

THE SUN SHINES OVER
THE SANGKAN RIVER

TING LING

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FOREWORD

It may be of some help to the reader if I give a brief account of how I wrote this novel.

In July 1946, I joined the Huailai land reform work team. Later on I left for Cholu, and returned to Fuping at the end of September. There was no chance to summarize this stage of our work satisfactorily. However, since I had no other work to do at Fuping and my mind was full of the people I had seen, I decided to start writing this novel. All I hoped to do at that time was to describe this stage of land reform and give a fairly faithful picture of a village with all its troop of living people. I would feel satisfied if I could just avoid making them too abstract. My original plan was to divide the book into three parts: the struggle, the distribution of land and the peasants' voluntary enlistment in the army. While I was writing, I received some very moving materials about the land protection corps in the Sangkan River area. The leader of the corps is the original of Comrade Pin, the county propaganda commissioner in the novel. I had travelled over that country several times too, so I hoped to go back there in order to be able to write the second part. Thus, while I was writing, I made constant allusions to material that would be more fully developed later. The manuscript was half written when the final checkup of land reform work came in

1947. That made me hesitate to go on with my work and wish to go back again to the country-side to make good the deficiencies in my experience of life and in the novel by taking some part in the mass struggle. Accordingly, I set my manuscript aside, and went with a team to Hsing-tang in central Hopei, then came back to Fuping. This experience of life proved of value, but failed to provide me with much actual material for my book, so I went on writing for another three and a half months, till the summer was over. I devoted most effort to writing the first part, about the struggle, and was just about to start on the second part when the land reform programme was promulgated, and I took part in the land reform conference. As a result, I felt renewed doubts about going on with my writing, and decided to go back to the country first to take part in the distribution of land. I worked in a village in Huailu for over four months, and as a result of this experience made certain changes in my original plan. I felt there was no need to write the second and third parts I had originally decided on, because the distribution of land and the joint-the-army movement the previous year had been somewhat superficial and carelessly carried out. This was a result, of course, of war conditions, but still these working methods were not good enough to be worth describing. So, after thinking it over, I decided to compress the book, and since there was no way of adding other relatively new material, my first plan had to be modified. I did not, therefore, develop the two later topics. Just at that time, too, I was to take part in the Congress of the Women's International Democratic Federation; thus I had to bring this work to a hasty close. If there is time in future, I hope to be able to revise this book further.

June 15, 1948

CHARACTERS

For the convenience of readers, the original Chinese names have been shortened. The full names are given in brackets.

- OLD TUNG *chairman of the district trade union*
COMRADE PIN (CHANG PIN) *propaganda director of the county Party committee*
WEN (WEN TSAI) } *members of the land reform work*
YANG (YANG LIANG) } *team*
HU (HU LI-KUNG) }
YUMIN (CHANG YU-MIN) *secretary of the Nuanshui Party Branch*
CHUAN (KUO CHUAN) *Yumin's uncle, a poor peasant*
VICE HEAD CHAO (CHAO TE-LU) *vice village head of Nuanshui*
YOUNG CHENG (CHENG JEN) *chairman of the peasants' association*
SECURITY OFFICER CHANG (CHANG CHENG-TIEN) *son-in-law of Schemer Chien*
SWARTHY KUO (CHANG CHENG-KUO) *captain of the militia*
ORGANIZATION CHAO (CHAO CHUAN-KUNG) *Party organizer in the village*
CO-OP TIEN (JEN TIEN-HUA) *chairman of the village co-operative*
FRECKLES LI (LI CHANG) *Party propaganda officer in the village*
PUKAO (CHANG PU-KAO) *organization officer in the peasants' association*
KUEI (TUNG KUEI-HUA) *Vineyard Li's wife, chairman of the women's association*
YUEH (CHOU YUEH-YING) *the shepherd's wife, vice-chairman of the women's association*

TEACHER LIU

TEACHER JEN (JEN KUO-CHUNG)

LANDLORD LI (LI TZU-CHUN)

LANDLORD HOU (HOU TIEN-KUEI)

SCHEMER CHIEN (CHIEN WEN-KUEI) *chief of the village racketeers*

TRADE UNION CHIEN (CHIEN WEN-HU) *chairman of the village trade union, Schemer Chien's cousin*

YI (CHIEN YI) *Schemer Chien's son, in the Eighth Route Army*

CHIENLI (CHIEN LI) *Schemer Chien's son*

TANI *Schemer Chien's daughter*

HEINI *Schemer Chien's niece*

WENFU (CHIEN WEN-FU) *a poor peasant, Schemer Chien's brother*

LANDLORD CHIANG (CHIANG SHIH-JUNG) *village head*

OLD KU (KU YUNG) *a rich peasant*

YOUNG KU (KU SHUN) *Old Ku's son*

DA *Old Ku's elder daughter*

ERH *Old Ku's second daughter, married to Schemer Chien's son Yi*

HUTAI *father-in-law of Old Ku's elder daughter*

SHENG'S MOTHER (KU CHANG-SHENG'S MOTHER) *a middle peasant*

TENANT HOU (HOU CHUNG-CHUAN) *nephew of Landlord Hou*

YOUNG HOU (HOU CHING-HUAI) *Tenant Hou's son*

TENANT KUO (KUO PO-JEN) *tenant of Landlord Li*

YOUNG KUO (KUO FU-KUEI) *Tenant Kuo's son, tenant of Landlord Chiang*

YOUNG WANG (WANG HSIN-TIEN) *a poor peasant, tenant of Landlord Chiang*

ORCHARD-KEEPER LI (LI PAO-TANG) *relative of Landlord Li and his hired hand*

LIUMAN (LIU MAN) *an ex-Party member. His family has been ruined by Schemer Chien*

LIUCHIEN (LIU CHIEN) *Liuman's brother, a former ward chief, now mad*

VINEYARD LI (LI CHIH-HSIANG) *a poor peasant*

SHOU (LI CHIH-SHOU) *Vineyard Li's cousin*

OLD HAN *a poor peasant*

YOUNG HAN (HAN TING-JUI) *Old Han's son, formerly a soldier of the Eighth Route Army*

EX-SOLDIER CHANG (CHANG CHI-TI) *formerly a soldier of the Eighth Route Army*

RED-NOSED WU *primary school cook and town crier*

WHITE SNAKE *a loose woman who acts as a medium and quack to deceive the villagers*

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The heat was sweltering. Although it was only about four miles from their starting point, Pali Bridge, to the river Yang, White Nose's chest and flanks were soaked with sweat. However, she was Hutai's best mule, and pulled well, though the cart track was so muddy. The sun hanging in the west was hidden by a clump of roadside willows, but the heat was still intense, and the muddy water splattered into the cart from the wheels felt warm against bare legs. At last leaving the flooded road, the cart came to a dry place. Only then did Old Ku, who had been urging on White Nose continuously, relax. Sitting up straight, he reached for the tobacco pouch behind him.

"What a downpour there must have been, Dad! Look at the state this road is in, like a muddy stream!" Da, his elder daughter with her son on her knee, was sitting to the right of the old man, a little further back. She wore a new cotton gown with blue flowers on a white ground. Her hair had been cut and hung straight down at the back, combed up high in front. She was looking about her cheerfully, for to be going home with her father was a piece of rare good fortune.

"The river's in flood, you sit still!" The old fellow beat a rat-tat-tat with his pipe. It was proving a difficult journey.

When they started across the river, the two cart wheels were practically submerged, and all that could be seen of White Nose was her big spine which seemed to be writhing through the water. Old Ku's daughter held her child more tightly and gripped the side of the cart, while water from behind splattered forward. The old man flicked his whip,

calling out encouragement to the mule as the cart rocked from side to side. The stretch of water in front of the cart, lit up by the sun, dazzled the eyes so that the old man could not see clearly, and sweat poured down his wrinkled face. The cart bogged down, then was extricated again, rocked violently, then righted itself again, till at last White Nose emerged from the river, and slowly planted her four hooves in shallow water. On the river's south bank, the cart once more reached the road and a gust of wind rose, delightfully cool!

As on the north bank of the river, rice was growing here in great profusion. The shoots were thick and tall, the height of a man's shoulder. Kaoliang screened everything else, its leaves as wide as maize leaves. The soil was moist and black, and a rich odour emanated from the thick growth. Then there came vegetable gardens encircled by irrigation ditches, the land neatly divided into patches of dark and light green. Each time Old Ku passed this way he felt an inexpressible longing to own such a fine piece of land. He could never have enough land, and he could not resist saying to his daughter: "In the section north of the river the land round Pali Bridge where you live is the best. In our Cholu County this Sixth District is the best. See how rich this soil is. Every three years a crop of rice, and a bigger harvest in one year here than in two years elsewhere."

"Planting rice one gets more out of the land, only you have to put more work into it. The water has to be changed every other night, and you have to keep at it all the time. . . . My father-in-law says the orchard land in our village is good. I hear this is a bumper year." Thinking of the orchard trees at her old home, laden with bright red fruit, Da recalled how she and her family used to burn piles of weeds in the orchard and pick fruit there, piling it up into little mountains, then packing it into baskets to take to market—what fun it had been! But

that reminded her of the pear tree which had been crushed by a neighbour's willow tree.

"Has that willow of Schemer Chien's been cut or not?" she asked, frowning.

The old man shook his head without saying anything. "Humph! And we're supposed to be relatives!" she said impatiently. "But couldn't you ask the village cadres to settle the matter? Or if it's beyond them there's always the district court."

"I'm not quarrelling with him over that. One tree can't ruin me, and I can make it up by sweating some more in other ways. Besides, only half of it was torn down, and we're getting quite a few pears from it this year." He sighed. Last spring when Old Ku's son was digging an irrigation ditch he had grazed a willow tree belonging to Schemer Chien and growing on the ditch. Later the tree fell in a high wind, coming down across the ditch and crashing into Ku's pear tree, tearing half of it off. Chien wanted the Ku family to pay for the damage to his willow and would not let anyone move it. Young Ku wanted to argue it out with Chien and ask why he didn't look after his own tree. But his father would not let him. The whole village could see quite well the pear tree was slowly dying. They thought it a shame, but only discussed it in private, not wanting to meddle in other people's affairs.

Now the old man turned to look at his daughter with eyes that constantly watered. Only after a long look did he wipe his eyes, turning round again and saying to himself: "Young people have no sense!"

He devoted all his attention once more to the mule. The cart had passed Paihuai Village, and the Sangkan River could be seen ahead. The sun was sinking towards the western hills, and from the fields on both sides of the road rose swarms of mosquitoes. They bit the little boy so badly that he cried. His mother flapped her handkerchief to drive them off. Pointing to the trees at the foot of the mountain on the other side of the river she soothed the

child: "We're nearly there, we're nearly there. Look, all those are fruit trees, filled with red and green fruit. We'll go and pick it, and it'll all be for you, Little Paitzu. There, there. . . ."

Once more the cart was rocking through the river. This was in the lower reaches of the Sangkan River; five miles further on, at Hochuang, it joined the river Yang. The Sangkan flowed from Shansi to southern Chahar, carrying prosperity with it, and here its lower reaches were even richer.

Now Old Ku was giving all his attention to White Nose, mentally thanking his stars for such a good beast and for Hutai's strongly built cart with its rubber tyres. It would have been no joke travelling that muddy road and fording two rivers without it.

Once more the cart gained the river bank. When it reached the farms, the peasants who were still hoeing the fields stared at both cart and passengers and wondered: "Has the old man bought another cart? The crops aren't in yet, where could he have got the money?" But they had little time for speculation. It was getting dark, and they bent again to their painstaking weeding.

Gradually the ground began to rise. Slowly the cart passed fields of kaoliang, millet, flax and peas, and reached the area of orchards. Both sides of the road were thickly planted with trees surrounded by low mud walls, some branches overhanging the walls. Most of the fruit was still green, but some of it had already turned an inviting red. Voices could be heard from the orchards, for people liked to go there to look at the fruit growing riper every day. Passing the orchards the cart turned into the street. Idlers were squatting outside the gate of the primary school in front of which was a stage, while a group of villagers were sitting beside a wall. Others were leaning against the window of the co-operative keeping up a desultory conversation with the people inside, while watching the street. The rubber-tyred cart attracted the attention

of these chatterers, some of whom came running over. A few called out: "Where did you get that cart? What a fine mule!"

With a mumbled reply Old Ku jumped down from the cart, took the bridle and hurriedly turned off at the cross-roads in the direction of his home, giving his daughter no time to greet her friends.

2

Old Ku was fourteen when he came with his brother to Nuanshui. He had been a shepherd while his brother worked as a hired hand. The two of them had toiled for forty-eight years, their blood and sweat dripping into the barren land to which their hopes were fixed. As year after year passed and the country changed hands repeatedly, their hardships began to tell on them. However, thanks to their hard work they gradually acquired land and became able to hold up their heads. Since their family grew fast they needed more and more land. Because they had many hands and the whole family of sixteen, men and women, old and young alike all worked on the land, they were able to conquer it. Their acreage increased until they had to hire a number of day labourers. People in need of money sold their land to Old Ku, and spendthrift sons of ruined landlords' families after a bout of gambling made over their title deeds to him too. At first he used paper to wrap up these title deeds, then a piece of cloth, and finally a small wooden case. He also bought a house with two large courtyards from Landlord Li, and everybody said that in recent years his was the only family to prosper, since both his family and fortune were increasing.

His third son was lucky enough to attend school, and brought home a primary school's graduation certificate.

He could write and calculate, and was a hard worker. Being a straightforward youngster who took part in village activities he was made vice-chairman of the Youth Association. And so long as this chairmanship did not interfere unduly with his work, his father raised no objection.

Ku's elder daughter Da had married into Hutai's family at Pali Bridge. Hutai's family was quite well off. In the past two years they had bought carts, and owned a mill. Pali Bridge was on the railway, so the Hutai family did some business in trading too. As the women in the family did not have to work on the land they gradually grew a little sophisticated, liking to dress in foreign materials. Da was in her late twenties. Old Ku's other daughter Erh had married Yi, younger son of Schemer Chien who lived in the same village. Chien was one of the most prominent men in the neighbourhood. When he sent someone to arrange the match, Old Ku, fearing to offend him, had to agree, although he disliked Chien because he was not a proper farmer. After her marriage Erh often came home and cried to her mother, although the Chien family led a comfortable life, the women doing little work and not cultivating the land. They depended on rents and, even more, on Chien's other activities. Hence, although they owned little more than ten acres of land they lived better than most people.

The previous autumn the village cadres had urged Ku's second son to join the Eighth Route Army. Old Ku considered that since the Japanese had surrendered, his boy would not have to stay in the army long. The farm could do without him because the family had been fairly well off the last few years. Since he had three sons he could very well let one go. And he had not asked for any compensation. His son, stationed in Cholu County town, often wrote home. As long as there was no fighting Ku felt easy about him. He would wait for a while and see.

That spring Schemer Chien had sent his son too. The young man wanted to join the army, but his wife, Ku's daughter Erh, was unwilling. She dared not say anything, however, seeing that her father-in-law approved. Chien said he was supporting the Eighth Route Army, that the communists looked all right to him. He also reasoned with Ku: "It's better for him to go. Nowadays things have changed, and to have people in the Eighth Route Army is all to the good. You know, we're called 'army dependents.'"

3

The arrival of Hutai's rubber-tyred cart gave the Nuanshui villagers something new to talk about. Nuanshui and its neighbouring villages were in the mountains, off the main line of communication, and none of them could boast of so fine a cart. In the past, Landlord Li had only owned an iron-wheeled cart which he had sold to Landlord Chiang two years ago, and this year the co-operative had bought an old cart from Li's brother. Now how had Old Ku got hold of such a fine cart? Some of the more curious made enquiries and found there was no mystery. It was because Hutai at Pali Bridge was ill and could not use the cart, that he had let his relative borrow it for a few days. Sure enough the next day and the day after Old Ku made two trips with the cart to fetch coal, whereupon all were satisfied and asked no more questions. The only person in the village not to believe his story was Schemer Chien.

Schemer Chien came of a peasant family, but during the past years the villagers had virtually forgotten his origin. Although they all knew quite well that Wenfu, who cultivated two *mou*¹ of vegetable garden, was Chien's elder

¹ One *mou* is about 1/6 of an acre.

brother, Chien himself seemed like a rich man from another world rather than a peasant. Though he had only studied with a tutor for two years he behaved like a city gentleman. All he said and did was premeditated. In his youth he had liked to travel. He had been to Kalgan and even to Peking one year, coming back wearing a big fur cloak and hat. While still in his twenties he grew a moustache. He knew all the ward chiefs and was on very familiar terms with them. Later he got to know the members of the county government, and when the Japanese came he established contact with higher circles. It had come about that if any of the villagers had to be chosen as ward chief, made to contribute money or act as porter, his word was law. He never held office either as *hsiang*² leader or ward chief. Neither did he engage in trade. Yet everybody treated him with respect and sent him presents and money. He was spoken of as the man behind the scenes and wielded great power. His family lived just like city people, with wine and fragrant tea every day and white flour and rice as regular fare, not seeing a kaoliang or maize dumpling from one end of the year to another, and they all dressed fashionably.

Now that the Japanese had gone and the communists were in power, with the arrival of the Eighth Route Army people on all sides were settling old scores. The previous year the villagers of Nuanshui had given Landlord Hsu, the former *hsiang* head, a public trial, and confiscated his property. He had fled to Peking and his family had gone to Kalgan. That spring they had also tackled Landlord Hou and fined him one hundred piculs of millet. But Schemer Chien sat at home not doing a stroke of work, smoking cigarettes and fanning himself. Because his son had joined the Eighth Route Army and Chien had found a village security officer to be his son-in-law while many village cadres were his friends, no one dared to lift a finger

² An administrative unit composed of several villages.

against him. When villagers met him they smiled and greeted him politely. But they preferred to keep out of his way, because if he took a dislike to you he would take secret steps to injure you. He only had to say a few words, and you suffered without even knowing it was his doing. Behind his back the common people called him a "racketeer," the foremost of the eight racketeers in the village.

When Chien heard that Old Ku had borrowed Hutai's cart he chuckled to himself: "A straightforward fellow like you, Old Ku, learning to tell lies too? If Hutai were really ill, would he let his daughter-in-law come home? Isn't it time to get in the garlic? Hutai must have planted at least four or five *mou* of it this year, for this is the year for them to grow vegetables at Pali Bridge. And the women in his house alone couldn't string all the garlic. There must be more in this than meets the eye." Chien felt he must get to the bottom of the business, for he was incorrigibly inquisitive. It upset him if he could not get to the bottom of any secret at once. He set about investigating this matter which everyone else believed to be plain and above-board.

At breakfast time he watched his daughter-in-law carefully. After hurriedly setting rice and dishes on the table on his *kang*,¹ Erh turned to go. She was very afraid of her father-in-law.

"Have you been home?" he asked her.

"No." Erh stopped, and glanced suspiciously at Chien. She was a grave-looking girl.

Eyeing her glossy black hair, her father-in-law went on: "Your sister is back."

"She came back yesterday evening with your father. People say she was dressed very finely. After all Pali Bridge is a big village, all the women there like to dress

¹ An enclosed brick platform through which heat is piped. It serves as a bed at night.