

home again.

"Do you dislike your country so much?" Youde asked.

"Sure. Because the Communists are totalitarian and cruel and they killed a lot of people. Of course, I didn't know that they arrested and killed so many people here too."

Old Chi, who was in for striking a superior, expressed his opinion.

"I don't understand the deep stuff. But, you see, I came only because they told us Taiwan was an Asian paradise. I thought I could find myself a wife, get some kind of job and settle down to a stable living."

Alas, brides for them were not to be found so easily.

It's true that when they first arrived at Chi-lung's waterfront, a line of Taiwanese maidens welcomed them. The girls hung leis over their necks, smiled at them and shook their hands. But the girls were there under official order to play their parts and were never seen again. In truth, no Taiwanese girls were foolhardy enough to be interested in marrying country bumpkins who came from an undeveloped part of the world and had neither position, nor education, nor money.

However, POWs were less burdened compared to the Taiwanese inmates, as they had no worries about their families and their lives were not in danger. They may have been dissatisfied in the service, but there were no stunted ambitions there. Besides, for them, serving prison terms was not much different from living in the army barracks. 'No wonder they were able to live happily here,' Youde thought.

Their one collective shortcoming, however, was that they

talked loudly. So loudly that Youde had the urge to tell them to cut it out.

Meanwhile, Old Shih and Old Chi began to play Chinese chess. Old Chen and Old Lee again started to play husband and wife, rolling around on the floor entangled and fondling each others' sexual organs.

76. It's Wiser to Let the Matter Drop

Lin the Bull knew Youde's case well. He said, "When I heard about you from Yu-kun, I thought then that you would be sent to the Military Court sooner or later. However, I did not expect to see you here. I guess you and I are fated to meet."

"I didn't expect to be returned to another investigative organization either."

"I heard that you tried to overturn your confession in court."

"Overturn is too grandiose a word for what I did. I just told them the truth, that I never had 'Mao-wen-chi' in my house."

"Ha, ha, ha. That's what irked them."

"Don't you think even they knew that confessions were mostly nonsense? After all, many people carry around scars from tortures they received."

"You can't expect conscience nor reason from these guys. These judges are not human beings. They are but rubber stamps that affirm the conclusions reached by the investigative bodies."

"I can't bear to dance to the arbitrary tunes of the investigative bodies, to be convicted and sentenced without a reason that's

understandable to myself. I can't help but feel that to do so is not being fair to myself."

"Ha, ha. I can see that you studied abroad, because you think in foreign terms. You may not know it, but our country, though a democratic country in name, is in its core a country ruled by warlords, and for that matter, hasn't evolved much since the Three Kingdoms period in the second century. It's going to take total reconstruction to destroy the feudal system and in its place establish a truly democratic people's government. That was what we sought in the Chinese Communist Party."

He paused a bit then continued, "This government is corrupt to its core. The judges have all lost their consciences. No, rather I should say, only people without a conscience can become judges. They have not a speck of considerateness to help the innocent. On the contrary, they push anything sticky onto others for they are unwilling to take any responsibilities themselves."

"I guess that's why the accused are passed from one place to another and why it takes them several years to reach arbitrary and baseless decisions."

"That's right. Your case is a one-person case. That's why it proceeded rather speedily."

"....."

"Had you repeated obediently in court what was in the confession, you could have been sent to re-education shortly after the court appearance and be home in three years. Of course, who knows if this government will last another three years."

"I guess I said something unnecessary in court, didn't I?"

"Ya. As a result, you will be kept here for two, three or even

six months for re-investigation, then eventually you will be sent back to the Military Court.

Since the sentencing is rendered only by the Military Court, there's no way they will send you to re-education directly from here."

"It looks like the time I will spend here is a total waste of time."

"I guess so."

Youde muttered the old saying with self-mockery, "It was wiser to let the matter drop after all."

77. Life Extending Tactic

Youde and Lin the Bull became fast friends. They talked about everything.

Youde asked Lin, "I've heard different numbers, but how many people did Yu-kun actually implicate?"

"As far as I know, it's fifteen or sixteen. He confessed all of his vertical connections."

"And he still was not able to save his life, with that kind of number?"

"No way. It doesn't make any difference how many people one implicates. Reduced sentences cannot be granted to political prisoners just because they told it all."

"How about the Self-Renewal policy?"

"Well, the policy is on the books, but it does not apply to confessing one's vertical connections. Yu-kun was taken in by the

investigators."

"How about his confession about me?"

"Your relation with him is a lateral one; as such, Self-Renewal policy should be applicable. But then, it's only helpful if you were a big fish that escaped the dragnet. Well, you turned out to be not much of a big shot. Ha, ha, ha."

"Ha, ha. Well excuse me that I am not a big fish!"

"But, Yu-kun did not tell about you to take advantage of the Self-Renewal policy."

"How's that?" This was a different take from what Youde thought.

"I think Yu-kun brought up my affairs because he was lured by the Self-Renewal policy. Suppose, as a result of his informing, I was exposed to be a Communist and was captured, he would be saved from death, wouldn't he? You know, paying back one's crime with merit. Don't you think that's what he had expected?"

Lin said with confidence, "I rather think his was a tactic to extend his life."

"Life extending tactic?"

"You see, the only way people like Yu-kun and me can be saved is the upheaval in the international situation. In essence, it depends on whether we can stay alive until something happens, be it a military confrontation or a political upheaval. I know it is maybe only one in ten thousand chances that it will happen, but we must wait patiently."

"Speaking of a change in the military situation, do you think there's a chance that Communist China will attack Taiwan?"

"That's what I wanted to ask you, since you are the most recent

arrival."

"I think it will be very difficult for them to do anything at least in the next few years. Especially since the signing of the U.S.- Sino Mutual Defense Treaty, I should think the possibility of a Communist attack is almost non-existent."

As soon as he said it, Youde knew he had disappointed Lin and regretted it. What bungling! Youde continued, "But the situation changes constantly. Maybe no military invasion will occur but political changes are still possible. The Korean War has ended but the Cold War nevertheless seems to escalate. The United States may want to help solve the 'Taiwan Problem' as a way to embrace the Communist Chinese."

"In my view, the U.S. is a totally unreliable country. Didn't the U.S. hand Taiwan over to the Chiang Kai-shek regime? Yet, it closed its eyes to the February 28th massacre and keeps mum about the current dictatorship. The U.S. would acquiesce to any inhumane behavior under the excuse of anti-Communism."

"That may be so, but the U.S. is the only country that will stand up for international justice."

However, Lin had hung his hopes on a military solution, instead of a political one. He said, "As we while away our idle days here, Communist China is strengthening its military power. I think China will begin its attack as soon as the U.S. forces withdraw from Taiwan. It's true that they lack battle ships of their own, but they can borrow from the Soviet Union. And as soon as the Communist Chinese land on Taiwan, the battle would be over in a matter of days."

That was but Lin's wishful observation. 'Should Taiwan ever

become a battlefield, it would truly be a disaster,' Youde thought.

The conversation doubled back to Yu-Kun. It seemed rather pointless for two people who had no access to newspapers or a radio to contemplate the developments of international affairs.

78. A Helplessly Nice Guy

Youde asked Lin, "I wonder where Yu-kun told them about me. I've thought maybe he did it during the interrogation by the investigative organizations."

"No. He informed on you while he was in the Military Court Prison. I'm sure about that. He never mentioned you during interrogation."

"In that case, you were in the next cell when he was writing his secret report to inform against me."

"That's right. I saw for sure that he was writing a report. Though he did not tell me the content nor did he mention your name, my sixth sense told me that he was informing on somebody."

"Did you watch his actions in silence?"

"I sort of warned him that he would come to regret it if he wrote some funny report. He immediately tore up the paper. After that, several times, he would write then tear it up, then write again. I think he agonized over it a great deal. Then, sometime later, he intuited that his time was almost up. Finally, he handed the report to Panchang."

At that very moment, the course of Youde's life changed.

"Several days after he handed over the report, he secretly told

me your name. That's the first I heard of you. Yu-kun told me that he had a friend from the old days by the name of Youde who was studying in America. He also said that you might not return home. I thought then that you were the most suitable candidate to be used in his life-extending tactic. Granted it was a cowardly, dirty trick and sure to cause you trouble, but by reporting you he could at least extend his life until your return. And, if it happened that you did not come home, his execution could be repeatedly put off until the matter reached some kind of closure."

At the time, not a few Taiwanese, having gone through stringent screening to be allowed to go abroad and having breathed the air of freedom, refused to return home and lived abroad.

Lin continued, "Soon after informing on you, Yu-kun was called up by Chia-yi's investigation organization, and while there, I think he was questioned for one whole week about you. He never told anybody how he answered the questions. But I can sort of guess, so when he returned to the Military Court Prison after a week I gave him a piece of my mind. I predicted that Youde would be handcuffed the moment he stepped off the plane at the Sungshan airport and taken to Security Headquarters. As it happened, I was off the mark. The authority left you free to roam so as to trap more victims. A malicious ploy, indeed."

"....."

"I also said that Youde would be sent to the Military Court in a month or six weeks. This part I guessed right."

"Yes. My arrest was on Oct. 2nd and I was sent to the Military Court Prison on Nov. 8th."

"On the other hand, suppose you had implicated others and

the interrogation of these people somehow took longer than usual. Who knows, maybe it can take upwards of one year."

"....."

"In any case, Yu-kun's life-extending tactic worked to a certain extent. If he hadn't sacrificed you, he might have been executed before you returned to Taiwan. Of course, it would be much better for his purpose if you had not returned."

"....."

"But, Youde, don't you hate Yu-kun? You've got plenty of reasons to do so."

"No," Youde replied instantly. "If it will help save Yu-kun's life, this is not too much of an ordeal for me to endure."

Those were Youde's true feelings. He desperately did not want Yu-kun to die. Youde told Lin about the chance encounter, about how on the day of his court appearance, he turned his head in response to Yu-kun calling his name, and that he had then shouted after Yu-kun, "I do not hate you."

"I see. I haven't heard that one. Maybe your shouting voice did not reach his ears, or, maybe what you said touched him so deeply that he did not want to relate it to anybody. For all we know, he may have wept over what you said to him."

After a brief silence, Lin put his hand on Youde's knee and said, "You really are a helplessly nice person. Youde, I would also like to have a friend like you."

Inexplicably, Lin's eyes shined with tears as he said it.

79. Favorite Songs

Youde and Lin knew a lot of songs in common. Adding Lai to make a threesome, they often sang together.

Lin's favorite song was an Indonesian folk song, 'Bengawan Solo.' Youde knew its Japanese words :

Bengawansolo runs without end,
Unable to hear the ancient past.

Lin sang it in Indonesian and taught it to other inmates:

Bengawan Solo, riwayatmu ini,
Sedari dulu djadi perhatian insani.

The POWs preferred the Indonesian verse better than the Japanese version.

Lin said, "This is the song I would like you to sing for me when I am taken out to be executed."

Youde asked him, "I am impressed that you can sing in the original verse. When and where did you learn it?"

"I learned it in Indonesia when I was in the Japanese Navy. You see, during the war, I enlisted as a Navy volunteer."

The so-called Taiwanese volunteers were in reality halfway conscripted to join.

"I learned this song when I was stationed in Indonesia for a time. Wherever we went in the South Pacific, people were singing this song. As we watched the young men and women dancing to

the music under the shades of coconut trees, we couldn't believe that we were in a war."

Speaking of the Navy, Youde inexplicably thought of Ho, perhaps because he also spoke of the South Pacific.

"When I was being interrogated in the Chia-yi station, a man by the name of Ho, also an ex-Navy man, was among the special agents there."

Youde told Lin about his dealings with Ho.

"He must be Ho Chih-mo. I've no doubt about it," Lin said with cockiness. "I heard that he had become a special agent. As I recall, I met him once in the Navy Club in Singapore. The guy and I were in the same class, as we were both Corporals then. Others called him 'Ho the Lecher', because he took advantage of the fact that he knew the language in Singapore and often procured women for his superiors, taking kickbacks sometimes."

"At first, I thought he was a kind and considerate man. I even thanked him."

"No way. No kind person ever becomes a special agent. A person possessing even a smidgen of kindness can't last in that job. I am glad that you were not taken in by him."

Lai, who ordinarily listened quietly interjected, "The guy is probably taking advantage of his position and fooling around with women as we speak."

Lin changed the subject and asked Youde, "Do you by any chance know what songs Yu-kun likes to sing?"

"Hum. He favored military marches. He also sang the march in Aida and the 'Drinking Song'. Among popular songs, we used to sing 'Under an Apple Tree,' 'Red Roses,' 'Inn by the Lake,' some-

times under the Zamboa tree in my backyard."

Never again will we ever share happy times like that, Youde was pained by the thought.

"I don't know the name of the song, but do you remember this one?"

Lin sang the first few stanzas of the song.

"Nice song. But this is the first time I've heard it. I've never heard Yu-kun sing it."

"Well, maybe it's a song he picked up after his flight into the mountains. Anyway, he sings this song everyday. We will probably see him off with this song when he is called out for execution."

Youde took out a pencil and a piece of paper and wrote down the words to the song:

Runs, runs, to no end,
The river of my longing;
In the moonlight,
Longing for your image,
I walk and walk.

The last two verses touched Youde's heart. A lone Yu-kun had walked the moonlit mountain path, remembering the 'you' in the song. Who might the person of his longing be? Youde knew she was Wen-bang's sister Su-yun and the image of a smiling, elegant woman came to his mind.

Did she know about Yu-kun's unrequited love for her? Did he ever confess his love to her? Or was he captured before he had a chance to do so? When did they last see each other? Although

somewhat embarrassed to be conjecturing about others' affairs, Youde continued to contemplate: Yu-kun was a fugitive for five years and it had been two more years since his capture. So, their last meeting, if it did take place at all, would be at least seven years ago. And during all this time, Yu-kun had held fast to her image, which no doubt added a splash of color to the grayish life of a fugitive. And the image of her no doubt sometimes smiled at him and quietly talked to him. And in those moments, Yu-kun was not alone.

Each harboring his own thoughts, the three 'sweet-potatoes' sang the songs over and over, Bengawan Solo and Yu-kun's favorite song.

80. A Forerunner of the Independence Movement

One morning, the inmates of Cell No.2 were let outside to exercise, which was not a regularly scheduled routine. Instead, here in the Investigation Bureau, inmates were let out to the courtyard for exercise and bathing from time to time, on the spur of the moment.

On that morning, Youde was startled to notice a man of small build at one corner of the courtyard - a face he had seen before. The man was exercising in the nude under the still chilly sky of February. His trunk, lean with no body fat, looked firm. His expressionless face suggested unyielding courage.

"Who could he be?"

Youde tried to remember as he and his prison friends circled around the courtyard.

The man, oblivious to his surroundings and expressionless throughout, continued to swing his arms in silence. As hard as he tried, Youde was not able to place the man and since a plainclothes man was standing guard, it was not possible to speak to the man directly. Upon taking a closer look, Youde saw his shackled feet behind a large garden rock. A pretty important criminal for a serious crime, no doubt, Youde figured.

Youde lowered his voice and asked Lin the Bull about the man. Lin replied in a hushed voice, "I think he is Ko Kinan." Then, after circling another lap, Lin added, "he is from Putzu too."

So he was. The man was Huang Chi-nan (Ko Kinan in Japanese), a man Youde knew about but never met. Huang was from the village of Niu-tiao-wan, a short distance from Putzu. Having gone to college, he was regarded as the number one intellectual of the village. Youde had heard that Huang, despite a promising future, had thrown himself into the Taiwan independence movement and ended up in jail.

'He looks familiar, probably because I've seen him around town in Putzu,' Youde thought.

Now Huang Chi-nan started to roll his torso to and fro, then right to left. Youde noticed that he had a large, dark purplish bruise in the center of his back, a painful testament to torture.

Youde tried in vain to greet Huang and express his goodwill, but their eyes never met. Huang steadfastly fixed his eyes at one spot in space while he continued to exercise, not paying any heed to Youde and the rest.

Fifteen minutes soon passed. Huang was the first to be ushered inside. 'He is probably in a solitary cell,' Youde thought. Everybody watched as the shackled man clanked away. Soon, Youde and his fellow inmates were returned to the former crypt of a jail.

Youde asked Lin, "Has Huang been here long?"

"Let me see. He was here during my last stint in this joint. That makes it at least three years. Of course, he could have been to other places in between. I am sure he is from your hometown."

"You are right, but we are not acquainted, since he is about one generation older than me. What's more, he didn't live in town and he had already gone to Japan to study when my friends and I started school. He started the Taiwan independence movement in Japan with Liao Wen-yi, so he did not get anybody from Putzu in trouble. But his name is certainly well known."

When people in Taiwan were still intoxicated with the fine wine of Taiwan's restoration to the motherland, Huang had presciently, ahead of everybody else, given up hope on the KMT government, or rather, on the Chinese, and had advocated Taiwan's independence. In other words, he was the forerunner of the Taiwan independence movement.

Lin again said, "He is known as an eccentric."

"Is that so?"

"Sometime ago, he was once thrown into the Big Room. I heard from his cellmate that he would not eat with the others. When everybody else sat in a circle and shared the foods from their care packages, he would stick to his own corner and eat his own food. They said he wouldn't talk to the others either."

"I wonder why. Might he be a loner?"

"No. He just wanted to draw a line between us and him. You see, he seems to be of the opinion that those of us who joined the Communist Party are bad guys, even though we are all fellow prisoners."

Come to think of it, Youde realized that all the inmates he had come across so far were in for Communist related charges while none was imprisoned for engaging in the independence movement, except for Huang. No wonder Huang had a hard time finding anybody to trust in prison.

Lin expressed his own point of view, "In my view, he and I are comrades. After all, we both worked and sacrificed ourselves in order to liberate the Taiwanese people from the corrupt government."

"I guess he is in solitary confinement and has nobody to talk to."

"I think so. Who knows, maybe he himself chose to be in the solitary cell."

Youde had a glimpse of Huang's persevering, uncompromising character, yet wondered if this same characteristic had also made his prison life doubly lonely and miserable.

Remembering the solitary figure that resolutely carried on his one-man exercise, Youde felt a strong pang of what you might call love for one's compatriot or townsfolk toward Huang.

Youde learned later that at this time Huang was already sentenced to death, but his execution had been postponed in order to induce Liao Wen-yi, the leader of the Taiwan independence movement, to turn himself in.

81. A Middle of the Night Happening

About a month later, Lin the Bull was finally called in for questioning. The POWs carried on as usual, totally unconcerned. Ex-assistant chief Ma asked Youde, "Is he really a Communist?"

"I gather he really is. He himself admitted to be one."

"If he carried arms, he is going to get the death sentence."

"He knows that."

"How terrifying," Ma shook his head and shuddered.

Youde asked Ma in return, "Have you ever joined the Communist Party?"

"Absolutely not. If I had, I would have fled to the mainland a long time ago."

Youde thought: Indeed, quite a few mainland students at the Normal University fled fast enough to the mainland on the eve of the mass crackdown, after having recruited energetically and successfully many Taiwanese students into the Party. 'Did they receive merit citations over there?' Youde wondered.

"Then, why are you here?"

"The Bureau chief by the name of Kung snitched on me. He told the authority that I was in a study group while a middle school student. In fact, I only showed up once at the study group, something I had forgotten myself."

In mainland China, because of the shortage of published materials, all schools had so-called study groups in which people lent and borrowed books from each other or discussed what they read. Because the Communists made good use of study groups as their breeding grounds, the KMT government considered them to be

Communist front organizations and censored them. Conscious of its own failure to get control of the study groups while on the mainland, once in Taiwan, the KMT government ordered all KMT members to come clean with their past involvement with study groups. However, many did not turn themselves in. Some probably forgot; some may not have known for certain that they belonged to one. Still, others may have worried about the impact on future advancement and skipped, thinking nobody was going to know anyway. Ma may well have been among the ones who forgot.

"Did you not get along with Chief Kung?"

"In the beginning we did, both being from the mainland. Some people even said we were like brothers. But then he started to be suspicious of me. He suspected that I kept the monthly red envelopes (bribe money) from the 'special class business' (prostitution) to myself. He was mad thinking that I was getting all the gravy and gradually our relationship went sour."

"Didn't he also receive the monthly red envelopes?"

"Of course. It's the custom."

'What custom! We never had such a custom in Taiwan before the Restoration,' Youde thought.

"He held a grudge that I did not give him his cut."

"But, isn't it also a custom to pay tribute to one's superior?"

"It's not like I didn't pay him his share at all. I had my principle, which was that I would accept the red envelopes that came my way, but would not go around myself, nor order my subordinate, to collect them. That's why I had a good reputation among the businesses. That's not a lie. So I did not pay tribute to Kung regu-

larly every month. That's the underlying cause. Then, at a banquet, emboldened by a few drinks, I criticized him to his face. He grinned and listened at the time, but later he immediately started to check into my background to find any fault he could. One month later, he informed on me to the authority that I had a 'thought problem.' He made it sound like he had to sacrifice friendship for the sake of greater good. What a dangerous, scheming man he is. You know, he continued to smile at me at work even after he had snitched on me. We northerners could never be as two-faced as those southerners."

"Did they have evidence?"

"No evidence really. But they had a witness, a classmate of mine from middle school who testified that I was a member of the study group."

"Is that true?"

"I admitted that I did attend the study group, but only once. Well, that was enough to get me thrown in here. I don't know why my case has not been sent to the prosecution yet, since I am done appearing in court for questioning. I am worried that there's going to be more to this."

"No. You don't necessarily get sent to prosecution immediately after court appearance; in fact, it takes about a month usually," Youde tried to ease Ma's mind.

Just as the conversation was coming to a close, Lin returned. He was calm enough, but appeared dispirited.

"How did it go?" Youde and Lai showed their concern.

Lin replied quietly, "It was nothing."

Lin did not say much. He relieved himself, promptly returned

to his seat, then rolled onto his back and closed his eyes as if he were very tired.

That same day, in the dead of the night, a loud scream, "Ah –," roused Youde and his cellmates from their sleep. It came from Ma.

"What happened?" Lai who slept next to Ma asked.

"Oh boy, Ah, I'm glad it was just a dream. I dreamt that I was being executed by a firing squad."

"Is that all?" many muttered.

Youde rolled to his other side and turned his eyes to Lin's bed. Lo and behold, Lin was sitting, leaning against the wall still with his eyes closed, seemingly to have not heard Ma's scream at all. Straining under the dim, naked light bulb, Youde saw traces of tears on his cheeks. And in his hand, Lin was holding unmistakably the picture of his daughter – the picture of the smiling Ah-bi with a pageboy haircut holding a jump rope in her hand. How long had Lin been sitting like that? Obviously, it was since before Ma's scream. It seemed that Lin had gotten up in the middle of the night to stare at his daughter's picture.

82. A Request to Confront the Accuser

At last, Youde was called up for questioning. A guard led Youde up the stairs to a sealed room that was lit dimly by a light bulb in the middle of the day.

Two men in Sun Yat-sen suits entered the room, one in navy and another in khaki. The latter carried a thick stack of documents which looked like investigation folders on Youde.

The two men ordered Youde to sit across from their desk. Going through the documents, the man in navy did the questioning while the man in khaki recorded. Again, they went over the same ground, starting from the beginning – since there had been no new developments, there were no new questions either. This being his fourth time, Youde answered the questions fluently. The questioning was pro-forma, though tiresome, and Youde was quickly put at ease. Again, the only answer to deviate from his confession was the part about 'Mao-wen-chi.' Youde denied what was in the confession and insisted that he never had the book at his house. Youde was rather prepared for some sharp follow-up questions, but the man in navy merely drew deeply on his cigarette and said nothing. However, the man in khaki, the recorder, put down his pen and leaned back in his chair.

Youde said to the two men with a determined expression, "Please let me confront the person who said the book was in my house."

The man in navy signaled with his eyes to the man in khaki, who straightened himself up and added something into the record.

The questioning abruptly ended.

When Youde returned to his cell, Lin said to him, "That was short, only about two hours. It must have gone well."

Youde recounted to Lin what had happened in the questioning and told him about the request to confront Yu-kun.

Lin laughed out loud as he said, "Yu-kun has no face to face you. I doubt if he would say that the book was there when it comes to face-to-face confrontation with you. But, your request for confrontation could drag this out some more and if in the mean-

time the political situation changes, who knows ..."

Youde's heart was lightened like a patient after an operation. He was done with all the terrifying, disgusting parts of the ordeal. As the saying goes, "Do all one can and wait for the heavenly edict." From now on, the only thing left was to wait for sentencing.

Lin said, "When I get back to the Military Court Prison, I will tell Yu-kun about you. He'll be happy to hear that you don't hate him at all. But, it also looks like his case is coming to a close. I reckon he will be executed as soon as the face-to-face with you takes place. Actually, I don't think they will allow the confrontation."

Then on April 1, April Fool's Day, the time came for Lin to go back to the Military Court Prison. His final struggle appeared to have failed. After shaking each cellmate's hand to say goodbye, Lin squeezed Youde's hand hard and said, "I don't think I'll see you again."

Ignoring the guards' urging and still holding on to Youde's hand, Lin tried to say something, but then swallowed it, and finally said only, "Take care."

Obviously, he had wanted to ask Youde to look after his daughter. Youde nodded his head deeply and said, "Yes. I understand. Don't worry about little Ah-bi."

"Thank you."

Lin the Bull dropped his bundle abruptly, took a step forward and crushed Youde in his embrace.

83. Return to the Old Nest

On April 10, following Lin, Youde was transferred back to the Military Court Prison from the Investigation Bureau. Arriving at the prison office about four in the afternoon, he was taken back to the old nest, Cell No.7, after a two month absence.

"Tsai Youde is back."

The message spread ahead of him.

By the time Panchang Teng unlocked the cell door, his cell-mates were waiting at the door.

"Welcome back."

Youde had barely kicked off his shoes, when he was half picked up and dragged to the wooden floor. It was apparent at once that the number of people in the cell had decreased. The room felt empty.

"Where's Little Lu?" These were the first words out of Youde's mouth.

There was no Little Lu to be found.

"Oh, no." Youde looked toward Liu and Kao.

After a moment of silence, Liu opened his mouth.

"Little Lu was executed about a week ago."

No wonder the air in the cell was leaden.

Ex-policeman Wu said, "This government kills even children without mercy. He was only thirteen when it happened. No law as cruel as this exists anywhere else in the world."

Looking around the cell again, Youde asked, "Chou Shui the wood-cutter too?"

Liu replied, "Yes, he was taken soon after you left here."

Wu added, "He walked out of here calmly with a lot of dignity. Really impressive."

Youde recalled the composed Chou Shui standing still like a wax figure.

"Then, Chen Shih the man-child too?"

"Yes, he was sentenced to six years. His had the shortest sentence among the people involved in the Lu-ku case."

Wu added the footnote, "It was after Chou Shui was taken out. Chen went out bawling."

"Mori too?"

"Yes. After Chou Shui left, Mori's case was decided. Just like he predicted, he got ten years. He left happily. That's the lightest sentence under Article 4. He was transferred to the military prison in Hsin-tien. He and Little Lu hugged and cried when he left."

Wu said, "Ten years. He made it just under the wire. Remember how he was going to sign the divorce papers if he got more than ten years? Ten is not more than ten, right?"

Kao said, "He was here for two years and three months. So, subtracting that, ten years is reduced to less than eight years. His wife should be able to wait that long. First of all, she didn't say anything about divorce anyway."

Youde again looked at Liu and Kao, "Was Little Lu's brother taken on the same day?"

"Of course. Ten Petacos came that day and took five to the execution yard in one fell swoop."

Youde pained for Little Lu's parents who lost two sons at the same time.

Some say, "In the whole world, pity most the mother of the

Sweet-potatoes." How true.

Shen the public scribe soon went back to his seat, sat himself down in a Zen position and started to mumble something – perhaps to pray for Little Lu and Chou Shui's happiness in the netherworld. According to Liu, Shen spent almost all his waking hours in Zen meditation ever since Little Lu's execution.

Youde took out his mug and placed it in its rightful place and hoisted his bundle on the shelf.

Wu said, "This week especially, we were getting lonely, with four less people including the ever talkative Mori. So, it's just great to get you back. Of course, I don't mean to imply that you are a chatter box, ha, ha."

Liu described the way Little Lu went out. "When the flushed-faced Panchang Teng came to get him, blood did drain from Little Lu's face. But his two eyes were fearless, burned with anger."

"You Baldie(nickname of Chiang Kai-shek), so you are going to kill us both. I pity my mother." He stomped the floor and cried with resentment then shouted to us, 'Avenge me!' But when we started singing "We are like the burning fire of youth" in unison, he reclaimed his composure and walked out with his head high."

"He was impressive," Wu praised.

"I almost forgot, there's something for you." Liu reached up on the shelf and handed Youde a small package wrapped in paper.

"Little Lu had instructed me to give this to you when the time came for him to go. So when I cleared out his belongings after he was gone, I kept this for you."

Little Lu's vocabulary book fell out of the opened package, the vocabulary book that he had meticulously kept for four years,

packed from cover to cover with small handwritten words. 'It was all in vain after all,' Youde screamed inside. Large drops of tears fell from Youde's eyes.

"He left a parting instruction."

Liu took out an envelope from which he withdrew a piece of paper and handed it to Youde.

It was a parting note to everybody, written in Little Lu's own hand. It contained the unpretentious, childlike anger that was Little Lu.

"Knock down the bronze statue of the Baldie in front of my grade school's lobby. Let them worship him if they want. But let the people who want to spit or piss on it, spit and piss on it."

84. Message from the Next Cell

The best thing about settling back in at the Military Court Prison was to be able to correspond with home again. Youde immediately wrote a letter to his wife the next morning and let her know that he was all right – the first correspondence in two months.

Unaccountably, Youde was distracted by Cell No. 3, so he asked Wu, "There seems to be fewer people in Cell No.3 too."

"You are right. The buck-toothed judge turned informer was taken out by the Petacos. That was great. I heard that he did everything to beg for his life to be spared, like writing report after report to exonerate himself, but nothing came of it. Ha, ha. I wish I could show you the way that guy went out of here. He bawled

like a baby, with a drippy nose yet. Nobody sang any song, as if we had agreed in advance. He killed people like they were dogs; so he was killed like a dog. It's only justice."

Liu said, "I wonder if he would be lauded as a patriot over in the Chinese mainland. What a twisted world this is. He was probably put up in the memorial hall together with the people he had sent to be killed. Do you think his victims will keep quiet? How strange."

"Ha, ha," Wu laughed as he said, "If it were me, I would push him out of the memorial hall."

Youde glanced at Cell No.3 again. He couldn't see the Bucktooth, but his eyes met those of messenger Sung's.

"Hey you," Sung motioned Youde to come close.

"It's from Lin Jin-so the bull. The message actually came the day before you got here, but I didn't want to bother you last night since the message didn't seem urgent. The message said that a navy Sun Yat-sen suit came to the Military Court Prison and called out Yu-kun for questioning. Lin said to tell you that there's no more need for a face-to-face confrontation with Yu-kun."

No need for a face-to-face would mean Yu-kun had agreed with Youde's side of the story. Yu-kun might have acknowledged that he said he saw 'Mao-wen-chi' at Youde's house out of faulty memory, or out of jealousy – some plausible reason to refute his own previous statement. Or might he have told them the truth and admitted to his life-extending ploy?

In any case, there was no mistake that Yu-kun had made statements favorable to Youde.

The two months spent at the Investigation Bureau were not a

waste after all and it was not a mistake to persevere and fight for an answer he could accept. If Youde could have just pushed the thought of Little Lu out of his mind, he probably would have broken into happy song.

Sung added some welcome words, "In general, re-education is thought to be for three years. But, the law on that is not in black and white. If things go well, your re-education term can be reduced to one year. Though according to the Bucktooth, there hasn't been anyone sentenced to re-education who actually got a reduced term."

As Youde thanked him and was retreating from the front wall, Sung asked, "Do you know a person by the name of Peng Chung-cheng?"

"Peng Chung-cheng. Hum. Oh, yes. I know him," Youde replied. A name about to fade from Youde's memory, Peng was Dragon-head Peng, a mainlander, at the Taipei Police Battalion.

"He was executed last month for a two-man case. I heard that he was quite a stand-up guy."

"Yes. What's more, he was kind. He did a lot for me. Now that's a genuine Communist patriot."

"He's the one who sent us the message of your arrest back then."

"That makes sense."

Youde told everybody about Peng's affairs and prayed for his happiness in the netherworld.

Time spent with Dragon-head Peng seemed like from the long ago past. Counting on his fingers, Youde figured that it had been six months since parting with Peng.

85. Prison Divorcee

The letter from Youde's wife arrived. Surprisingly, nobody else got letters that day. Perhaps writing became infrequent after a few years because one was only allowed to correspond once a month.

A photograph was enclosed with the letter, showing his wife seated and daughter Ah-jing standing by the side. Her expression seemed to say "Papa, chi-lin, chi-lin." It tugged at Youde's heart. His wife's pregnancy was apparent now, in the 7th month she said. 'I guess I will receive the news of the birth in the re-education center. For sure, I can't be by her side when the time comes,' Youde thought. He realized and hated the devil's hand that blocked happiness by breaking up a perfectly happy family. Yet his sentence was the lightest among all the inmates and the mark of envy for all. Youde recalled Lin the Bull staring at his daughter's picture in the dead of the night. What did a man faced with certain death feel when he stared at his daughter's picture? Youde sighed.

Youde passed the letter and the picture around for all to see.

Wu examined the picture carefully and said, "Hum. I think my old lady got a big belly too. Ha, ha. Usually when an inmate learned of wife's pregnancy, others are suspicious. Ha, ha. Mr. Tsai, you are so fortunate because you know for sure she's carrying your own seed."

"Does your wife still write to you?" Youde asked Wu.

"No. Not since last month and probably will never again. Besides, she is not allowed to write to me anymore because she is no longer family. She's become a total stranger since last month."

"So you are divorced."

"Yes. After Mori left, I finally made up my mind. Anyway, I am probably going to get fifteen years, so I thought through a lot from her point of view and signed the divorce papers. It's what you call a prison divorce. I think it's best for the baby about to be born. On my part too, I felt the burden lifted."

"Don't you have a child?"

"Ya. When I left, he was but this little, but he is going to school now. She promised over and over again that she would do a good job bringing up the kid."

Shen the public scribe interjected, "Wu here still carefully keeps all the letters she wrote him, even though he used to get mad every time a letter arrived. Prison divorces just can't be helped." Shen shook his head.

Wu laughed and said, as if discussing somebody else's affairs, "From now on, I am relying on that other Wu, the special agent, to love and care for both my wife and son. Ha, ha, ha."

86. Chou Shui's Mother

One day, Liu said to Youde, "A story about wood-cutter Chou Shui's mother and the villagers of Lu-ku is circulating around here."

"I don't know if it's all true, but the story started on the day Chou Shui was executed, so I don't think it's all made up."

With that preface Liu related the story.

"I think it was Feb. 16. Sixteen Petacos appeared and took

eight out in one fell swoop; all the inmates from Lu-ku including Chou Shui. The day happened to be a Wednesday, a day to submit care packages. Maybe a little bird told them, but the families from Lu-ku, with bananas in their hands, arrived at the Military Court Prison earlier than usual. As was their custom, they often came in a group despite the arduous journey and despite the fact that they were not allowed to see their loved ones.

I guess it made them feel better just to be near their husbands or their sons. I was told that sometimes some of them would yell the names of their husbands or sons over the high wall.

On that day, the group, consisting of women, old men and children, was stopped at the main gate, because precisely at that moment their very husbands and sons were being read the death sentence in the courtroom. The villagers had no way of knowing that, but somebody spotted two military trucks with the flaps down parked in the middle of the courtyard and sounded an alert. The Lu-ku villagers had gone through a few group executions by this time, so they were tipped off by the trucks right away. Terrified and shaking with fear, and while battling the guards who chased them away, they repeatedly swarmed back to the gate to look inside. The guards called for help and additional guards came. Eventually, the villagers were not able to go near the gate."

Youde could almost hear the snarling voices of the guards.

"But when the military trucks revved up their engines, the villagers broke through the guards' line and ran toward the courtyard. Oblivious to the guards' threats, they fought off hands that grabbed at their arms and legs and ran with desperation."

Youde pictured them dashing, crazed, while crying out the

names of their husbands and sons.

"Several of them made it inside the gate. Chou Shui's mother was one of them. They fell to the ground, panting for breath."

Liu's voice choked. He paused before he continued, "Then, when they raised their heads, what they saw was none other than their beloved husbands and sons whom they hadn't seen in several years. And what they heard were the voices calling for their mothers and loved ones 'Ah-bu,' (=Mother) 'Ah- ...' And right in front of their very eyes, their sons and husbands, their hands tied to their backs with heavy ropes and a chan-pan stuck in the middle of their backs, were fighting to struggle free from the MP's hold." Liu choked again.

Youde could imagine Chou Shui's mother extending her hands while calling "Ah-tsui, my son!" and Chou Shui calling "Ah-bu!" desperately trying to struggle free of the MP's grasp to approach his mother. Was she able to rise from the ground? Or did she crawl toward her son? How she must have wanted to run up to him and embrace him!

"The guards and MPs working together succeeded in suppressing the villagers and loaded the husbands and sons, one by one, onto the truck, right in front of the flailing and screaming villagers."

Youde thought to himself: The wailing and screaming must have reverberated in the open sky of Chin-tao East Rd., and the people working in the offices must have stopped their work and watched from the windows. That's why the story spread on that very day.

"The MPs lowered the flaps, cutting off the line of vision con-

necting the villagers to their loved ones. The trucks passed in front of the villagers, leaving puffs of black smoke. The villagers again pushed away the guards' hands and rose to chase after the trucks. The trucks went through the front gate, turned south on Ching-tao East Road and headed toward the Hsin-tien execution yard. The villagers chased after the trucks, half-crazed, even after the trucks had disappeared from view."

Youde could imagine how they must have stumbled, then got up to run, run and stumbled again. Their faces and clothes a muddy mess, their arms and legs covered with scratches oozing with blood.

Replaying the scene in each of their minds, nobody so much as even cleared his throat. The room was silent.

"We haven't heard what happened to them after that. But a story circulated about Chou Shui's mother."

"Oh? What is that?"

"When exhausted and collapsed on the roadside, she was helped by a kind passerby. And it was said that despite scratches all over her body and barely conscious, in her hand ..."

Liu continued with tears in his eyes, "In her hand, she still clutched the bare broken banana stems."

87. A Friend of the Bull

One morning during the daily outing for bathing and walking, just as Youde squatted in front of the water storage tank to splash some water over his body, Zong, a fellow inmate of Hakka extrac-

tion, came to Youde's side.

"Do you see the guy in blue pants over there?"

Looking up, Youde saw a man standing uneasily cradling his wash basin. Conspicuously, he still had his pants on, unlike everybody else who had stripped stark naked. He was obviously a newcomer. Youde couldn't help breaking into a grin thinking about his own first few days here.

"He just arrived yesterday. That means he was in the East Pen-yuan Temple at the same time you were there."

Zong beckoned the man with a hand gesture and the man came over right away. Youde and Zong moved over some to either side to make room between them for the newcomer. The newcomer's name was Kuan. He was a native of Chung-li and was also a Hakka. He said while in East Pen-yuan Temple, he was housed in the east wing of the prison opposite where Youde's cell was. Since the Investigation Bureau followed the practice of housing people involved in the same case in separate wings even more strictly than in the Military Court Prison, inmates from the east and west wings were never to lay eyes on each other let alone exchange words.

Youde's was a one-man case, so no one in the east wing was connected to him. Youde decided to ask about Lin the Bull's case.

"Were there people implicated by Lin Jin-so living in the east wing?"

"Yes," the new comer Kuan answered, while shooting sideglances at the guard, "a man called Huang Ching-tien in my cell."

Because they only talked when the guard was not watching, the conversation was stop and go.

"What kind of person is he?"

"He is the second in command at the Agricultural Laboratory. He is very mad that Lin has dragged him into this. A coward, he called Lin."

"I see."

To be 'dragged in' meant being informed upon. The uncompromising Lin who once said, "That's where I am different from Yu-kun," had informed on some innocent man.

"You mean you roomed with Lin but didn't know about this?" Zong said to Youde incredulously.

One could say that Lin had put his life-extending tactic into practice by falsely accusing his friend Huang Ching-tien of being a Communist, thus betting his life on the time it would take for the authority to investigate this new wrinkle. This is what he meant by his final struggle, Youde clearly realized. It was a struggle to buy time.

"But Huang Ching-tien was let go within four months, without any charge," Kuan said.

Youde contemplated: There were precious few precedents in which people were let go scot-free after being called in by the Investigation Bureau. Huang's freedom could only come from Lin recanting his previous statement in court. Had Lin had enough of his own life-extending tactic and given it up without reservation?

"Did the two of them face each other in court?" Youde asked.

"Yes they did. That's when Lin's false accusation was revealed." Kuan obviously took his roommate's side.

Youde remembered Lin coming back from court that day saying curtly, "It was nothing." By that, he probably meant "It didn't

turn into a problem."

"You know what they say, 'One feels compassion for a person one meets face to face.' The Bull opened a road to life for him." Zong, who knew something about the way intelligence organizations operated, was not totally unsympathetic to Lin.

"I am glad Huang was able to go home," Youde said.

"But you know what?" Kuan said. "He was worried that this episode would interfere with his future advancement."

"What a pathetic guy," Zong spat out his words.

Huang apparently left here hating Lin and concerned about his own future prosperity.

When the guard pointed a finger at them and warned them not to talk, the three left the water tank, put on their underwear and switched to walking around the yard.

As they walked, Youde remembered Lin had once said, "I, too, would like to have a friend like you," and understood what the teary glint in Lin's eyes meant.

The whistle sounded, sending everybody back to the cells.

Thoughts about Lin occupied Youde for the rest of the day. Even at night, he lay awake for a long time:

Lin was certainly different from Yu-kun in that he implicated no one, except for Huang Ching-tien, who entered the stage rather late in the game. The dark, purplish bruise attested to Lin's integrity. Nevertheless, he used Huang as a means of his final struggle when the time to face death was near. Naturally, Lin was a coward in Huang's view. Why did he not persevere to the end? Many people would agree with Huang .

But only a person who is not in Lin's shoes can make such an

argument, something only the audience of a play can say.

Youde mulled it over in his mind:

The general theater public never truly sees the hero behind the actor. What they usually see is just the actor who plays the role -- a beautified human image instead of a real life person. The person who dies heroically on the stage is not the character himself but rather what the actor impersonates. After the play is over, the actor washes off his makeup and goes home to a cold beer or to contemplate where he will take his daughter the next day. This is why an actor can act out death scenes with such moving beauty. Is it not too much to ask a real flesh and blood person to be like the hero in a play?

Youde replayed the scene of Lin staring at his daughter's picture in the dead of the night. It was apparent that Lin decided on the course of his final struggle after he received Ah-bi's picture and learned of her existence. Youde felt for Lin: How long and hard Lin must have stared at little Ah-bi before he was able to make up his mind. Maybe he reneged later, but then looked at the picture again and decided anew to go through with it. Internal struggle probably more aptly describes Lin's final struggle.

In any case, the curtain had come down on Lin's final struggle. What was left was only to wait for execution day. The upheaval in the international situation that Lin had hoped for was unlikely to happen.

88. Lin the Bull, Covered in Blood

One morning, the feared words again arrived: "Two Petacos are here."

As usual, the exercise period was suspended. The arrival of two Petacos meant somebody involved in a one-man case was to be executed.

Who could that be? Youde felt tense. No one can feel absolutely safe as long as one is in this prison.

"Is it going to be the Bull?" Shen guessed.

Youde rejected Shen's suggestion. "No, Lin's is a three-man case so all three would be put to death at one time. There would be six Petacos for that."

Liu said, "Youde, you may not know it, but the other two in Lin's case have already been executed about three months ago. As a matter of fact, it was the day after you went to the Investigation Bureau. Only the Bull was separated out into so called 'other case' and subsequently sent to the Investigation Bureau."

That made it precisely ten days after Lin's transfer to the Investigation Bureau when his two comrades were executed. The judge must have anticipated that Lin's 'other case' would take some time to resolve, so he singled out Lin from the group and executed the other two as scheduled. So, Huang Ching-tien did play a role in extending Lin's life for at least three months. Had Lin bit onto Huang like a crazed dog and not let go, the case could have dragged on a lot longer just as the judge had predicted. As it happened, it appeared that Lin nevertheless couldn't go through with it. Perhaps facing Huang in court brought forth human sympathy.

On the other hand, the unknowing Huang might have faced Lin with hatred or even berated him to his face, ignorant of the fact that Lin's one word could have changed his destiny. Lin never mentioned a word about Huang Ching-tien to Youde, and Youde, sensing Lin's reluctance, never asked him about it.

At last, the intelligence report No.1 arrived.

"It's the Bull from the West Area."

"So it is he." Many sighs followed.

"Youde," Wu said as he padded Youde's shoulder, "Do not get too worked up. O.K? It's not you."

'My face must be taut with tension,' Youde realized. Though having known each other for only two months, Lin was more than a mere friend, rather, he was someone Youde had shared twenty-four hours a day with and had opened his heart to. To Youde, Lin's execution was not entirely somebody else's affair.

"Bengawan Solo riwayatmu ini," Youde started the song he learned from Lin.

Youde's cellmates quickly joined in. They sang in Indonesian as Youde had previously taught them the Indonesian verses using Japanese Kana.

Fellow inmates from other cells, also knowing this was Lin's favorite song, started singing it, some in Indonesian, some in Japanese. The singing of "Bengawan Solo" surged ever wider and louder until it reverberated in the entire prison like a torrent.

But the word of Lin leaving his cell was late in coming. Just as everybody began to wonder, the intelligence report No.3 arrived.

"Lin is refusing to leave his cell."

It seemed when Panchang came to order him out for execu-

tion, Lin had refused and didn't move an inch.

Youde recalled what Lin had once said to him, something Lin threw in nonchalantly when they were chatting: "Why? Why does everybody allow themselves to be led like lambs to the execution yard?"

Youde thought then that Lin had meant why not take the stance of final resistance. And now he was carrying out his promise. What's going to happen? Nobody knew, as there had been no precedent.

"The guards from our area rushed over there to help," words came from inmates in the cell closest to the entrance.

The singing of "Bengawan Solo" stopped in mid-air.

The unbearable tension spread from the West Area to the East Area, wave by wave.

Youde tried to conjure up Lin engaged in his final resistance: Where in the cell is he standing? The swarm of guards must be all over the corridors on either side of the cell. Is he pacing the room? Or is he standing leaning against the cell partition? Did he block the door with the matung? Is he holding any weapon in his hand? What are his cellmates doing? They certainly are not in a position to come to Lin's aid.

Time ticked away minute by minute.

"The guards rushed back to fetch bamboo poles," another report arrived.

'What are they going to do with the bamboo poles?' the inmates discussed among themselves. Are they going to poke the poles into the cell to beat him? Or are they going to constrain his movement by sticking a lot of poles into his cell?

Ex-policeman Wu came up with a likely answer, "They are going to attach a rope to the end of the pole and try to lasso him down, then once his movement is restricted, they will jump into the cell to suppress him."

Of course. That's an ancient trick the Taiwanese used to capture a pig. Youde now pictured Lin fighting on like a beast in a cage.

The No. 4 intelligence report arrived.

"Lin is covered with blood from head to toe and is not able to keep his eyes open."

Did his head crack open and blood squirt out? He must be glaring and staring down the guards as he wipes away the blood smarting his eyes.

Unexpectedly, the singing of "Bengawan Solo" again surged in the prison building. To cheer him on with his favorite song was all they could do. His prison friends from the West Area, who could only watch and swallow their pain, must also be singing his song, Youde imagined. What irony that a song that serenades the peaceful pastoral scenes is accompanying this incredible life and death struggle. The song seemed out of place yet entirely appropriate.

Two whole hours passed.

At last, the forgone conclusion came from the West Area.

"Lin was suppressed and roped."

From this point on, one after another in quick succession, intelligence reports came from the cell next to the entrance.

"The prison servants from our side rushed over to the West entrance to view the Bull's exit."

Youde could almost hear the guards hollering to stop the ser-

vants from crowding the entrance.

"The two guards came back, mouthing "Bastards!" and entered their room to take off the bloodied clothes."

'Lin's blood,' Youde thought.

"The two guards are putting iodine on the broken skins of their arms and legs."

"One of the servants came back. He said the Bull looked like a bloodied Chin-kang, the 'Hercules' of Taiwanese folklore."

"Another servant returned and said Lin was bound in ropes and carried out of his cell. Lin is no longer resisting."

"Lin is being shackled, still barefoot."

"Lin is being dragged toward the main gate. He is surrounded by guards and MPs so I can't see him very well."

"A guard is pressing a piece of cloth on Lin's head as he walked alongside Lin."

The blood must still be flowing from the top of his head. Are they going to take him straight to the court like that? They wondered.

Later in the afternoon of the same day, further news about Lin eventually arrived. Lin was first taken to the infirmary where they washed away the blood and wrapped his head in bandages, then he was taken to the court still wearing his bloodied clothes and was stood in front of the judge while two guards supported him from either side. And when the judge was reading the decision, Lin had, pouring his body and soul into his voice, railed, "Pigs! Pigs!"

Youde's thoughts were filled with Lin that day. But when night fell, his thoughts turned to another friend, Yu-kun.

'That's right, Yu-kun lives next door to Lin so he has watched Lin's saga from the closest vantage point. How does he feel? Come to think of it, my case is about to be concluded. That means Yu-kun does not have many days left to live.'

89. Shen's Verdict

Finally, Shen the public scribe was called to receive the court's decision. He came back within an hour bearing his court decision papers.

"I got ten years," Shen said without much expression and showed the papers to everyone.

The essence of the decision said:

"The accused Shen Shih-kai was previously found to harbor left-leaning, impure thoughts and was sent to the re-education center. While there, he made and displayed a flag of the rebel regime in an attempt to enhance the morale of his Communist comrades. Thereby, we found the accused having engaged in behavior beneficial to the bandit Party and he shall be sentenced to a prison term of ten years."

Youde thought indignantly: This for merely patching up a cracked plate glass window with paper stars! One would think this a monstrous, ridiculous joke, if it were not for the fact that Shen was standing in front of everyone with the decision in his hand.

To imagine the mustached Shen, a man looked to be cautiousness personified, cutting out star shaped papers is to bring smiles

to everyone's face. What rebellious intention!

Back in the re-education center when someone pointed out that the patched window resembled a five-star flag, Shen should have smashed the plate glass to smithereens, then there would be no photograph to stand as evidence against him.

Still holding the decision paper, Shen's expression was ominous.

"Congratulations!" Liu slapped Shen on the shoulder suddenly and said.

"It's good. This puts an end to it," Kao said, half trying to comfort Shen, half feeling envious. "Take away the time you've spent during the investigation and the time in the Military Court Prison awaiting decision, ten years becomes less than eight. Mr. Shen, you get to go home in eight years! I am rather envious. As you know, I am one of the permanently unsentenced."

Wu chimed in, "These permanently unsentenced, like Liu and Kao, even though convinced of their innocence, are still terrified every time the Petacos show up. They would gladly take ten-year terms, as they said themselves. Mr. Shen, don't you think you can be happy about the decision?"

Suddenly, Shen slammed the decision paper on the floorboard and said, "Damn it! This is an absurdity. How can I be happy about that!"

His face twisted in anger, Shen turned and fixed his eyes in a spot in space.

Having studied Zen, Shen ordinarily appeared wise and dispassionate. But once misfortune fell on him personally, he proved to be unable to contain his anger after all.

The next morning, Shen said goodbyes and left Cell No.7 which had been his home for the past sixteen months. Thus, the Military Court Prison on Ching-tao East Road had one less inmate while the Military Prison of An-kang of Hsin-tien added one.

Kao said, "I had a nightmare last night."

"What about? You were moaning about something," Wu asked.

"I dreamt that this place was deserted. You were not here, neither was Mr. Tsai. The cells on either side were empty too. And there was no Panchang, no guards, no servants. The two of us, I mean Liu and I, are left in this terrifyingly silent space. When I hollered "Hey!" only echos of 'Hey!' 'Hey!' bounced back and still nobody came. Liu and I ran around and around the cell and continued to cry for help, 'Hey, help!' Then I was awakened by my own voice. Boy, was I relieved."

"Hum," Wu nodded, "something like that may actually happen. Of course, it won't be just the two of you. Still, just the people in your case will be left here."

Liu said, "Should we say 'be forgotten,' rather than 'be left?'"

Now that only four people were left to occupy the cell, the room appeared spacious and empty. After supper, they kept to the routine and walked around and around the room for exercise; but loneliness dogged them. Singing, half-hearted at best, did not help either; it merely amplified the emptiness.

Youde noticed that every cell had lost about half its inmates compared to when he first came. Was the authority executing the political prisoners with more dispatch in order to avenge the Chinese Communist for the rising tension in the international situ-

ation? Or was it because the new addition to the Hsin-tien prison had been completed? Or was it because a new prison administrator had sharply increased the efficiency? Nobody knew the reason.

Nevertheless, the fact that there were more people going out than coming in clearly indicated that the government's political terrorism had succeeded in drastically reducing the ranks of dissidents who turned cautious in their speech as well as action.

90. An Old Taiwanese Communist

As if taking Shen's place, a balding man in his fifties came to Youde's cell. Instead of a cloth-wrapped bundle, he had a rolled up blanket slung over his shoulder that contained his toiletries. His calm demeanor betrayed the air of an old-timer and his seemingly gentle, narrow eyes shone with sharpness.

With no forethought, Wu instinctively addressed him as "Senpai," a reverential Japanese term referring to someone who is one's senior in school, on a job or in the same profession.

He was clearly the oldest in terms of age.

"Ojisan, this way please." Liu tried to turn over the dragon-head seat to the newcomer, but the newcomer declined.

After putting down his blanket roll in the last available seat, he introduced himself.

"I am Chang Chao-chih, a native of the Ta-tao-cheng district of Taipei. How do you do?"

Ta-tao-cheng was a well-known, old neighborhood of Taipei. But it was rather rare to find a Taipei native among the political

prisoners, as most people of this capital city busied themselves with money making during the day and joy-seeking at night and were largely apathetic to politics. Mr. Chang was the first Taipei native among the numerous political prisoners Youde had met so far.

Liu introduced the inmates of Cell No.7 to Chang and one by one Chang shook their hands.

"I can see you are all here without just cause," Chang said and continued to introduce himself. "I am what you would call an 'Old Taiwanese Communist.' You see, I joined the Japanese Communist Party as a young man. Though I did not go to college and was not a learned man, I sure was active running around in various localities as a Taiwan local operative for the Party. Once, I even got to meet Tokkyu, short for Tokuda Kyuichi. I worked my heart out. In fact, I was quite prepared to sacrifice my life for the sake of the proletariat. I was young then and idealistic. I didn't think it was particularly hard work either."

"What did you do after the Taiwan Restoration?" Liu asked.

"When the Restoration took place, we too rejoiced. At the time, we Taiwanese Communists had to fight oppression on two fronts. First, there was the oppression of the colonial Taiwanese by Imperial Japan. Then there was the oppression of the proletariat by the capitalists. With the Restoration, we were glad that we were at least liberated from one of the oppressions. But at the same time, since our nationality changed we were severed from the Japanese Communist Party. Of course the Japanese Party by then could hardly take care of themselves in the aftermath of Japan's defeat and had totally forgotten about us.

"Still, I say the Japanese Communists were far luckier than we because they were able to openly engage in political activities. You know a Communist by the name of Katayama even became the prime minister later on.

"On the other hand, look at us, we were called the Old Taiwanese Communists and were avoided by everybody as if we were relics from the past. Not a few people called us fools even."

"Oh, no. I want to thank you for all your troubles," Liu said, as if he represented everybody.

"After the war, I, as well as many other Old Taiwanese Communists withdrew from politics entirely and led a quiet life. You may say that we turned into onlookers as far as politics were concerned. Hermits might even be more apropos."

"Then why did you get thrown in here?" Youde asked.

"Well, when one is minding one's own business, disaster can still fall like rainwater from a leaky roof. I was splashed by the eruption of the February 28th Incident. At the time, I ran a magazine stand in the portico of a store owned by an old friend of mine. The business did well enough to sustain my livelihood. Besides, my life was quite interesting from watching the passersby and the changing worlds reflected in them. That was the least eventful period in my life. On the day of February 28th and the turbulent days that followed, I stuck to my resolve to be an onlooker and just tended to my business and observed the event's development from the sidelines.

As a Taiwanese, I was all for a mass movement to resist a corrupt regime. But I told myself, 'your act is over,' and was able to keep calm.

Then midway through March, Hou Kan, an Old Taiwanese Communist comrade, showed up at my magazine stand. He pretended to be a customer, flipping through this magazine and that one, and advised me to flee as soon as possible. According to him, the government had started to blame the Communists for inciting and planning the February 28th riot and had already arrested several Old Taiwanese Communists as sacrificial lambs."

The KMT government wanted to shift the blame to the Chinese Communists for an incident whose root cause was their own profound corruption and incompetence. It would be an especially convenient scapegoat if Big Daddy United States, who had seen a rising anti-Communist sentiment domestically, and other free nations could be convinced of it.

However, the fact of the matter was that the Chinese Communists had their hands full fighting the civil war and were not able to reach their hands over to Taiwan at the time. Moreover, only a handful of Communists had infiltrated Taiwan before the February 28th Incident, not enough to plan and incite a riot. That's why the government started to arrest the Old Taiwanese Communists to come up with a decent number of schemers.

"So did you evade the headwind?" Wu asked.

To evade the headwind meant to go into hiding until the storm blows over.

"No. I rejected the idea without a second thought. I hadn't done anything that required me to flee and I figured I had many witnesses since I stand all day in a busy thoroughfare. Nevertheless, I was arrested just as Hou had predicted. A special agent came to my magazine stand and, whether I liked it or not,

forced me into a car and took me to the Garrison Command Headquarters."

"And you have been in jail ever since?" Somebody asked.

"Oh, no. That's not the case. I was released after about a week."

"How so?"

"You see, on the day of February 28th, I saved the life of a mainlander. An ashen-faced man in a Sun Yat-sen suit passed by my business. I stopped him and told him that he would be beaten senseless were he recognized as a mainlander. And I made him take off his Sun Yat-sen suit and put on my windbreaker instead. The man quickly grasped the seriousness of the situation, thanked me and hurried off. Somehow, the man learned of my arrest and showed up at the Garrison Command Headquarters as my witness. He turned out to be a man of high position in the government and knew somebody in the Garrison Command. The man signed on as my guarantor and I was released."

Numerous similar incidents happened during the February 28th Incident. Youde, too, had personally warned a mainlander who passed him by on the street to take off a shirt that bore the characteristic hand-woven stripes from the mainland. The fact was most Taiwanese couldn't bear to see mainlanders churned up in the waves of Taiwanese anger toward corrupt officials and beaten up merely because they were from the mainland.

Chang took a sip from the mug of tea Wu had handed him and continued, "But on Dec. 8 of last year, I was again arrested and I've been in ever since. It's getting to be five months. I gather that still makes me the least veteran among you. Well, I sure didn't expect to

be thrown in jail again at my age."

"Were you imprisoned when you were young?" Kao asked.

"Oh, sure. We were in and out of jail all the time. In my personal experience, the sentences from the Japanese government were only one, two or three months, at the most, at a time. Sure, I was severely beaten by Japanese MPs, but never had to worry about a death sentence."

Chang looked at the four faces around him, one by one, and said, "It's great to be able to talk face to face with you all. This is the first time in five months."

"What?"

"I've been in solitary confinement in the Secret Protection Bureau, so I've been living a lonely existence all by myself."

"Is that so!"

"The cell was less than six feet square with solid walls on all sides. The door had an opening like a mail drop and the guard passed me food and water through that. And even the opening had a cover. Sometimes, the guard would lift the cover of the opening and peek inside. And we sometimes were able to push up the cover from inside and exchange a word or two with people next door. That's about the extent of communication we got, let alone seeing each other's faces. Compared to that, this place is easy street."

Chang smiled.

The Secret Protection Bureau was reputed to be the most terrifying among the intelligence organizations, Youde had heard.

"What were you in for this time?" Liu asked.

"I'll tell you the whole story later."

Chang extended his hand once more and firmly seized everybody's hand one by one.

"It's been a long time since I grasped human hands this way."

And he smiled again as he spoke.

91. Implicated by a Big Fish

After dinner Chang talked about the reason for his arrest.

The person who brought the disaster upon him was none other than Hou Kan, the man who showed up at Chang's magazine stand right after the February 28th Incident. Hou had since fled successfully to Hong Kong then, subsequently, into mainland China. It was soon after the establishment of the People's Republic and its people were full of hope and the nation full of energy. Despite the fact that Hou hadn't been politically active since the end of the war, he received a hero's welcome based on his past achievements as a Communist in Taiwan. For the next several years, he worked on China's Taiwan policy under various august titles. An old Taiwanese Communist was thus turned into a new Chinese Communist, you might say. Then, last December, he brazenly snuck back into Taiwan with a new mission – he was appointed the supreme director of Taiwanese Communists.

"But," Chang continued, "he was captured within the first twenty-four hours after landing."

"I wonder why he was caught so easily." Liu was miffed.

Youde thought it strange too, so he said, "The Secret Protection Bureau didn't have to arrest him in such a hurry. After all, he was