a sudden pang of gratitude, she waved at them.

"Go back quick. Look after the seriously wounded."

Once again she turned her back on them and, gritting her teeth, walked away with her usual briskness, as if nothing had happened.

The sky was clear, but snow was whirling in the air, swept up from the ground by a strong wind. Battling the wind and snow, she toiled up the steep path to the other side of the mountain, where she found the familiar dugout. But not a soul was to be seen. She could not choose but sit on a pile of firewood in front of the place, waiting for the village chairman.

She had waited for a quarter of an hour, when she saw an old Korean approaching. He looked about sixty. He was wearing a torn padded cotton jacket and a pair of slippers on his bare feet which were chapped and chilblained. But the moment the old man drew nearer, he cried out, "Comrade Volunteer! Comrade Volunteer!"

The old man poured out a torrent of words. Chen Ming didn't understand him, so, shaking her head, she said in what little Korean she could muster, "I don't understand Korean."

Then, coming closer, the old man pulled at her fountain pen and notebook. Chen Ming understood at once, knowing as she did that many old Koreans

could write Chinese. She gave him her fountain pen and notebook. The old man wrote in Chinese:

"Is it the village chairman that you want to see?"

Chen Ming replied in writing, "Yes. Where is he?"

"He has gone with his whole family to repair roads. You can take up everything with me. My son is a captain in the Korean People's Army. My daughter-in-law was a member of the Nodong Party, but she was killed by the Americans. So you see we are all one family. Tell me what you want."

She read what the old man had written, and, looking up, met his steady, resolute gaze. Somehow she felt sure that he would help her to solve the food problem. She wrote simply:

"A dozen wounded Volunteers are now staying in the village. They have run out of food. I have come to borrow grain from the village chairman."

After pondering for a little while, the old man came straight to the point.

"I have food."

Immediately he turned back, dragging Chen Ming with him. A strong north wind was blowing, and two shreds of torn cotton were blown off his jacket. The old man went into a dugout. Soon after, he came out with a bag of grain and handed it to her. She really thought it was too much, so gesticulating that she could take only half, she wrote:

"The Commander of the Chinese People's Volun-

teers has made it a rule that in borrowing grain from the Korean people, we must see that they keep enough for themselves. I can take only half of the bag."

The old man wrote in reply:

"I much admire such a rule, but our General Kim Il Sung has also laid down a rule, namely, that even if we ourselves have to go starving for it, we must lend grain to the Chinese People's Volunteers."

Reading these words, Chen Ming and the old man burst out laughing together; however, she still insisted on taking only half of the grain offered. This so exasperated the old man that he grew red in the face, and, forgetting about the Chinese characters, stamped his feet. He made the gesture of firing a gun, after which, sticking up his little finger to show his utter contempt, he spoke through clenched teeth, "The Americans!"

Chen Ming knew what he meant. She accepted the bag and wrote out a receipt. She also wrote:

"Thank you! The Chinese People's Volunteers will certainly give the Americans a sound thrashing!"

But she felt these words inadequate to express her gratitude and affection; so she tried to use Korean again.

"Old uncle, thank you, thank you very much indeed!"

Having said good-bye to the old Korean, Chen Ming thought of the wounded Volunteers now waiting for her on an empty stomach. The bag of grain slung over her shoulder, she hurried off.

While walking on the ridge, she did not feel any strain; but as soon as she started her uphill climb, she felt the dead weight of the bag. She breathed with difficulty, her muscles strained to the utmost, trembling in every limb. The wound in the waist burned as if somebody were branding her with a red-hot iron, and each fiery throb was worse than the last. Her stomach, so long denied food, also ached as if twisted and pierced in a thousand places. She had barely struggled half way up the mountain when she retched, but brought up only yellowish water. She staggered on, only to fall flat on the ground after a few steps. Then all at once she realized her own exhaustion, feeling with a pang the crushing burden of all that she had lately gone through—the unceasing labour, the hunger, the wound. She remained lying on the ground for some time before slowly and painfully she dragged herself up. On her feet again, she reached out for the bag of grain and tried to lift it. But no! the bag dropped like a millstone, pulling her down with it. Powerless to do anything about it now, she sank weakly to the ground.

The top of the mountain was less than half a mile away. How she wished she could fly there! But she had not the strength even to walk. Looking intently at the top, she felt the helplessness of it all and uttered a sigh.

She remembered the eleven wounded, and seemed to feel the gaze of eleven pairs of eyes. They must all be awaiting her impatiently. For all