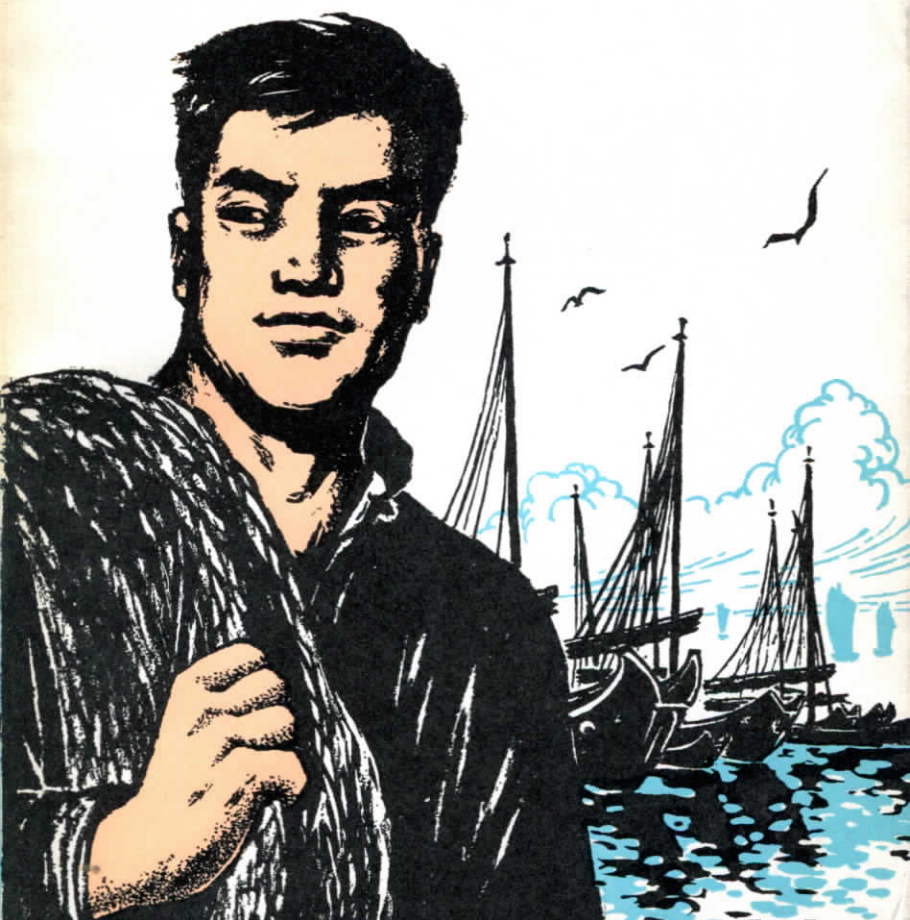


The Young Skipper

AND OTHER STORIES



THE YOUNG SKIPPER

*The
Young Skipper*

and other stories

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Contents

THE YOUNG SKIPPER	1
Chang Tao-yu and Chang Cheng-yu	
OLD SENTRY	25
Chiu Hsuch-pao	
OLD HSIN'S DAY OF RETIREMENT	47
Yao Ke-ming	
RED NAVIGATION ROUTE	59
Chao Tzu	

The Young Skipper

Chang Tao-yu and Chang Cheng-yu

CLOSE to Gold Hill Bay, on the East China Sea, is located the headquarters of a fishing brigade. The fishermen of this brigade seemed to possess the "Dragon King's key to the sea," for every time they put out, they never failed to return with fine catches. Year after year, their haul increased. Notable among them are the crewmen of motorized trawler No. 715 and her auxiliary vessel. Known for their socialist consciousness and sound outlook, they have been rated as an advanced unit of the brigade. Every season their haul surpassed that of others by 15 to 20 tons. The red banner of the advanced unit fluttering from their main mast seemed to have taken root there.

But last autumn, much to everyone's surprise, No. 715's catch fell behind that of No. 717 by about 20 tons, while the other boats were catching up too. Some units were close runners-up. The red banner had to be transplanted to the mast of No. 717! Just at this critical moment, No. 715's old skipper had a severe attack of rheumatism and had to go off to the hospital.

The crewmen felt that a skipper was to them what a commander was to soldiers, and put in a request to the leadership of the fishing fleet to send another skipper as early as possible. Aiming at a new record catch, the leadership weighed the matter in the interest of the whole brigade and answered their request. But who would the new skipper be? This had become the main topic of conversation among the sailors of No. 715.

As a folk adage says: A high flood brings in gold; a lesser one brings in silver; but the golden season of fishing does not wait. For three days a wind had been blowing at sea. As the day was drawing close for them to set out, the crewmen were anxious to have their new skipper, but no one showed up. "Sea Tiger" Ah-jung got impatient. He went to the brigade headquarters to inquire.

"What's the hurry?" Old Chou, secretary of the brigade Party branch committee, said to him leisurely. "With rice in hand, you needn't worry about the meals. With salt in hand, you needn't worry about the fish spoiling. The Party branch is studying the matter. We guarantee that you won't be delayed."

Ah-jung almost jumped up with joy. He darted off to the brigade propaganda team, where he picked up drums and gongs, threw them over his shoulder with a clang, and rushed back to his boat.

All hands were on deck on the day the new skipper was to arrive. The gongs and the drums were sounding off loudly. A stout drumstick in each hand, Ah-hsing, an experienced sciner, was pounding on a big drum with gusto.

It was nearly noon when the new skipper finally arrived, accompanied by Party Secretary Chou. The gongs and drums sounded still louder when the men moved over to welcome them. But, what was this? The new skipper was none other than Ah-hsing's 28-year-old nephew. Ah-hsing's heart sank, and the sticks in his hands automatically came to a pause. The gongs, too, seemed to lose their ring.

Finally, Ah-hsing put the drumsticks down and drew the Party secretary aside. "I say, Comrade Chou, in sailing boats or catching fish, a lot depends on the skipper and his skill. I'll say my nephew Ah-hai is strong and energetic, but don't you think he's a little young to be a skipper?"

"Comrade Ah-hsing," replied Party Secretary Chou, "whether sailing boats or catching fish, what you rely on is Mao Tsetung Thought and the joint effort of the collective. You don't measure the sea with a pail. So you mustn't judge a man only by his looks. Ah-hai is a Party member, the second hand on boat 717. He has matured under the personal guidance of his skipper who knows the sea like the palm of his hand. The Party branch committee has reviewed his qualifications quite thoroughly before deciding to send him to be your new skipper." Then, in lighter vein, Chou continued, "Perhaps he's not welcome here. In that case, how about sending him back?"

Ah-hsing knew Ah-hai well. He and Ah-hai's father were distant cousins. They had worked together on a boat for a tyrannical fishing-boat owner before the liberation, slaving all year round in all sorts of weather. One hard winter day shortly before Spring Festival, when they were far out at sea catching hair-tail fish, a fresh gale

came up from the northwest. Sea-gulls flew low, screaming before the approaching storm, while enormous foam-crested waves began bearing down upon the boat. The devilish boat-owner did not allow the men to return to port before it was too late, but forced them to take advantage of the gale to get in all the fish they could. The boat was driven into an area of submerged reefs known as White Breaker Rocks, where at a place called Broadside Wave Turn she was rammed and sank with all 16 hands on board, including Ah-hai's father. Only Ah-hsing and one other fisherman survived. Ah-hsing had helped Ah-hai's mother to bring the lad up.

After liberation, Ah-hai went to school for several years and then became a fisherman, working alongside Ah-hsing. He grew into a fine young man who cherishes deep love for the Party and Chairman Mao, has a sound socialist outlook and is good at his work. In a few years he became engineer on boat No. 717. During the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution, he conscientiously studied Chairman Mao's works and applied Chairman Mao's teachings to his work. As head of a revolutionary mass organization in the brigade, he had fought in the front ranks of those defending Chairman Mao's revolutionary line, and was highly thought of by his associates. His uncle, Ah-hsing, was of course well pleased with all of this. But now that Ah-hai was to be his skipper, he could not conceal some doubts he had about his nephew's ability in that capacity. Party Secretary Chou's remarks were helpful, however, and he went on deck and surveyed the lad from head to foot. There stood his nephew with strong arms and a sturdy, straight back, his complexion well tanned and his big round eyes smiling under thick

dark brows. They used to see each other often, but today this young man was more than ever an image of his father.

Ah-hai was not at all embarrassed by his uncle's scrutiny. Candidly he said, "Uncle, I've got plenty to learn from the comrades here."

"In that case, you'd better get acquainted with the boat first," suggested Ah-hsing. "We're leaving for the fishing ground in a few days."

When Ah-hsing started introducing the new skipper to the crew, mostly his childhood pals, everybody appeared a bit unnatural. Party Secretary Chou cut in with a smile, "You may have been working on different boats, but you're certainly no strangers to each other. Do you think he needs introducing? Isn't it like adding salt to salted fish?"

At this, Ah-chin, Ah-fa, Ah-jung, Young Chen and other members of the crew swarmed over their new skipper, caught his hands and pulled him into the cabin. Their merry laughter rang throughout the vessel.

II

A three days' wind had swept away all clouds, and countless stars sparkled in the sky. Slowly the dawn appeared on the horizon. A mist hung low over the sea like a veil until a morning breeze tore it to ribbons and scattered it far and wide. Then the rising sun gilded the surface of the sea, the dark blue water turned to crimson with myriad golden lights dancing everywhere.

"Red is the east, rises the sun. China has brought forth a Mao Tsetung..." The song *The East Is Red* rang out vigorously as the trawlers swung away from the quay. A new challenge faced the crew!

No. 715 led off, cut through the waves like a knife, leaving in its wake an ever-lengthening silver streamer that glistened in the sun. On the deck a hot debate was going on. The majority of the crew believed they could fulfil their plan to catch 190 tons of fish that winter, as Ah-hai had pledged on behalf of the No. 715 crew and their Party group at the brigade mobilization meeting. Ah-hsing had accepted somewhat dubiously the target figure. At the back of his mind he thought that it was unrealistic. The new skipper Ah-hai listened carefully with an open mind.

"I say," said "Sea Tiger" Ah-jung, representing the majority view, "if we want to make substantial increases in our catches, we must first have the will to do so. It's all up to us to decide. If No. 717 can set a target of 175 tons, why can't we aim at 190?"

"Who doesn't want to catch a lot of fish?" Ah-hsing declared meaningfully. "Last winter we caught only 125 tons. Now, with the same crew and nets, we think we can get 190. Everybody in the county says that No. 717's skipper knows the sea by heart, and they set their target at only 175 tons. Do you think you young fellows can beat that skipper?"

"It's because we've got so many young people on our boat that we should do better than 717!" Ah-fa interposed.

"Yes, young people are full of pep," Ah-hsing continued, "but technique... that's something solid and indispensable."

"Whether or not we fulfil this winter's 190-ton quota is a matter of responding to Chairman Mao's great call: **'Be prepared against war, be prepared against natural disasters, and do everything for the people.'**" The new skipper's words sounded serious. "What my uncle said is only half the truth. Yes, we've got to have technique in fishing, but what matters first is ideology. When fishermen revolutionize their thinking, the fishing-boats are bound to have fine catches. Fishermen had plenty of skill in the old days, but their winter catches amounted to only 15 to 20 tons per boat. And look at the miserable life they had! We all know these things, don't we, Uncle?"

Without waiting for Ah-hsing to answer, Ah-hai went on, "Now, after liberation, with our Party and Chairman Mao to lead us, we've advanced from our early co-operative to the more highly developed people's commune. We've got fine motorized fishing-boats now instead of the small sampans we had before, and can fish on the high seas as well as along the coast. And you can see for yourselves we're getting larger catches all these years. What counts here is not technique, but the superiority of the socialist system and the correctness of Chairman Mao's leadership."

"The skipper's right," Ah-jung affirmed feelingly. "Ideology comes first. Thinking only of skill is a poison left by Liu Shao-chi's wrong idea that 'technique comes first.' Such an idea should be thoroughly repudiated."

"That's so," Ah-fa followed up. "Technical competence depends on constantly revolutionizing our thinking. We'll lose our bearings in our advance if we fail to put Mao Tsetung Thought in command."

Ah-hsing was impressed by the young skipper's sincerity and seriousness, and his comparison of the old society with the present. He began to see the young man in a new light and felt that, after all, he had not quite known his quality as a skipper. But is he only fine in words? How about his deeds?

Ah-hsing stood up, gave a dry cough, then said, "Everyone wants to catch more fish. I'd like to catch five thousand tons at a haul. To serve the people all over the country with our fish catches is of course our highest ideal, but it's got to be matched by action. If not, we'll not only lag behind 717, but become braggarts as well!"

"Oh, you're pulling our legs," exclaimed Ah-jung, stamping his foot in a huff, with Ah-fa agreeing.

III

Hundreds of fishing-boats plowed briskly through the sea. As No. 715 and her auxiliary entered the fishing ground, Young Chen, the observer, kept his eyes on the fish detector fluorescent screen. Skipper Ah-hai called out from the helm, "Port 25!" "Starboard 13! . . ." The vessel answered obediently.

"Fish shoal ahead!" Young Chen reported joyfully.

"Good — continue your watch," was the skipper's calm reply.

"More shoals, large ones!" Young Chen shouted again with renewed excitement.

The crew ran out of the cabin and took up their positions, ready for action. They expected the skipper to

give an immediate order to lower the net. The 400-metre-long net would soon be filled with silvery hair-tail fish when lowered into the sea between the lead boat and its auxiliary. They could almost see the fish thrash about in the net as they were brought in through the foaming water and laid on the deck. But Ah-hai remained calm and did not give the order. He scanned the expanse of water ahead where an occasional hair-tail flashed over the surface of the water, then turned to glance at the rest of the fleet which were following so close that he could hear the engines and the laughter of the happy socialist-minded fishermen. The auxiliary boat had spotted the shoals too, and signalled that they were ready to close ranks and set the seine.

"Notify the command boat: Large shoals ahead," the skipper gave the first order.

Ah-fa jumped onto the platform, flagged the signal and resumed his post.

"Notify auxiliary boat to sail on," the skipper's second order followed.

Ah-fa reiterated the order word by word as he signalled the message to the auxiliary.

"Seiner!" the skipper was calling.

"Here!" Ah-hsing answered. This old fisherman, though a little conservative in thinking, was always ready at crucial moments to carry out the skipper's orders to the letter.

"Is the net ready?" asked the skipper.

"All's well," Ah-hsing reported back. "We're ready to set the net."

"Good!" It was Ah-hai. As he spoke, the crew took up the seine line, the scoops, the floats and sinkers, an-

icipating his order to lower the net. But after glancing again at the other vessels, Ah-hai ordered, "All hands at ease. Full speed ahead!"

The boat picked up speed, cresting wave after wave and slipping low in the deep troughs between. The sailors did not question their new skipper's order, but Ah-hsing was worried and demanded doubtfully, "What are you after, Ah-hai? Why are we passing up all these fish right before our eyes?"

"Uncle," Ah-hai replied with another question, "tell me which is bigger, 190 or 1,900,000?"

"Of course the latter," replied Ah-hsing.

"Now, figure this one: which is bigger, 715 or 750 million?"

"Even a kid knows the answer," Ah-hsing shouted at the new skipper. "What are you driving at?"

"At just this, Uncle," replied Ah-hai seriously, "though we're working on 715, we must keep the other figure, the nation's 750 million people, in mind. Our boat's quota is 190 tons, but what about the 1,900,000-ton quota of the 20,000 boats of the whole fleet? If we think only of ourselves and lower our net here, we'll be in the way of all the others. If we move on, the boats behind will get a better catch."

"Ah-hai's right!" the sailors agreed. "That's just what broad-minded fishermen armed with Mao Tsetung Thought ought to do!"

Only Ah-hsing failed to understand. "Our net won't cover the entire sea and draw in all the fish. I still don't see why we should move on," he went on saying to himself.

IV

The sun set behind a screen of crimson clouds and it would soon be dark. No. 715 lowered her seine after cruising for a while over the fishing ground. The catch was fine, each haul averaging about two tons of silvery hair-tail.

The sailors were enthusiastic, putting all their energy into bringing in as many hauls as possible before dark. Only Skipper Ah-hai stood with knitted brows as he gazed over the sea, golden now in the sunset. He was troubled over a problem; his face clouded as the dusk deepened.

Night fell. Lanterns on the fleet twinkled over the dark water like so many stars. No. 715 brought up only seven or eight lean hair-tail in its last haul. Obviously, it would be foolish to lower the net again. Ah-hai ordered the auxiliary boat to come close and cast anchor for the night. The day's work over, the men gathered in the cabin to talk things over.

Gazing over the sea in the silvery moonlight, the new skipper pondered many questions: Why can we catch plenty of fish only by day but not by night? Why do the fish shoals disappear at night? Do they leave the fishing ground at night and return the next day? Where do they go?

Unable to answer these questions, he took a copy of *Quotations from Chairman Mao Tsetung* from his pocket and, as a matter of course, began to study it by the navigation light on the main mast. An idea dawned on him: The wisdom of the masses is inexhaustible. Why not consult them? The day's fatigue vanished instantly. He

jumped to his feet and joyfully burst into the cabin where the others were.

Ah-hai sat down beside Ah-hsing. "I've been wondering, Uncle, why we catch hair-tail by the ton in the daytime but none after nightfall?"

Ah-hsing spoke impatiently. "Didn't old fishermen say that the hair-tail is a spirit that swims far away at night?"

"Then where do they come from the next day?" asked the new skipper.

"Hum... I've never thought about that. Fishing in the daytime and sleeping at night has been the fishermen's way for generations."

Others were drawn into the discussion. "Sea Tiger" Ah-jung got up from his bed and said, "You're onto something there, Skipper. I've noticed that when the moon's bright we can still catch a few fish, but we don't get any when it's very dark. Also, we seem to get better hauls when it's fairly warm. Why is this?"

"Strange," put in the observer, Young Chen, from the sidelines. "The fluorescent screen shows fish shoals at night, but when we lower the net it comes up empty."

"That's the problem we must solve," said Ah-hai, "and if we solve it, these fishing grounds will yield more for the state."

"We must solve that problem," agreed the others.

"Let's not brag," said Ah-hsing as though giving the sailors a classroom lesson. "We should just get all the fish we can by day and stop trying to do things that can't be done."

"But there must be a way, Uncle. There's dialectics in fishing as well. Know yourself and know your opposite,

and you can win a hundred times out of a hundred battles. If we know the night-time habits of the hair-tail, there's no reason why we can't catch them at night," said Ah-hai. "Let's hold a meeting and hear from our group. What do you say?"

"I have no objection to calling a crew meeting, but I am against acting rashly."

Everybody went on deck for the meeting. A lively discussion followed on the habits of the hair-tail. Young Chen thought a while and then said, "It seems that the hair-tail like warmth and light. In the daytime they swim near the surface of the sea where they have both. At night, when the surface of the water gets chilly and dark, they may swim down deeper. Maybe we didn't sink the net deep enough to catch them."

"There's sense in that," put in Ah-chen, the engineer. "We used to keep our seine at 40 metres' depth. I suggest we now sink it 20 to 30 metres deeper at night. I'm sure we'll get good hauls at that depth..."

"And to make sure," the new skipper cut in, "let's add half again as many sinkers to keep the seine at the proper depth."

Everybody thought this was a good idea. "Sea Tiger" Ah-jung was the first to rise, ready to attach the new sinkers. Ah-hsing, however, rose and announced, "I object!"

"Why?"

"You'll tear the nets at that depth. You're quite right in studying the habits of the hair-tail, but there've been hidden reefs deep down there since the world began. The net would only need to get caught once and that would be the end of your night's fishing."

"Let's have a try, anyhow," insisted "Sea Tiger."

"But don't be rash," cautioned Ah-hsing. "I'm the seiner. I'm responsible for the net, and it belongs to the whole fleet. Unless you convince me, I won't let anybody touch it!" Ah-hsing flared up. He clutched the net as though it were in danger.

"Your sense of responsibility is to be commended, Uncle," the new skipper said patiently, "and we should learn from you on that score. But we're trying to catch more fish for a revolutionary cause. We all think of how we can do it, but you often hold us back. We should not retreat before difficulty and danger."

"Retreat? Me?" This was more than Ah-hsing could accept. "Let me ask you, have I ever lagged behind in setting the seine? Have I ever done less than the others? I started life much earlier than you. I'm only asking whether your idea is scientifically sound."

"As for scientific basis, our conclusions are not away from practical experience. According to the chart, the sea bed is more than 80 metres deep here, with no submerged rocks except for White Breaker Rocks. At 70 metres, I don't think there'll be any danger of the net being torn."

Ah-hsing was quite surprised that the young skipper knew the sea bed so well. His nephew was indeed a thoroughgoing young man. Ah-hsing began to feel at ease about the new idea, so he gave it a second thought. Heartened but still somewhat dubious, he said slowly, "So long as there's no danger to the net, then . . . let's have a try."

After careful preparations, No. 715 and her auxiliary set out to attempt their first night catch. The seine bellied in a huge semi-circle between the two boats as they gathered speed. Everyone was keyed up when the seine

lines showed signs of strain. After about twenty minutes, when the boats began to lose speed, the skipper ordered acceleration. The engine was already at full speed. The engineer opened the throttle wider but the boat continued slowing down. The seine lines became more and more taut.

Sweat broke out on Ah-hsing's forehead. If the lines snapped, the brand-new nylon net, with its great load of weights attached, would be lost at the bottom of the sea. Worse, if the torn net fouled the propeller it could do a lot of damage. He rushed to the new skipper and belatedly, "I said it wouldn't work. I'm sure the net has caught on a snag. The boat is not moving ahead even at full speed. What a calamity!"

Suddenly the seine lines slackened off, followed by loud sounds of commotion in the wake. The crew ran to the stern to see what was causing such a noise. The seine was bulging and writhing like a huge monster in the waves. Hurray! It was full of struggling hair-tail fish! Everybody began to shout and laugh in excitement, so much so that they forgot to haul it in. Ah-hsing looked at the silvery catch. His worries had disappeared in no time. "Hurry! Haul them in!" he shouted. "What a haul! But laughing over them won't get them in the hold!"

The auxiliary boat slowly came alongside. The seine was pulled in and the excited crew plunged the flapping fish into the hold. It took over an hour to bring in that catch of more than five tons. No one seemed to feel tired. After the fourth haul, when Ah-hsing was about to drop the net again, the skipper ordered, "Take a rest. We'll swing over to the command boat. . . ."

"Why not another haul, Ah-hai?" the seiner asked. He was puzzled over the decision. "What's your big idea in going over to the command ship?"

"To report to the brigade leadership."

"You're really like a child, can't keep anything to yourself overnight," Ah-hsing grumbled. "Can't you report in the morning? If we stop now we'll lose several hauls."

"If one boat makes a few big hauls, that's good; but if every boat in the fleet does the same that's a great many times better, isn't it?" asked Ah-hai seriously. "It's true, our boat will get a few less hauls, but if we let the others know our method earlier, they'll bring in more hauls too, and the night's catch will be in the thousands of tons."

"Right, except that if we don't get the most fish we won't overtake No. 717 and win back the red banner. We'll fill our quota all right, but isn't it better if we can hit 300 tons?" It was Ah-hsing speaking.

"Of course we'll match the advanced in catches, Uncle," the new skipper said firmly, "but first we must match them in thinking."

"He really thinks of everybody but not himself," Ah-hsing murmured, as if some new idea was catching on in his head.

V

News of No. 715's successful night catch was broadcast to the whole fishing fleet. Skipper Ah-hai and his crew explained in detail to a steady flow of visitors from other

boats who came to learn how they did it. Then, Ah-hai gathered his crew together and worked out a plan to make up for lost time. They decided to increase the boat's speed and thus shorten the actual time for each haul from 40 minutes to 30. But just when No. 715 was beginning to catch up, the weather suddenly changed. The forecast was of a cold wave approaching, to be accompanied by a fresh northwesterly gale and probably a snowfall. An order came from the fishery headquarters for the fleet to return to port before dark. This threw cold water on all the plans of No. 715.

"Damn the weather!" scolded Ah-jung. "Why does it change just when we're doing so well!"

"What can you do about it? It's no use scolding the weather," Ah-hsing refuted.

"What do you say about having a contest with the wind?" the skipper asked deliberately.

"I'm game!" Ah-jung shouted emphatically. "Let's try for a few more hauls before the storm breaks."

"What! Catch fish before the storm breaks?" Ah-hsing interposed as he rose to his feet.

"Yes, a shoal always arrives ahead of a storm," affirmed Ah-hai. "I think we should seize this chance to make a big catch and return to port in time."

"It's five hours to port. We'll scarcely make it even if we set out right now. If we start catching more fish, we'll be caught in the storm on our way home and might end up on White Breaker Rocks!"

"There's a short cut we can take. It's *through* White Breaker Rocks. That way we can get back in about two hours."

"What! Go through White Breaker Rocks — at night?" Ah-hsing was shocked. "Ah-hai, you were brave and correct when you led us catching hair-tail at night. But getting through White Breaker Rocks at night is another thing. The Rocks are a natural barrier in the East Sea fishing ground, and the submerged rocks and sharp reefs cover a wide area for many miles. The current's so strong that the water's rough there even on a calm day. Old sailors used to say that the Rocks claimed nine out of ten boats passing there. Why, White Breaker Rocks is where we struck a reef back in the dark old days when we were working for that devil of a boat-owner. It was there your father died. Haven't you learned a lesson from what happened to your father?"

"Uncle, I'll never forget how my father died. It was the evil man-eating society that killed him," the young man replied with conviction. "But isn't it true that there's a safe passage through those reefs?"

"Well, yes. But the channel's no more than ten metres wide, with plenty of sharp turns too. It's very dangerous!"

"When I was a child I heard you say that you once sailed into the Rocks by mistake. How did you get out that time?"

"That time we had that old experienced skipper on 717 at the helm. We slowly punted our way off the rocks on each side and got through by the skin of our teeth."

"Uncle, in the evil old society, fishermen were often forced to take that short cut," Ah-hai said. "Sometimes, by chance, we made it. It's different now. The Communist Party and Chairman Mao have us fishermen at heart, and beacons have been specially set all round that

area. Illuminated buoys mark the channel. If we're bold and at the same time careful, I'm sure we'll sail through quite safely."

"Ah-hai," Ah-hsing said worriedly, "even experienced sailors are leery of White Breaker Rocks. Are you sure you can get through? This is serious!"

Skipper Ah-hai glanced up at the sky, paused a moment and then said confidently, "It may be difficult, but we can do it. In the first place, I've been through the Rocks twice with my old experienced skipper on 717, and I've made a rough chart of the area. Secondly, the gale is a northwester. We'll encounter it headlong instead of side-wise, and that will make our passage much safer. And thirdly, you've been through the Rocks too. This time I can take the wheel and you can take charge of the punting. So our plan is practicable. And most important is that we all have our Party and Chairman Mao at heart, and fear neither hardship nor death. We're fishing for a revolutionary cause and will let nothing stand in our way."

The skipper's analysis convinced the crew, who gathered round to voice support for the shove through the Rocks.

"All right," agreed Ah-hsing.

Grasping the skipper's hand tightly, "Sea Tiger" Ah-jung said, "Ah-hai, I'll go all out with you. With Mao Tsetung Thought at heart, we can overcome any difficulties."

"Right," added Ah-fa in a firm tone. "The Rocks are dangerous, but they are paper tigers, too. We'll conquer them!"

"Right! We'll navigate White Breaker Rocks at night. We're not afraid. Let's beat them!" someone declared in the crowd.

The men's hardy spirit affected Ah-hsing, and he felt his face flush. The young skipper mounted the engine-room roof and announced in a loud voice, "Comrades. We're all full of confidence, but let's firmly bear in mind Chairman Mao's teaching: **'Strategically we should despise all our enemies, but tactically we should take them all seriously.'** I suggest that while we're pulling in our last hauls, each work group discuss what safety measures to take for our return to port tonight. Does everyone agree?" When all shouted approval, the men resumed their work and, while lowering the seine, conscientiously discussed safety measures. Skipper Ah-hai went over to Ah-hsing and calmly explained, "Uncle, getting through White Breaker Rocks at night is of course difficult. But to fish for the revolution takes daring. If we pluck up our courage, we'll overcome all difficulties."

Ah-hsing hesitated for a moment, then said slowly, "Everybody is determined to tackle the channel, so let's do it your way."

In the calm just preceding the wind, the catch was indeed a good one. The average haul was around four tons, while the best reached about ten. The men became so enthusiastic over the catches that they seemed to have forgotten the approaching storm.

Sea-gulls swooped low over the waves, snatching at the little fish swept up to the surface by the strong under-currents. Dark clouds from the northwest began to gather overhead, while the waves foamed like lumps of cotton-waste. The temperature took a sudden drop. Ah-hai glanced at the great heaving vastness of the sea, fully aware that the storm would reach them soon.

"Return to port!" he ordered resolutely, as the last haul was brought in.

The fully loaded boats headed for White Breaker Rocks at top speed, riding the wind and waves in triumph.

Weather changed quickly at sea. Dark clouds now covered the entire sky; the wind gathered strength. Showers of spray flung onto the deck quickly froze. The clouds turned into a blanket the colour of beeswax, and snowflakes whirled down savagely like a myriad plucked goose feathers, reducing the visibility to a mere ten metres. Skipper Ah-hai calculated the distance they had covered and ordered the observer, Young Chen, to check the course. The chart indicated the boat's position already near enough to White Breaker Rocks to spot the signal lights, but there was nothing to be seen ahead but the opaqueness of the whirling snow. The skipper was absorbed in contemplation over the unexpected situation. Pole in hand, the 16 crew members lined both sides of the boat, scanning the sea with the greatest attention.

The roaring of the waves grew fiercer, the wind blew stronger, the snow fell heavier, the temperature continued falling, and the spray from breaking waves froze on the clothes of the crewmen. The turbulent waves tossed the boat about like a chip. But No. 715 and her auxiliary went on into the teeth of the wind like a pair of eagles in a gale.

They suddenly heard the boom of waves dashing against rocks within about 20 metres, and saw them thrown back as gigantic pillars of white foam. Then, a red beacon light flickered behind a screen of churning water. It stood sentinel on a huge rock at the entrance

of a narrow channel leading towards the southeast. It was the White Breaker Rocks!

"Watch out!" the skipper shouted. In the nick of time he swung the wheel hard over, and the ship nosed into the channel — the only passage through that rock-bound stormy sea. A few seconds' delay would entail disaster. Sciner Ah-hsing, watching from the bow, smiled his approval of Ah-hai's decisive action. He was truly proud of the bold but steady young skipper, revolutionary at heart and unparalleled in skill.

The boat sailed swiftly onward while the crewmen acted out their skipper's orders with speed and precision.

"Port poles!"

The eight men on the port side thrust their poles into the water and the boat swerved away swiftly.

"Starboard poles!"

The other eight men on the starboard side punted in unison and the boat veered off from a reef.

A sharp turn. Ah-hai ordered all the 16 men to move to the bow and thrust their poles against the rocks ahead while he swiftly swung the wheel over. The boats moved with added speed before the wind. To avoid the danger from the treacherous rocks on either side of the twisting channel, Ah-hai ordered the speed reduced. Yet in spite of this the swift wind and current drove the boat along. Dangers still lurked ahead.

Skipper Ah-hai stood at the wheel as steady as though he were navigating a calm estuary. But his eyes never left the rushing water before the prow.

"Attention! Shallow waters ahead, brake with anchors! Reduce speed!" he directed. Two anchors, each more than 200 kgs, were lowered and the boat slowed



down. It began to heave violently in reduced speed, but the 16 fearless men on the deck meticulously carried out each order from their skipper.

Suddenly a red signal light flashed straight ahead. It was a sharp-turn warning. The channel turned southwest at a right angle. This was known as the Broadside Wave Turn, the last but the most critical section of the whole channel. This was where the boat with Ah-hsing and the father of Ah-hai had struck a reef. . . . The 90-degree turn must be completed within a minute's interval to avoid being hit broadside on by the force of the waves.

The young skipper didn't hesitate. His order came immediately after the onrush of the first wave: "Weigh anchor! Full speed ahead!" Meanwhile, he swung the wheel over hard. The boat made a sharp turn, shot on through the narrow passage and switched back to her original course just in time to meet the impact of the second powerful wave with her prow.

No. 715 and her auxiliary steered past the last few rocks and headed for port at full speed. The sailors looked back triumphantly at the White Breaker Rocks quickly lost in the flying spume and snowflakes.

Skipper Ah-hai stood calm and composed. Looking at this young new skipper, Ah-hsing had profound class feeling for him. "Button your jacket against the wind," he advised Ah-hai, proud of this nephew of his.

The young skipper, keeping one hand on the wheel, beckoned to Ah-hsing, and gripped his hand tightly. . . .

Old Sentry

Chiu Hsueh-pao

IT was a starry night. The Custom House tower clock far away struck twelve, its clear and loud tones resounding pleasantly in the air.

The shipyard, ordinarily bustling with life, seemed exceptionally quiet this night. There was not a soul around, only a light burning in the office of the ship construction leading group. Group leader Yang was sitting at his desk smoking. He was weary from lack of sleep. Cigarette butts sent out slender strands of blue smoke from a filled ash-tray. Several volumes of Chairman Mao's works and a pile of documents and paper lay on the desk. The page of manuscript in front of him bore signs of having been worked over many times. In his concentration Yang had been unaware of live ash dropping on the paper and burning tiny holes in it. He was hurrying to summarize the experience in building a 10,000-ton freighter, and as he wrote, the exciting events crowded into his mind. During the building of the ship many working-class heroes had emerged. Where was he to begin? He thought for some time but could not decide.

"Hum! Writing a summary seems more difficult than building the freighter," he mused as he rose from his chair. Then, turning off the light, he walked towards the slipway. He unbuttoned his work jacket to the fresh night breeze and felt refreshed. Beyond the wharf was their newly built 10,000-ton freighter, the silver grey of its hull and the deep green below the load line blended now in darkness. The sight of the ship silhouetted imposingly against the river filled him with great joy.

The launching of the freighter that afternoon had been an unforgettable sight — the dangerous jerk it had given in the anxious moment between the removal of the last pair of blocks and his order for launching. Just then his technical adviser, the retired Master Hsiao who had been at his side throughout, had cut the cable at the control at the precise moment to release the ship down the slipway. How gracefully it had slowly gained momentum before hitting the water and kicking up foam and waves! Rattan helmets had been thrown into the air; gongs and drums sounded, and shouts of "Long live Chairman Mao!" had gone up, while tears of joy and triumph glistened on the workers' faces.

The same equipment, the same people, the same small repair dock, Yang thought, and yet a half-year's intense and self-reliant struggle had produced this ocean-going 10,000-ton freighter. What had made this possible? He felt sure there was a great truth that would explain it.

As he gazed at the ship through the darkness, he imagined people moving about on it. But, what was that? Why was there a light in the wheelhouse which had not yet been equipped? He must find out.

Scarcely did he step onto the pontoon bridge leading to the ship than a husky voice boomed out, "Halt! Who goes there?" And the beam of a flashlight nearly blinded him. The voice was familiar, definitely that of the retired old worker Hsiao. By the distant street light, he saw faintly the sturdy figure of the grey-haired veteran standing by the gangway.

"Master Hsiao, why are you here tonight? Hasn't the militia headquarters posted sentries?"

"Oh, so it's you! We figured the militiamen have been working pretty hard these days! I just told them to knock off for a while. I'll call them if anything happens."

Yang went up to Hsiao and gripped both his strong hands, saying, "You must be pretty tired yourself, you and the other old workers."

"And what about you and those in charge of the work?" said Hsiao, raising his frosty eyebrows and smiling. "You weren't taking it easy either. There are nine of us old men who are too excited to sleep tonight; we decided to take the duty aboard. Come! Have a look!"

Yang followed Hsiao up to the wheelhouse where, to his amazement, he found eight retired workers leaning against their bed rolls. Beside them were nine lunch boxes and a large pot of tea. "Yang, have a cup of hot tea with us," came the invitation from the nine.

"Ha! Looks like you're celebrating a happy event!"

"So we are. In fact three happy events," said one.

"The first is the launching of the big freighter," explained another as he poured Yang a cup of strong black

tea. "The second is the launching of China's first man-made earth satellite. And the third is International Labour Day on May 1st."

"If not for Chairman Mao and the Communist Party, I wouldn't even live so long," said Hsiao, beaming. "I'd never have enjoyed the honour of cutting the cable and launching the freighter!"

"Why aren't you in bed at this late hour?" Hsiao queried as he handed Yang a bun to eat. "What have you been doing?"

"I'm racking my brain writing a summary of the building of the freighter," replied Yang, munching the bun, "and I've got to finish it as soon as possible."

Master Hsiao nodded. "You've got to do a good job of it, Yang. This is a big thing."

"Tell me, Hsiao, what you think of the building of the boat."

"I think it boils down to this," said Hsiao after considering the matter for a while. "It's the result of the increasing consciousness of the broad masses of both old and young workers in relation to the struggle between the two lines. When everyone realizes that he is at this post guarding Chairman Mao's revolutionary line, things become easy." With that Hsiao straightened his red armband as he was used to doing, and pulled it higher up over his sleeve. The big golden words "Red Sentry" flashed before Yang's eyes like a torch suddenly lighting his trend of thought. The words, and the other eight old workers with similar armbands, kindled a warm glow within him.



II

One day in 1958, Yang recalled, Master Hsiao stamped into his office and, without a word, took out his letter of transfer and laid it before Yang, who was then head of the workshop. "Why are you sending me to the residents' committee? Am I no longer one of you?" said the old man contentiously. He was due for retirement that day.

Yang had had great respect for Master Hsiao ever since he came as a lad in his teens to the shipyard soon after the liberation. Yang had learned a great deal as an apprentice to the old worker. Later, Yang joined the Party and became a cadre, always looking upon Hsiao as his respected elder. He had had a hard time persuading the old man to retire and readily realized his feeling about the change of his status.

"I know how you feel about it," Yang said understandingly. "But the rule for retirement. . . ."

"My case is different," Hsiao cut in. "My back door is right next to our workshop. I request to remain with the shipyard."

"The residents' committee should look after you," Yang continued. "Meanwhile, you'll be welcome at the workshop meetings, and also any time you want to come to the shipyard. You can keep your pass. Will that do?"

The old man was pleased, took back his letter of transfer and went away. From then on, he refused to consider himself retired, and would drop in at the shipyard several times a week. Each time with his treasured tool

kit slung over his shoulder, he would walk along the dock, go up the berth or into the warehouse, never idle a moment. If he found a defect on an oxygen hose, he would repair it. When he saw bits of welding rod lying beneath the foot-high construction platform, he would crawl under to retrieve them one by one. Two precious things in his bag were a file and a thick notebook he had made from waste blueprint paper. Wherever he found scrap metal, he would smooth the pieces off with the file to see whether they were copper, aluminum, steel, or some other alloy. Then he would jot down in his notebook the things he found. He knew every scrap box and exactly what was in it — the size of the cog-wheels or the kind of spare parts. If anyone should need any of these things, he could tell him where to find them.

As Hsiao's hair grew white, he seemed to grow more revolutionary at heart. He talked very little, but worked hard and was always in high spirits. The workers fondly called him "the old housekeeper," which he felt an honour and accepted with satisfaction. In workshop meetings, Yang would commend him for his wholehearted devotion to the people's interests. And there would be old Master Hsiao sitting quietly in a corner of the room, responding to his colleagues' looks of respect with smiling eyes. His face, lined by hardships that were now long past, showed the joy brought by socialist labour.

Yang had noticed a great change in this veteran worker since the storm and stress of the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution. Previously a quiet type, he had become an entirely different person. He had come to the shipyard almost every day and, whenever a debate took place, would make his way through the crowd to a seat in the

front row, where he would listen carefully and then support what he thought was right. When big-character posters were going up, he was busy helping with a ladder or brushing paste on the wall. He also organized the retired workers to support the revolutionaries and repudiate the capitalist-roaders. Workers raised their thumbs to him and said, "Good for you! You retire from work, but not from the revolution."

"The Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution has opened up the mind of an old man like me," Hsiao replied candidly. . . . What especially struck Yang was the old worker's enthusiasm and strong fighting will in the course of building the 10,000-ton freighter.

In autumn 1970 when the call came from the leadership to build more and larger ships, the workers here responded with big-character posters, at the same time requesting the Municipal Revolutionary Committee for permission to take up the challenge of building a 10,000-ton ship. Approval was given, bolstered by active support.

The workers first called a general meeting to repudiate Liu Shao-chi's revisionist line that "building ships is not as good as buying them; buying ships is not as good as chartering them." One after another the workers went up to the rostrum and denounced this traitorous theory of Liu. Near the end of the meeting, old Master Hsiao suddenly rose, made for the platform, then mounted it in steady steps. Taking the microphone in his strong hand, he said, "Comrades, I'm 69, but this is the first time I've ever spoken before such a meeting. Those who have just given their opinions have spoken for me too, but now I want to say what's been on my mind all these years."

There was enthusiastic applause, which the speaker indicated should stop. Then he continued, "Comrades, you all know that I've been nicknamed 'the old housekeeper.' To tell the truth, I used to be quite satisfied with the nickname. I thought I was really doing what Chairman Mao teaches by being diligent and thrifty, saving every cent for the country. I've never spared my energy and sweat, and the more I sweated the more energy I got. I tried hard to be a good worker of Chairman Mao. But, since the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution, I've come to realize that this 'old housekeeper' here has not done his duty well at all. I still have a long way to go before I can really be Chairman Mao's good worker."

Then he took out his copy of *Quotations from Chairman Mao Tsetung* and read aloud: "**Our Party has laid down the general line and general policy of the Chinese revolution as well as various specific lines for work and specific policies. However, while many comrades remember our Party's specific lines for work and specific policies, they often forget its general line and general policy. If we actually forget the Party's general line and general policy, then we shall be blind, half-baked, muddle-headed revolutionaries, and when we carry out a specific line for work and a specific policy, we shall lose our bearings and vacillate now to the left and now to the right, and the work will suffer.**"

Laying the book on the table, he went on with fervour, "Comrades, here is the answer to why your 'old housekeeper' hasn't kept house very well. I remembered only the Party's specific lines for work, and understood very little about the Party's general line and general

policy. I knew only that enterprises should be run economically, but I failed to bear in mind at all times things of utmost importance such as state power and the struggle between the two lines within the Party. So, I kept busy day in and day out, seeing to leaky pipes and picking up bits of welding rods here and there. Of course, I should look after these things, and I will continue to. But what I was doing was not enough. I often failed to grasp the fundamental issue — the line."

One could have heard a pin drop in the hall. All eyes were fixed on this old master worker as he gulped down a glass of water, then wiped his mouth with the back of his hand. "Let me cite just one example," he went on strongly. "Take repairing ships. I'd always wondered why we should pay good money for broken-down foreign ships and waste a lot of labour and material repairing them. Renovating a 10,000-ton freighter takes several times as much labour as it does to build a new one. Why shouldn't we build a new one ourselves? I often felt something was wrong somewhere and was never very happy about it. I remember I took Yang here — he was then head of our workshop — to the shipyard director about this matter. We stated our views, and even got into a row with that foreign-educated chief engineer! Don't you remember, Yang?"

Yang, who was chairing the meeting, nodded emphatically. Then the old man went on, "But as nothing came out of our suggestions, I just gave up. So you can see how lacking this 'old housekeeper' was in political consciousness, in awareness of the struggle between the two lines. Now I know it was that renegade Liu Shao-chi undermining

Chairman Mao's revolutionary line. The more I think of it, the more I hate that renegade!"

Hsiao's candid remarks affected Yang profoundly and stirred up a deep sense of affection and respect for the old man.

Still Hsiao went on, vehemently now. "Comrades, we must never forget this lesson. We must always remember the Party's general line and general policy. We should firmly grasp class struggle and the struggle between the two lines, and forever remain clear-headed revolutionaries. Now, I want to pledge before you: I, 'the old house-keeper', will go on keeping the house, and more too. I want to learn from the revolutionary heroes and be an 'old sentry.' As long as I live I will stand at my post and defend Chairman Mao's revolutionary line.

"Down with the renegade Liu Shao-chi!

"Long live Chairman Mao! A long, long life to Chairman Mao!"

Once again thunderous applause rose from the audience.

The old worker's plain language, his profound class feeling and lofty ideal had left an indelible impression on Yang, too. The speech had often come back to his mind, and he had always felt that it also embodied his own thinking and was therefore a constant reminder of similar inadequacies in himself.

III

After that meeting the workshop leadership asked Hsiao to serve as technical adviser to the group which was

to lead the building of the 10,000-ton freighter, with Yang heading the group.

Under the general leadership of the shipyard Party committee, work soon got under way. The job was to be accomplished by relying on China's own efforts. The struggle was to be hard, and the first problem confronting the shipyard was the redesigning of the existing berth, which had to be lengthened. There were hot arguments over the choice between two proposals. One was that as the building of a 10,000-ton freighter was a major undertaking, the shipyard could ask the state for money to build a new and larger berth. The reason given for this proposal was that this was a long-term project, and so the ground should be laid solid.

Proponents of the other proposal said, "We ought to display the spirit of creative labour through hard struggle, lengthen the berth we have and build our 10,000-ton freighter on it." The thinking behind this second proposal was that it would save state investment funds, and at the same time work could be started sooner.

The meeting to discuss the two proposals lasted from six till ten in the evening, with no conclusion reached. It was already eleven when Yang reached home. He sat down to seek guidance in Chairman Mao's works, feeling his responsibility heavy. To ask the state for a large sum for investment, or use indigenous methods to build the ship on existing facilities? He firmly opposed the first alternative. The second was the correct, revolutionary one. He must stand steady in this struggle between the two lines, hold fast to the correct principle and not waver, he decided.

As he was thinking, he heard heavy footsteps on the stairs, followed by a knock at the door. Who could it be? Yang rose from his chair and opened the door, and there stood Hsiao. He came in, and not even taking time to sit down, asked Yang straight away, "Why were you so hesitant when you summed up the debate on the two proposals?"

Yang poured Hsiao a glass of water and, smiling, countered his question with a request. "Suppose you guess why I wasn't in a hurry to draw a conclusion."

Hsiao knitted his brows, his eyes shining beneath them as he said bluntly, "I'd say, there's something blinding you."

"What is it?" asked Yang, surprised.

"'Self'."

"'Self'?"

"Of course, it's 'self'!" repeated Hsiao, past bothering about politeness.

Yang smiled. "I don't see it. Suppose you point out where my 'self' interferes," said he.

"I know you support the crane operators' idea of using existing facilities. Right?" Hsiao answered, pointing a finger at Yang.

"Right!"

"Then why didn't you say definitely that you support their idea? Why?"

Hsiao's words hit Yang like a hammer. It was true, there was one obstacle in the way of adopting the correct proposal. As brought up at the meeting, the berth would have to be lengthened by at least 40 metres, and to do so they would have to demolish the workers' club that stood in the way. The crane operators had boldly sug-

gested tearing down the matshed structure to clear the space needed. Hsiao was all for it. He threw a meaningful glance at Yang, prompting him to declare his stand. Yang, however, had not said a word, but gone on puffing at his cigarette. Actually, Yang was thinking that although tearing down the club was necessary to make room for the berth, it would affect the workers' recreational activities. He must be cautious, he thought, for some people had already put up big-character posters during the Cultural Revolution, pointing out that for a time he cared only about production and neglected workers' welfare. He must not make a hasty decision this time! And now came Hsiao, saying that he was blinded by 'self'! Really!

At this thought, he said sincerely to the veteran worker, "But, Master Hsiao, this question concerns the everyday life of the shipyard workers. If it's not handled well, people will complain about us."

Hsiao smiled. "There you are! That's your 'self'!"

"How can this be 'self'?" Yang was puzzled.

"Of course it is. You don't trust the masses. When you weigh the pros and cons of a question, you should first consider whether they are in accord with the fundamental interests of the revolution. But you don't do that. For example, tonight. You thought first whether tearing down the club would bring you criticism, or a few big-character posters. If this isn't 'self,' what is? Yang, you don't understand the feelings of the masses. All the old workers at the shop have made up their minds to use existing facilities and overcome whatever difficulties arise. You don't believe me? Just look!" Hsiao took a draft of a big-character poster from his bag and handed it to Yang. "This poster is written by the night shift of the

assembly workers in support of the crane operators' proposal," he said.

Yang was deeply stirred by these words. The veteran worker had such high political consciousness, and had quickly spotted the remnants of 'self' clouding his thinking now. As a leader, Yang couldn't help taking pride in having such a fine old worker and Party member around. He took Hsiao's hand and said with intense feeling, "You 'old sentry,' tonight you have once again stood guard at your post defending Chairman Mao's revolutionary line!"

IV

The extension of the berth went on smoothly, the entire shipyard presenting a vigorous, militant work scene. One question after another arose and was solved as each came before the leading group — questions concerning material, building site, cranes, the mechanical and electrical equipment needed and so on. Yang hardly slept four hours a day, as he and the others plunged into the work.

One day Yang made a special trip by bus to Paoshan County. It was beginning to snow and, as he looked at the grey sky, he became increasingly anxious about Hsiao and the young comrades of the Youth Shock Team. They were salvaging a landing craft sunk at the mouth of the Yangtze River.

It had happened like this. When work to build the hull in sections started, they needed one more berth, but there was no space for it. This problem threatened to hold up the work. The engineering group suggested dis-

mantling the acetylene depot on the river bank to give the space, and Yang asked the workers what they thought. The men held that dismantling the acetylene depot was different from tearing down the club house. The latter was a matting structure which could easily be rebuilt. But the former was a permanent workshop indispensable to production. The workers opposed the idea of "incurring new loans to pay old debts." What was to be done then?

Just then Hsiao came in, wet and covered with mud. "Yang," he shouted, "I've found a way!"

Yang was anxious to know what good idea he had, and Hsiao, beaming with enthusiasm, answered, "Two months ago I took a boat to Chungming Island to see my granddaughter. At the mouth of the Yangtze River, I saw an old U.S. landing craft half submerged on the beach. It belongs to the scrap metal company. It's about 100 metres long, and if we repair it and make some alterations, don't you think, Yang, we can use it as a floating berth? That would solve the problem of space."

"Excellent!" Yang and the workers chorused, "Let's get in touch with the company right away."

Hsiao smiled. "I've already done that! Before daybreak I went to Paoshan County. The boat was still there. As it was low tide, I took off my shoes and waded over to take a look. The landing craft has a flat deck, and if we remove the upper structures, the whole thing can be used as a berth. Yang, that old landing craft is made to order!"

Yang fairly hugged Hsiao, he was so happy. "Good, you 'old sentry'! Tomorrow I'll go with the men and bring it home!"

"Oh, no, you're in command here and have a lot to look after," Hsiao protested. "Let me go."

The leader of the Youth Shock Team stepped out saying, "Give this job to us. We'll bring back that landing craft!"

"All right, then," Hsiao rejoined. "I'll let you young people go in front. As an old man, I'll be on standby to help you."

Yang insisted that Hsiao remain because of his age. The next day, however, Hsiao went with the Youth Shock Team just the same.

The snow fell heavier, and as Yang rushed to the beach, this was what he saw. The old landing craft had been brought to the surface all right, but a strong wind had blown it down the beach. Master Hsiao and the young people were waist-deep in the icy water, pulling hard at a steel cable to drag the boat back.

Yang threw off his padded shoes and trousers, jumped into the water and waded towards Hsiao. . . .

V

Soon after the landing craft had been salvaged, Hsiao fell ill. The cold wind and icy water had aggravated his joint pains, and he was confined to bed. In a few days, however, he was back at the shipyard, limping up to the berth. Yang saw him coming and went up to him, saying, "Master Hsiao, why don't you listen to the doctor's advice? Go home and rest."

"You're all doing your best for the revolution. How can you expect me to lie in bed? Oh, no!" replied Hsiao, and he limped off again without looking back. The old man was at the shipyard every day, going about giving his opinions and suggestions to the assembly or scaffolding crews. . . .

One day, after the work had gone on for about four months, Yang had just emerged from a manhole, blowtorch in hand, his work clothes, mended many times over, wet with sweat. He opened his shirt, took off his rattan helmet and mopped his brow. As he looked at the nearly completed hull rearing high on the berth, he felt an unspeakable joy. He had worked at every task alongside the shipbuilders in wind and snow with great energy. The building of the big freighter progressed rapidly. Now there were the workers tier upon tier of the scaffold high up against the blue of the sky.

When Yang came to the breakwater to one side of the berth, he heard Hsiao talking to Comrade Wang of the Political Propaganda Team.

Wang had just pasted up a slogan, a large brush dripping with paste still in his hand. "What do you think of it?" he was asking Hsiao as he pointed to it with obvious satisfaction. The old man nodded, and then shook his head again.

"The slogan is well worded, but that's not the right place to post it," replied the old man, fumbling with the stiff white stubble on his chin.

"Not prominent enough?" asked Wang.

"No, not that."

"It's posted too high?"

"No, not too high."

"Too low?"

"Not that either."

Wang was puzzled. "Why, then, do you say that it's posted in the wrong place?" he asked.

Hsiao became very solemn. "Young brother," declared he, "don't you see what was written there before?"

"Oh, so it's that," rejoined Wang nonchalantly. "I thought you meant something important. What was written on this wall had been there for a long time. It doesn't matter if it's covered up now."

Suddenly and quite unexpectedly Hsiao shouted, "Yes, it does matter, young brother! What was written there before is something we should never forget, not for a moment, not for a second. . . ."

Yang felt a sudden stirring in his breast as he heard these words. Right! Formerly on the wall in prominent red characters was: "**Never forget class struggle.**" Hsiao was really worth the name "Old Sentry," thoroughly faithful to the Party's cause, keen and alert, and always defending Chairman Mao's revolutionary line, Yang thought. Walking up to Wang, Yang said, "Master Hsiao is right. Let's move the slogan somewhere else. And repaint the original, in red as it was, but larger."

When Hsiao saw Yang, he said to him, "Yang, you came just in time. I was looking for you."

"What for?"

"The work on the freighter is going into full swing. Especially at this stage, we should pay attention to security."

"Yes," replied Yang. "In fact, I've just talked this matter over with the militia. The thing is they can't

leave their jobs at the moment, and have no time to stand sentry."

"Don't worry about that," Hsiao immediately put in. "I've spoken to eight retired workers, and the nine of us will organize a 'Red Sentry Squad.' We'll take three shifts a day for security work on the berth. What do you say?" With that he drew from his pocket nine bright "Red Sentry" armbands. "Look!" he said, smiling. "My granddaughter made these."

Yang put down his blowtorch, took the armbands into his hands, and was quite speechless. . . .

This was how the "Red Sentry" squad was set up at the shipyard with the approval of the Party committee.

From then on, while everybody was in the thick of building the boat, Master Hsiao and the other retired workers guarded the berth 24 hours a day.

VI

An incident took place when the launching was only a few days off.

One night when Yang came from the meeting of the leading group, the Custom House clock had struck twelve. It was raining hard. Yang put on his raincoat and went to the freighter for a final check.

As he walked up the deck and came to the first hold, he saw Hsiao and another retired worker at the bottom of it examining something by flashlight, their raincoats and helmets dripping with rain water. Feeling great respect for the two old men, Yang started down the temporary

spiral staircase to the hold when he heard Hsiao shout, "Stop that acetylene plane! Quick! I smell acetylene in the manhole."

A stream of sparks was flying out of the plane nozzle from the main deck and falling on Hsiao who was trying to divert the flow of sparks with his body, but to no avail. Suddenly flame sputtered from the manhole. Hsiao dragged the leaking hose from out of the hole, and with his own back sealed the opening which was still belching fire. Meanwhile he blew hard on his whistle.

Yang swiftly slid a tube to the bottom of the hold, grabbed a fire extinguisher from the hand of the other old worker and called to Hsiao, "Get away! Quick!"

But Hsiao shouted back at Yang, "Spray at the hold!" Yang hesitated a moment, till Hsiao called out again, this time a command. "Hurry up!" And only when Hsiao felt the cold foam spraying on him did he move away from the manhole.

An alarm at once sounded on the berth and people rushed down the hold with fire extinguishers. Soon the fire was put out.

Yang turned to Hsiao. The old worker was shaking the raincoat he had on, now smelling of scorched rubber. He was saying to the people around him, "I'm all right. It's nothing." But when Yang examined the skin beneath the back of the old man's well patched work clothes, he saw it very much reddened by the fire. He asked the doctor, who had also arrived, to rush Hsiao to the hospital.

The old man, however, would have none of it. Instead, he said to the people around him, "I'm not badly burned. It doesn't matter." Picking up the leaky hose, he continued, "Comrades, this incident is a warning to us. In

moments of victory, we must not drop our guard, but heighten our vigilance and prevent sabotage by the class enemy."

After Hsiao had left with the doctor, Yang called a meeting on the spot, for he had decided to make the incident known throughout the shipyard and hold a general discussion to ensure the safe launching of the 10,000-ton freighter.

It was later learned through extensive investigation and exposure by the workers that the fire had in fact resulted from an act of sabotage by a revenge-seeking counter-revolutionary. After that incident, Master Hsiao kept even better watch in the shipyard, his alert eyes brighter than ever before.

VII

The ring of the telephone roused Yang from his thoughts. Who could be calling at this hour? Had something happened? He took up the receiver apprehensively and to his surprise, heard Hsiao's voice.

"Yang, have you finished your summary?"

"Oh, so it's you, Master Hsiao. I was thinking about what we went through building that ship. How's everything with you on the boat?"

Hsiao's voice again rang out at the other end. "Everything as usual. By the way, what I called to tell you is that several of us old men have been talking together, and we feel there's something that ought to be included in the summary."

"What is it? Tell me," replied Yang in a respectful tone.

"We old men are worried," said Hsiao.

"About what?"

"You see, after launching the 10,000-ton ship, our shipyard has become well known. It has been reported in the papers, broadcast over the air. Film studios have come to make pictures. And how many fire-crackers have been let off! We think, especially at this time, we should remember Chairman Mao's teaching to be modest and prudent, to guard against arrogance and not to slacken our effort. Don't you think so? Anyone who knows anything about ship building knows that the launching of a ship is merely the launching of a hull. The work is only half done. Still tougher jobs have yet to be tackled. So the old men here all said that we should further step up our efforts and reach our goal at one go without the slightest let-up."

Yang was very much moved. But Hsiao had not finished. "The nine of us have decided that as long as the freighter is here, we will stay with it. This is how we will stand sentry for Chairman Mao's revolutionary line. We will carry the revolution through to the very end!"

Yang put down the receiver, his eyes moist with emotion. Feeling that he had now grasped the theme of his summary, he rubbed out his cigarette, took up his pen, and began rapidly to write.

The Custom House clock struck again. The grand and solemn strains of *The East Is Red* echoed and re-echoed over the broad expanse of the river.

Old Hsin's Day of Retirement

Yao Ke-ming

ANY time of the year you might have seen a square-set man with well tanned face riding a bicycle in the streets or lanes of Shanghai, a bright red plastic-covered copy of Chairman Mao's *Serve the People* in the breast pocket of his blue denim jacket. The canvas bag fitted to his bicycle bulged with bottles of medicinal herb drinks. He was delivering them to the patients' homes, undelayed by wind and rain, the summer's blazing sun or winter's ice and snow. This man would be Old Hsin, delivery man for our pharmacy of traditional medicine.

He's white at the temples now after his long years of work. Today completes his forty-fifth year at the shop, counting the time he served as apprentice there in Shanghai's dark pre-liberation days. Today is also Old Hsin's first day of his well-deserved retirement. When I came to relieve him of his work in the morning, he told me he had one more bottle of medicine to deliver.

I wondered why he must make another delivery after all those he had made over the years. What special medicine was this?

Old Hsin fished a small notebook out of an inner breast pocket with slightly shaky hands. His eyes narrowed, accentuating the wrinkles at their corners as he began to thumb through it. I looked and saw noted there names of factories, patients, patients' home addresses, their illnesses and general condition, prescriptions delivered, and so on. Old Hsin read slowly and thoughtfully. "Chang Ah-ken. . . went back to work a few days ago. Li Hung-kang. . . no recurrence. Chao Tung-liang. . ."

Now I could see the mood he was in. The little notebook revealed his affection and concern for the multitude of workers, peasants and soldiers through the years.

He stopped short when he came to the name Huang Hai-sheng, which was ticked in the margin.

"He must be back by now. I wonder how he is," Old Hsin muttered to himself, thinking hard for a while.

"What is it, Master Hsin?"

"It was his bottle of medicine I wanted to deliver but couldn't."

"How was that?" I asked, my interest growing.

The old man lit a cigarette before telling the story.

It happened before the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution, more than four years ago. One afternoon, the store's ex-manager Gou told Old Hsin that a customer wanted some tonics prepared at home and that since Hsin knew his job well he should go. "There's big money in it," the manager said, gesticulating to lend an air of seriousness to the business. Then calculating aloud, he continued, "How much can we collect for an ordinary herb prescription? Only a few cents!" Gou grinned and went

on, "Ha, our business will go up today, leap up like a dragon!"

This had immediately brought doubts to Old Hsin's mind: "Nowadays we don't prepare fancy tonics in customers' homes as we did for the rich in the old society. Why should I put off my medicine deliveries to prepare tonics in someone's home? What kind of customer is this? What does he need tonics for?"

Old Hsin had set out, calm but on his guard, and when he found the place he did not go in at once. He inquired from several families around and learned to his indignation that the "customer" was a big capitalist who monopolized the fish market in the old days, battering on the blood and sweat of the working people. After liberation he pretended to turn over a new leaf and change — in the daytime, that was. But comfortably back at home in the evening he still lived as before, eating and drinking greedily behind latched doors.

"Bloodsucker!" Old Hsin cursed under his breath. "Better open your eyes and see what time it is. You're daydreaming if you think you can buy home-prepared tonics with the money you've squeezed out of people! You think you can go on living like a parasite and make a comeback when you've grown fat and strong? We'll see about that!" Without giving so much as a backward glance at that house, Hsin rode straight back to the shop, fuming with anger. That night he wrote a big-character poster exposing the manager's capitalist way of "putting profits in command" and running the shop in the interest of the bourgeoisie.

Next day he was aware that while he was out on the manager's tonics errand, several prescriptions had piled up

and not been delivered. One had been ordered by a fisherman named Huang Hai-sheng, asking that the medicine be delivered to the fishing fleet headquarters that day.

Old Hsin immediately set out with the medicine, pedalling for all he was worth, but when he got to the place he was told that Huang Hai-sheng had left in the morning. Huang was a veteran fisherman with rich experience, and had been assigned to another province to give technical guidance for three or four years, till fishery was developed there and young fishermen trained.

Having missed Huang, Old Hsin found his way to the fishing fleet's clinic, and from the doctor he learned that Huang Hai-sheng had suffered for many years from chronic rheumatoid arthritis. In the old society, the owner of the fish market cared only about making bigger profits; to him the health of the fishermen meant nothing. To keep the fish in good saleable condition in the heat of summer, he made the fishermen take the haul to the cold-storage warehouse as soon as they were in port. But he provided no warm clothes so that the fishermen had to lug the boxes of fish into cold-storage in their sweat-soaked shirts and shorts. Of course they got chilled to the bone, and many fishermen suffered from chronic joint pains after working for a long time under such conditions.

With the undelivered medicine in his hand, Old Hsin thought about his errand of the previous day and hated Gou the manager intensely. He stood on the wharf, his heart going out to Huang the fisherman. . . .

From then on, every time Old Hsin delivered prescriptions to the fishing fleet he would inquire after Huang Hai-sheng's health, and often when the weather turned bad he would worry whether Huang might have had a relapse.

Four years passed, and as Old Hsin turned the pages of his notebook today he said that someone at the fishing fleet had told him that Huang Hai-sheng would return to Shanghai in a few days. "I must go and see him to find out how his arthritis is," he said.

"But you're retired beginning today," I reminded him.

"There may be a limit to one's working life, but there's no limit to serving the people." Old Hsin paused for a while and continued firmly, "My mind won't be at ease till I get this thing settled. Let's get moving. We'll go together today, young man. Since you're a newcomer, you should get acquainted with the workers and the general conditions here," he said to me enthusiastically.

It did not take us very long to get to the place.

Old Hsin knew the fishermen there very well and it seemed everybody was greeting him and exchanging words with him. I was deeply impressed by the warm and friendly atmosphere.

"Hello, Old Hsin," one of them said, beckoning to him. "I got my medicine you left here yesterday. But how did you know I was here on special duty? You must have taken it to my home before you brought it here."

Another one chipped in, "Thank you for all the trouble you've gone to, Hsin. If you had not brought me the herb drink on time I would have forgotten to take it."

"The prescription you recommended really fixed me up!" a third one added.

"Old Hsin, everybody's saying the credit to our fleet for catching more fish goes partly to you," someone else joined in. And all laughed heartily.

Old Hsin smiled modestly and greeted back. And at the clinic he told the doctor what we had come for.

"You've come at the right time. Huang Hai-sheng returned a couple of days ago and I've just been to his home," the woman doctor said. "Comrades in that province had taken good care of him and done everything to treat his arthritis. He is much better now, but it's a chronic trouble. A permanent cure will take time. The leading comrades here are also concerned for him. They said he must be tired after the long journey home, and since the weather has been nasty the last few days his old complaint may recur. They want him to rest for a few days at home and take the opportunity to get some further treatment."

"He must be at home then."

"I expect so," she nodded and opened a drawer. "I've just written out a prescription for him and haven't yet sent it to your pharmacy," she said.

"Good, I'll take it back with me and deliver the medicine to him." Old Hsin took the prescription. His eyes shone as warmly as though he was going to see his own long lost brother. "We'll prepare the tonic and deliver it early tomorrow morning," he said to me.

It was already noon when we were back at the shop. Hsin quickly ate his meal and pushed his bicycle out again. Instead of medicine bottles he carried a sickle, a bag and a small hoe.

"Aren't we going to deliver the medicine tomorrow? Where are you going now, Master Hsin?" I asked, somewhat surprised. "This is your first day of retirement, and you tired yourself out in the morning. You must take a good rest this afternoon."

"I've some urgent business to do." With that he smiled and rode away, soon disappearing in the distance.

Next morning when a rosy dawn broke in the east, Old Hsin and I were on our bicycles delivering Huang Hai-sheng's medicine. This long delayed delivery was Old Hsin's last and my first.

Huang's home was about seven kilometres from our shop according to the address written on the prescription. There was a gentle breeze and I inhaled the fresh morning air with relish.

On the way Old Hsin kept glancing to either side of the road — at the houses, poplars, road signs, bridges, as if for the first time. I understood how he felt. These familiar objects which he associated with his long years of serving the workers, peasants and soldiers were certain to strike an emotional chord on the day of his retirement.

Gradually he began to speak. He seemed particularly excited over the delivery today. He even tried to imagine what Huang Hai-sheng looked like. "I hope our medicine helps him to get better. We need hundreds of thousands of energetic path-breakers like him for our socialist revolution and construction," he said with intense feeling.

When we got to the place after a long ride, we tried to locate the house, but could not find it. The area was all one big construction site, with no residential houses in sight.

After some inquiries we learned that this was a new factory being built, that the former houses had been pulled down several months ago and the residents moved to new homes by the housing authority. The doctor must have given the old address. Where were we to find Huang Hai-sheng?

We pedalled all the way back to the fishing fleet headquarters where we got his new address. Huang lived another five kilometres away, and the sun was giving off a withering heat. The streets were hot and steaming like a cooking pot. Even the leaves of the trees drooped. It must be hard going for Old Hsin at his age, for even I considered the heat and fatigue unbearable, and I was only twenty. Perspiration clung to the ends of his greying hair, covered the bridge of his nose and seeped out from under his blue jacket. "You must be tired, Master Hsin!" I said to him.

"We need two wheels plus a red heart if we're going to do our job well and form links with thousands of families," Old Hsin said to me with a smile. "I forget about being tired when I think of getting the prescriptions as quickly as possible into the hands of workers, peasants and soldiers who need them." His youthful energy had won my respect, and I pedalled with new strength in my legs.

We dismounted at a row of new houses, found the number, and then Old Hsin went up to knock at the door, which was answered by a middle-aged woman.

"Excuse me. Is Comrade Huang Hai-sheng home?" Old Hsin inquired. "We've brought him his medicine."

"Oh, I'm so sorry. He's just left for the wharf," the woman replied.

"He's supposed to be taking a few days' rest, isn't he?"

"That's right. There's the doctor's order for rest on the table. But Old Huang said he could not sit idle at home when the movement to grasp revolution and promote production was in full swing and the fishing fleet was bringing in big catches every day. He said his trouble

would go once he started to work. He was home for a while this morning for he's going to sea with his boat at noon. That's what he's like. A team of oxen couldn't pull him back." And she spread her hands helplessly.

Old Hsin turned and said to me, "See what I mean? All our worker-peasant-soldier customers are good comrades like him. What could be more honourable than serving them?"

Then he said to the woman, "A fishing trip will take two or three weeks. We'll catch him at the wharf so he can take the medicine with him."

With that Old Hsin turned his bicycle round and was soon pedalling at top speed. I followed closely. Strangely enough, by this time I no longer felt tired. We only hoped we'd make it to the wharf in time and not miss Huang Hai-sheng again.

Everyone was busy on the wharf. The fishing trawlers that had just put into port were fully laden with silvery fish. The departing ones were lashing down for the sea. Directed by one of the fishermen, we came to the side of one of the trawlers, and there was Huang Hai-sheng.

After so many years and so many detours, Old Hsin had found him at last. He grasped Huang's hand and gave him the bottle of medicine.

When Huang Hai-sheng learned who Old Hsin was and what he had come for, he thanked him again and again.

"Don't mention it. I'm at fault for delivering the medicine four years late," said Old Hsin.

"How's that?" asked Huang, surprised.

Then Old Hsin told Huang the story — why the prescription never reached the fisherman four years ago.

"You're really doing as Chairman Mao says — showing a boundless sense of responsibility in your work and a boundless warm-heartedness towards all comrades and the people!" Huang Hai-sheng was deeply moved.

After asking kindly about Huang's arthritis, Old Hsin produced another bottle, one of medicated wine, from the canvas bag on his bicycle, and said to him, "Here, try this too. I once suffered from that trouble myself. A few years ago I made out a prescription of herbs, I soaked them in wine and tried it for some time. It worked. I still had some left in the bottle, but its strength might have suffered in storage. So I added fresh herbs . . ."

So, that was what Old Hsin had been up to with those tools! "You went gathering herbs yesterday afternoon, didn't you?" I interrupted him.

Old Hsin's silence was his admission.

"A long way out of the city and into the hills to pick these herbs," I thought aloud.

Huang Hai-sheng took Old Hsin's medicated wine, at a loss how to thank him. I was impressed too and told Huang Hai-sheng what Old Hsin had done since he'd "retired." Huang gripped Hsin's hand; strong emotions left them speechless for a while.

Then came Huang's booming voice: "Old Hsin, I'll never forget the kindness of a class brother. I'll follow your example, do what Chairman Mao says, and devote my whole heart and energy to the revolution and production."

A broad smile came over Old Hsin's face. "I'm only doing what I ought to do for the revolution," he said.

"Whoo!" A siren screamed and the trawler slowly cast off.



His eyes still moist with emotion, Huang leaned over the gunwale, fixing his eyes on Hsin till he lost sight of the old man.

I was deep in thought. "What Old Hsin has done reflects a splendid way of thinking. What is the great moral force that enables him to set such a shining example to others in his everyday work? And now I am to be his successor. How shall I go about learning to serve the people like that!" It was then that the bright red cover of *Serve the People* in Old Hsin's breast pocket caught my eye. . . .

"Wait a few days before you drink it. Wait till the goodness of the new herbs is fully extracted. . . ." Old Hsin's earnest advice to Huang at the wharf seemed to ring out again. "Tell me when you get back. I'll come and see you. . . ."

The trawler gradually grew smaller in the mist of the river, but I thought I could still see Huang Hai-sheng waving his hand.

Red Navigation Route

Chao Tzu

TOWARDS evening one day between late summer and early autumn, the weather had become unusually close and sticky. A few patches of thread-like white clouds floated at great height, while in the western sky were red and orange-tinged billowy clouds which were exceptionally bright — typical signs of a typhoon brewing.

At this very moment on the road along the Whangpoo River a comrade from the People's Liberation Army was hurrying on his way. His clothes were wet with perspiration. But he did not in the least slacken his pace. Now and then he would raise his head to look at the threatening sky, and as he looked he knitted his brows.

This comrade from the PLA was about forty years of age, strong and sturdy in build. His name was Li Chih-kang, and he was a cadre in the rear service of our northern frontier force. He had come to Shanghai to escort supplies urgently needed by the frontier forces who were standing guard against the revisionists. These supplies had been assigned to the 10,000-ton freighter, the "Fighter," for transport to the destination, and they were now

being loaded. The "Fighter" had docked only the day before, bringing a supply of coal from a northern port. When the crew heard that their ship was to transport supplies to the heroic frontier forces at Chenpao Island, they took up the task of helping the dock workers with the greatest fervour and, displaying their tremendous drive of daring to fight and daring to have a trial of strength, finished unloading the coal, cleaning the holds and loading the boat in thirty hours — a task which would ordinarily take four or five days. The freighter was to leave at 10:30 that evening as scheduled, but suddenly the forecast of typhoon came over the wireless. The several high-pitched loudspeakers along the river were all sounding warnings: Typhoon brewing in the Pacific, heading northwestward at 12 nautical miles an hour with a 12-grade central force. The typhoon should strike somewhere near the mouth of the Yangtze River. . . . What an unfortunate coincidence! If the "Fighter" could not weigh anchor that evening, she would have to stay in Shanghai harbour for at least a week till the typhoon passed the ship's navigation route. In that case, the supplies would not reach the destination on time. Li Chih-kang was, therefore, very much worried. Unless the typhoon changed its course, the chance was getting slimmer by the hour for the boat to leave on schedule, he thought.

Soon the majestic form of the "Fighter" came into Li's full view as he approached it, and he could hear the noises of the cranes and the bustling of men at work from quite a distance. A long streamer between two light poles reading "Answer with action Chairman Mao's great militant call: **Be prepared against war, be prepared against natural disasters, and do everything for the**

people.'" spurred the crew and the dockers to seize every minute in the loading. Li Chih-kang hurried through the crowd. He ran up the gangway and onto the spacious deck of the ship. Only the day before the ship had unloaded more than 10,000 tons of coal, and yet the deck was neat and clean, with not a speck of coal dust to be found. Remarkable, he thought.

Li Chih-kang was looking for a crew member to find out where the captain was when suddenly someone appeared from behind a crane operator's booth and called out to him warmly, "So you've come, PLA Comrade!" Then taking over the armyman's bag, he continued, "Our old seaman has asked me several times to go ashore to meet you. Now, come with me, your cabin is ready. It's over there. Our old seaman has also said. . . ."

Li Chih-kang looked at this round-faced young seaman wearing a red armband marked "On Duty" and queried, "Who is this old seaman you speak of?"

The seaman on duty was himself amused. "Oh," he answered, rubbing his head, "I mean our captain, of course. Everybody calls him the old seaman. But, how is it you also speak the Shanghai dialect?"

"I'm from Shanghai, so naturally I speak the dialect. However, it's been a long time since I left here. Perhaps you mean I speak the dialect with an accent?" Li Chih-kang patted the young man on the shoulder and went on, "Take me to your old seaman, then."

"No, he can't see you now. He's holding the meeting prior to departure, and wanted me to apologize to you. Our political commissar is not on board either. He's

off to a meeting in Peking. If there's anything you want, just tell me. I am Ah-yang."

"Holding a pre-departure meeting? Do you mean to say we're sailing tonight?" Li was pleased, but a bit worried. "What about the typhoon?"

"Typhoon?" rejoined Ah-yang as he looked up at the sky. Then he explained proudly, "Our old seaman says to let the typhoon have its own way; we'll still go ours. Now, here's your cabin. Don't you want to take a bath?"

Li went into a roomy and neat cabin as he dried the sweat on his face with a towel. From what he had heard from Ah-yang he already held a deep respect for this old seaman. "Let the typhoon have its own way; we'll still go ours." What valour! "Never mind the bath," he answered. "Tell me now: does it mean that the typhoon has changed its course?"

Ah-yang shook his head. "We entertain no such illusions," he said.

"Then you plan..."

"The old seaman's plan is to sail beyond the Yellow Sea before the typhoon reaches there. In other words, to throw the typhoon behind us. To put it more plainly, we'll have a race with the typhoon!"

"Ah, so that's it!" Li burst into smiles. This was indeed a bold plan. At this moment the typhoon was some 250 nautical miles from Shanghai. If it did not change its course, its full force would reach the mouth of the Yangtze River in 20 hours. And as the typhoon moved northward, it would gain velocity. The "Fighter" would have to pass the Shantung Peninsula in the northern part of the Yellow Sea within that time if it wanted

to avoid the typhoon. Not much time to manoeuvre in! Especially for a coal burner like the "Fighter." Still, it could be done if efforts were made. The captain's style of work was militant, strict and vigorous all right, Li Chih-kang thought, and began to have a liking for the skipper though he had not yet met him. Unable to restrain his feelings, Li said to Ah-yang in approbation, "Your old seaman will be sailing the storm, really, rather than the ship."

Ah-yang was pleased to hear the PLA comrade praise their old seaman, and said in turn, "An eagle that grows up amid storms loves to fly in the storm!"

"So you are a writer of verses!"

"This is not a verse, but a true story."

"A true story? Can you tell it to me?"

And so Ah-yang began to tell his story about the old seaman.

II

"Let's start from the January Revolution.*

"Our old seaman, whose name is Hsin Yung-chin, used to be 2nd Officer of our ship. For several dozen years

* In January, 1967, under the guidance of Mao Tsetung Thought, the proletarian revolutionaries of Shanghai seized power from a handful of Party persons in power taking the capitalist road in the former Shanghai Municipal Committee of the Chinese Communist Party. Great leader Chairman Mao appraised the January Revolution highly and gave it his warm support. Very soon the January Revolution swept over the whole country.

he's sailed the seas and become an all-round seaman despite his lack of much formal education. He does not speak much, but at crucial moments he dares to come out with his views, and he sticks to them. The former captain of our ship, Yang, used to say that the old seaman gave him a headache.

"Speaking of this Captain Yang, he was supposed at one time to be the 'pillar' of the Marine Transportation Bureau. His mind was full of taboos. He believed implicitly in one-man leadership. In everything, whatever he said went. That was before the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution, of course. So, when the Revolution started, our old seaman took the lead in putting up quite a few big-character posters criticizing him. But, did that give him a lesson? No! He held right on to the wrong ideas propagated by Liu Shao-chi. True enough, he was somewhat shorn of his airs as a captain, but he took on the protective phrase 'in case'..."

"What does that mean?" Li Chih-kang asked.

"Just listen and you'll know what it's all about. At the time of the January Revolution, a handful of capitalist-roaders in the Party in Shanghai tried to sabotage the great Cultural Revolution by spreading counter-revolutionary economism.* Goods were piled up high on the wharves waiting to be transported while telegrams were coming in from all parts of the country demanding prompt

* Counter-revolutionary economism was designed to oppose Chairman Mao's important policy of grasping revolution and promoting production. It dampened the revolutionary will of the people by offering "monetary benefits and subsidies" or material incentives and so inciting them to struggle against each other. In this way it tended to convert the political struggle into an economic one.

delivery. Just at this time our ship, the "Fighter," arrived in Shanghai with coal from a northern port. We were ready to throw ourselves at once into the task of freighting the accumulated cargoes. But the ship had touched a shoal at the mouth of the Whangpoo River, and there were signs of a small leak in the hull. Captain Yang arbitrarily decided that the ship should dock for repairs. Good heavens! Did our captain know the situation we were in? Of course he did. It was just like you PLA men coming face to face with the enemy at the front and about to go into action when suddenly your commander gives the order to fall out. . . .

"Immediately the revolutionary mass organizations called an emergency meeting to discuss the situation. When it was found that the leakage was only two or three tons an hour, while the rate of our pumps was 500 tons an hour, we felt that the leakage was insignificant. So we decided to set to the urgent task of transporting the accumulated goods. But that captain Yang held on to his own views, saying, 'Navigating a leaky ship is too risky. In case anything should happen, I, as the captain of the ship, couldn't afford to bear the responsibility.'

"We told him we had enough pumps. But he kept on shaking his head and saying, 'In case something happens to the pumps — what would we do then? Or, if nothing happens to the pumps, what would we do in case the cargo gets water-damaged?'

"Our old seaman was sitting in the corner, not saying a word. Whenever Captain Yang repeated the phrase 'in case,' the old seaman would draw hard at his cigarette. Soon he lost patience, jumped to his feet and said right out, 'Say, Captain Yang, from morning till night, it's

nothing but 'in case' — the odds are one in 10,000. To be sure, we should take into consideration the one. But, why don't you think of the 10,000?

"What do you mean by the 10,000?" Captain Yang grumbled. He was evidently taken aback.

"Our old seaman was furious. Striking the back of his chair, he said, 'You, the captain of a 10,000-ton freighter, not knowing what it means? One trip less means 10,000 tons of goods undelivered. To lay the ship up for repairs at this time means several times 10,000 tons of cargo undelivered.' 'But, but . . .' that captain Yang turned to his last resort. 'To put out in a leaking boat is forbidden even by international navigation regulations!'

"Specific instances should be specifically analysed. You're not willing to deviate the least bit from the taboos and commandments you love so much, and yet you deviated from the navigation route enough to run into a shoal.'

"I was navigating along the route guided by buoys, but the gale had dislocated the marks. Everyone knew that.'

"The marks were off. But . . .' and the old seaman pointed at his own head, 'what about the marks in there?'

"That captain Yang didn't understand what the old seaman meant and, thinking that he was trying to fix responsibility, hurried to defend himself, 'I . . . I was not to blame for that incident.'

"The old seaman's anger mounted. He raised his voice and shouted at Yang point blank, 'What! I should say what you ran aground on was a sand bank called "I." It wouldn't have mattered much if you alone ran aground, but our ship the "Fighter" must not run onto your sand

bank!' This was more than Yang could take. He flushed and shouted back arrogantly, 'You can kick me out, but to go to sea with a leaky ship, never! I'll not take this responsibility.' Yang had thought we couldn't do without him. His arrogance only infuriated us the more. We said, 'One doesn't eat pork with bristles on for want of the butcher. Do you think that without you for captain the seamen won't be able to put the ship to sea?' It was at this crucial moment that our old seaman with the support of all of us, stepped forward and took command on the bridge. In this way he struck back at counter-revolutionary economism and defended Chairman Mao's revolutionary line and the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution. Our old seaman has been to sea many years. He's resourceful and has plenty of practical experience. With him as our pilot, we overcame many difficulties and completed the arduous task of transporting the accumulated goods. Later on, he was officially appointed the captain of our ship."

III

Ah-yang was about at the end of the story when an elderly seaman passed by. Ah-yang quickly stood up and called to him, "Boatswain! Boatswain!"

"So you're here, Ah-yang. Go and pull up the gangway. Hurry. The meeting has decided that we sail two hours in advance." The boatswain is a fast-moving person, talks briefly and walks briskly. When he comes to

your room to say something, he says it with a foot on either side of the threshold and then hurries off.

"The meeting went smoothly? Did anyone make trouble?"

"Oh, yes, there was a trouble-maker. Except now, he couldn't get anywhere," the boatswain said with a smile.

"You mean? . . ." Ah-yang asked. But from the boatswain's meaningful smile he guessed who it was.

"Don't tell me it's the chief engineer again."

"He's followed Captain Yang for many years. It's not an easy thing to change one's thinking. It's not like, say, casting off a worn-out coat."

"What did he say?"

"The same as usual: What if the typhoon should arrive earlier than forecast? Since meteorology is as yet a young branch of science, world weather reports may not be very accurate. What if we fail to put on speed? . . . Finally when the comrades of the stokehold guaranteed the speed needed, he had nothing more to say. Well, you'd better go and pull up the gangway. Be very cautious on your job tonight." With a wave of his hand, the boatswain was off.

Ah-yang took his work gloves from the table and was about to go when suddenly something came to his mind. "Boatswain! Boatswain!" he called. "What if the tug doesn't get here in time?"

"We won't need it. Our ship will swing on its own!" replied the boatswain without even turning his head.

"Good! That's the spirit!" Ah-yang cast a glance at Li Chih-kang with a triumphant smile.

Ordinarily, when a large ship in the Whangpoo River puts out to sea, it employs a tug to help make the swing.

But since many ships had entered Shanghai harbour that night to seek shelter from the typhoon, the tugs were all busy. One had been assigned to the "Fighter," but it was scheduled to come at half past ten. Now the ship was to leave two hours early and there was no tug available.

Li Chih-kang was excited to hear that the "Fighter" was to take this bold action. He rose from his seat and said, "Ah-yang, I'll go with you to lift the gangway."

"You?" Ah-yang hesitated for a moment. "You'd better have a rest," he replied.

"Don't you think it takes two persons to lift the gangway? Come, you work the winch, and I'll handle the cord. How's that?"

"How did you learn all this?" asked Ah-yang in surprise.

"I was also in your profession when I was young," answered Li with a smile.

"So you're an old seaman too!"

When Li and Ah-yang came on deck, they found the whole crew busy getting ready for departure. Li Chih-kang nimbly stepped onto a gangplank and started to work at the pulley cord while Ah-yang operated the winch. Slowly the 20-metre-long gangway left the wharf. Li's ability impressed Ah-yang so much that he could not help shouting, "Wonderful!"

"Stop making such a fuss!" said Li Chih-kang modestly as he jumped down from the gangplank. "Anything else I can do? I'll be your assistant."

"That'll be fine! Chairman Mao says: **'If the army and the people are united as one, who in the world can match them?'** Let's go to the bow and loosen the moorings."

Two deafening blasts on the whistle ripped the still night air. Tonight the stars seemed to glisten in a liquid sky like pearls in water. They looked larger and shone brighter than usual and even seemed to twinkle more. Two green lights on the wharf flashed, giving the signal for the ship to depart.

Li Chih-kang looked at the dark surface of the river, estimating at the same time the size of the ship. The river here was rather narrow, only a few scores of feet over the ship's length. It wouldn't be easy for the boat to swing round on its own power with the help of wind and tide alone, without employing a tug. A slight error in calculation and manipulation could bring the ship crashing into the buildings on the bank. Such an accident must be avoided. This was not child's play. However, there appeared suddenly in Li's mind the old seaman who during the January Revolution hastened the transport of undelivered cargoes, angrily denouncing the former captain for his selfish considerations and his philosophy of servility to things foreign. What character he had shown! The old seaman was truly bold in thinking and action! Li felt a deep respect for the skipper, and yet a little anxiety for him too.

From the loudspeaker above the bridge came the clear and decisive command to unfasten the stern moorings.

Clank, clank. The telegraph sounded in the pilothouse, and the main engine started up. Breathless silence reigned on the deck as the propeller began to churn the water. A second clanking and the engine sharply picked up speed.

Helped by the current, the stern began to move slowly away from the wharf. The angle between the hull and the wharf quickly expanded: 5 degrees, 10 degrees, 15 degrees. . . . Li Chih-kang and Ah-yang never for a moment took their eyes off the thick mooring cable. A slight miscalculation on the part of the captain could cause the cable to snap into several pieces, and the result would be incalculable. Crucial now was this cable, on which was pegged the 10,000-ton freighter, and the hope of the entire crew.

The boatswain, who was standing behind Ah-yang, looked at it steadily, and also the 1st Officer, who was standing high above on the bow.

The dockers, who had heard that the "Fighter" was to sail against the risks of the typhoon and was to swing without a tug, had hurried to the wharf. They, too, watched the cable breathlessly from a distance.

The boatswain once again carefully examined the steel cable, then gave his order to Ah-yang:

"Add one more coil, make sure it doesn't slip, not one inch!"

"Righto!" answered Ah-yang. And, swift as an arrow, leapt over the bollard, Li Chih-kang following. The two grabbed the sturdy cable and, at one go, threw another coil round the bollard.

Clank. A fresh order sounded from the pilothouse. The propeller stopped. The huge boat noiselessly continued its swing. With the increase of tension, the steel cable became more taut — seeming also to bind the hearts of the people watching. Finally, the moment came when the pilothouse sent another order. The propeller started

once more; the ship was now at a right angle with the wharf.

"The prow is at the wharf; cable tension normal," reported the 1st Officer.

Li looked ahead into the middle of the stream. The towering round stern of the ship was swiftly swinging past the opposite bank as if it was headed for the buildings there. The huge hull now spanned the Whangpoo River like a steel bridge. Everyone held his breath.

A loud and clear order came from the bridge: "Let go!"

Li and Ah-yang swiftly and deftly untied the cable at the bow. The main engine roared. High waves rose in the ship's path. The "Fighter" swung round and majestically sailed on. Thunderous applause rose from the wharf.

Li Chih-kang felt the lump in his throat go. He was delighted with the captain's splendid seamanship which was even better than he had expected; the orders were decisive, precise and timely. The co-ordination between the crew was faultless, superb. Li Chih-kang looked up at the pilothouse whose lights were now off. There he saw the shadow of a large-framed man by the window. He had a telescope in his hands and was scanning the river vigilantly.

"Li, it's time you get some rest," said Ah-yang to Li Chih-kang. "Now, you'll get back to the front two hours earlier." Ah-yang's words had a proud ring.

"It's thanks to you all!" said Li, grasping Ah-yang's hand, deeply moved. "I'll tell our fighters at the front how precious these two hours were."

IV

The lights on either bank of the Whangpoo River receded swiftly, as did the shadows of tall buildings. Li Chih-kang was not in a mood to go to his cabin, but lingered on deck to watch the scene, which was new and yet familiar to him. For it was here that he began his bitter childhood, and later started on the road of revolution. Tonight he was sailing on the river again, but now aboard a 10,000-ton ocean-going freighter manned by a captain who was himself a worker. His heart beat turbulently like the waves of the river.

He was ambling along the corridor near the mess hall when he was attracted by a well designed and artistically laid out bulletin board carrying essays of revolutionary mass criticism. The lights shining on it revealed a fine penmanship. A coloured headline drew Li's attention:

Before Iron-Arm Reef, I recall the past;

The billows there were our blood and tears.

Today I look at the sea chart;

It records new deeds of new heroes.

The contributor was Hsin Yung-chin, the captain.

"Iron-Arm Reef!" Li Chih-kang felt suddenly charged, as though with an electric current. He tried to finish reading the story, but in the twinkling of an eye the words seemed to have vanished into a vast sea. This old seaman, could it be he? Thoughts crowded into Li's mind, taking him back to one night some twenty years ago.

Iron-Arm Reef was like a sharp sword planted at the mouth of the Yangtze River where it meets the East

China Sea. Here the current was swift, with no end of whirlpools and eddies. The rolling waves heightened by the howling gale lashed at the reef and sent white spume shooting skyward. How many ships had been wrecked and buried here!

In the past, certain bourgeois "technicians" of the West did some survey work preparatory to setting up a lighthouse on Iron-Arm Reef. But their unanimous conclusion was that it would be quite impossible. That was over twenty years ago when the 19-year-old Li Chih-kang was employed as a seaman on one of the imperialist survey boats. One night in early spring, the vessel ran into a storm. Without finishing the survey work at that spot, it hurriedly made for a mooring for shelter. Suddenly the ship shook violently, followed by two crashing sounds from the stern. Li Chih-kang and his shipmate Hsin Fu-ken, who slept on the lower bunk, were awakened. Before they could find out what had happened, that devil of a foreign captain Wilson who was frightened out of his senses, dashed into the sailors' quarters, his face bleach white with terror. He rushed towards an old deck-hand in the bunk opposite Li, yelling, "Get up! Dive down and examine the propeller blades. Our ship has run onto a reef!"

Hsin Fu-ken was furious when he heard this. He jumped out of bed and shouted at Wilson, "Damn you! Don't you know he's sick? How can you ask him to dive in this weather?"

Now that Wilson was in the position of supplicant, he forced a smile and said, "We're in the same boat, and we share the same fate. The blades are damaged, and the wind and waves are so high. . . ."

"I'll go in his place," said Hsin Fu-ken, throwing out his chest in disdain. "Go and get some wine!"

"Yes, yes, . . ." Wilson kept jerking his head up and down as he went to fetch the wine. By this time Li Chih-kang had also gotten out of bed. He said to Hsin Fu-ken, "You'd better let me go, Fu-ken."

"Oh, no," answered Hsin Fu-ken shaking his head. "I'm a better swimmer than you. You can hold on to the cord."

The propeller of the boat had been stopped. The ship rocked like a bottle cast on the waves. Hsin Fu-ken and Li Chih-kang walked along the deck of the rickety vessel to the stern. Hsin Fu-ken drank down a few gulps of wine Wilson brought, tied a cord round his waist and handed one end of it to Li Chih-kang, saying, "Chih-kang, if I'm not up in five minutes, pull the cord." Thereupon, he stepped to the edge of the vessel and jumped into the roaring sea. Li Chih-kang stood holding the cord. Piercing wind carrying icy foam bit into the marrow of his bones. He counted: one, two, three, four One minute went by, then two, then three. Suddenly he felt a heavy jerk of the cord and pulled with his whole strength. But when Li grasped Fu-ken's hand to pull him up, he felt something sticky. Looking closer, Li noticed the little finger of his pal's right hand was in a pulp.

"Rotters!" Hsin Fu-ken cursed through set lips, now ghastly pale. "Imagine! Starting the engine when I was still down there!"

When Wilson learned that only two blades were damaged, the rest being all right, he gave the order, "Sail on. Report by cable: Position 272 degrees, 4.21 nautical

miles from Iron-Arm Reef. Discovered uncharted reef." Wilson grinned with satisfaction at what he had done.

Li Chih-kang and Hsin Fu-ken could not understand why this crooked foreigner should be so happy when the blades were damaged. It was only long afterwards that they learned that according to international navigation regulations, if a ship runs onto an uncharted reef, the captain is not held responsible, but is even offered monetary reward. Actually, the survey boat was damaged on Iron-Arm Reef. To shirk responsibility, Wilson lied to his superior that his vessel had hit a hitherto unknown reef. So, Wilson not only received no punishment, but collected a sizable sum of reward. From that time on, seamen said the chart had shown near Iron-Arm Reef a new mark for a "suspected reef." And for that, Hsin Fu-ken lost a finger!

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V

When Li Chih-kang finished reading the story, he could no longer suppress his feelings. He hurried up the stairway that led to the bridge.

Li hesitated for a moment when he came to the pilothouse on the bridge. What if the author of the article were not the old pal he had in mind? Wouldn't it be a joke? Just as he was about to push open the door, a rich, powerful voice called from inside, "Who's there?"

"The comrade from the PLA who's aboard on escort duty," said the seaman on the look-out post.

"So it's the comrade from the PLA! Please come in."

"Am I disturbing you?" said Li Chih-kang as he pushed open the door and walked into the pilothouse. The place was dark, as it was not permissible to turn on the lights during night navigation. Only a streak of light came from the shaded lamp. The old seaman was standing at the window, looking attentively through his telescope. At Li's entrance, he shifted his position slightly and put out his hand. As Li grasped this warm, muscular hand, he felt distinctly that the little finger was missing.

"So, it's really you, Fu-ken!" Li Chih-kang cried out with joy.

"And you. . . ."

"I'm Chih-kang! Don't you recognize me?" Li took off his army cap and stood at attention right in front of the old seaman so that he could look at him squarely.

"Ah! My old pal!" exclaimed the old seaman, his eyes filled with tears of joy. Opening his arms, he embraced Li Chih-kang warmly.

"I never dreamed the PLA comrade they were speaking of could be you!" The old seaman drew Li to the window where there was a streak of light and surveyed him from head to foot over and over again.

"I feel like I'm dreaming," said Li Chih-kang after examining his former shipmate for a long time. "Do you remember the days when we were working on that survey boat? When we saw those imperialist ships throwing their weight around on the Whangpoo River, how we wished that one day China could also have her own ocean-going ships!"

"And then we'd all be sailors on our own ships!"

"But now you're a captain!"

"And you, a PLA cadre from the faraway frontier!"

"But fighting together for a common cause!"

And they both laughed heartily.

"But you old chap, why haven't you sent a word to me in all these years since liberation?" complained the old seaman, giving Li Chih-kang a poke in the ribs.

"You can't blame me! Who asked you to change your name from Fu-ken* to Yung-chin?*" In the years when we were aiding Korea against U.S. aggression, I did come to Shanghai on errands. I inquired about you everywhere, but where was I to find Hsin Fu-ken?"

"Do I still need a name that aspires to be a 'prosperous root?' We were liberated, you know. I want to 'forever go forward' under the leadership of Chairman Mao and the Communist Party. By the way, my comrade from the PLA," said the old seaman pointing towards the north, "how's everything in Chenpao Island? Are those revisionists still trying to make trouble?"

"Do you expect the nature of revisionism to change? They're still mustering troops here and there and making a great to-do about it. But we're waiting for them day and night, too. Let them come. We're prepared to 'accommodate' them Look! There are boats coming in our direction."

There appeared a dense cluster of lights from sail boats which covered nearly the whole surface of the river. These were boats entering the harbour for shelter from the approaching typhoon. They were sailing at very slow speed. Li Chih-kang was sure that the old seaman would

* The characters Fu and Ken mean "prosperous root."

** The characters Yung and Chin mean "to forever go forward."

blow the whistle to ask them to make way. But to his surprise, the captain ordered the helmsman to continue the course. Here in the Whangpoo River there was a 180-degree sharp turn, and the current was treacherous. Li Chih-kang recalled that in the past many boats collided here, and to avoid accidents the larger ships used to signal deafeningly to warn off smaller ones. But tonight, the old seaman didn't do this.

The sail boats came nearer and nearer. Li Chih-kang was feeling dizzy with the many lights that appeared before his eyes. He glanced at the old seaman who was looking through his telescope all this time, then heard him give the order:

"Starboard 10!"

"Yes, starboard 10!" the helmsman repeated the order.

The bow of the ship then moved straight towards two white lights. And it was at this time that the old seaman blew the whistle to warn off the boats. The two lights shifted apart, letting the ship pass between them. Another sharp turn, and the ship had thrown the cluster of lights behind. Li Chih-kang sighed in relief.

Suddenly, the telephone rang. The assistant on the look-out post swiftly took up the receiver and answered. "It's from Young Lu of the stokehold," he said, handing the receiver to the old seaman.

"Hello! Is that you, Young Lu? What about the assurance you gave us at the meeting before departure? As soon as we're out of the river mouth, I'll ask you for a speed of 13.5 knots."

A youthful voice came from the other end of the line. "Don't worry, Captain. Not enough steam for you now? But we all have something to say to you."

"Say it, then. Don't beat around the bush," said the old seaman, feeling pleased.

"Why don't you put on speed? Why so slow? It worries us."

"Listen, young man, don't be impatient." The old seaman was critical but kind. "There are too many boats entering the harbour right now. We mustn't risk their safety just because we're in a hurry."

"Well, so many boats are coming in. Why not blow the whistle more? Besides, we'll create an air of importance — sailing the seas in the teeth of the typhoon. And yet, you're like mute bottle-gourds on the water." The youthful voice at the other end of the line grew louder and louder.

"Do you think, Young Lu, that a few more blasts of the whistle will make it all right for you to throw your weight around in the harbour? No, that won't do. Besides, more blasts mean more shovelfuls of coal you have to feed, and more drops of your sweat too. . . ."

"We're not afraid of sweating!"

"Good! Wait till we're out of the river mouth, and then you'll know what sweating means! We must remember Chairman Mao's teaching of **'saving every copper for the war effort, for the revolutionary cause. . . .'** We must save every shovelful of coal and every drop of sweat for the tense struggle to come. Understand?" The old seaman hung up the receiver.

"Save every shovelful of coal and every drop of sweat!" Li Chih-kang was deeply stirred by these words. Even the coal used to blow the whistle mattered to the old seaman. From what he had heard and seen since he came aboard the freighter, Li had found his old pal a

man of decision, full of drive, and daring in thinking and action. This was quite in accord with his sharp temperament in his younger days. But now he had grown into a man of mature thinking, keen in foresight and meticulous in action. The "Fighter" manned by such a captain would certainly beat the typhoon and get the consignment of supplies to the front.

"I'm afraid I'll disturb you if I keep on talking to you. I think I'd better leave," said Li Chih-kang.

"Oh, no," the old seaman protested, grabbing Li's arm. "You haven't seen Iron-Arm Reef for more than twenty years. Tonight's a rare chance."

VI

It was still sultry hot, though once in a while a light breeze blew. The moon with its misty halo now and then peeped through the thin clouds. On the storm signal post at the mouth of the Whangpoo, three red and green vertically arranged lights shone out. This signal could be seen several scores of nautical miles away and was a warning to all shipping that the typhoon was due in 20 hours.

Hsin Yung-chin took up a flashlight and looked at the barometer on the wall; the needle fluttered around the area indicating storm, seeming to give a sense of foreboding — the near approach of the typhoon.

"Third speed forward!" Captain Hsin gave the order loudly and decisively. The freighter was now outside the river mouth. Clank, clank, the order was transmitted, and the main engine immediately started up.

"Report, Captain!" A young woman wireless operator rushed into the room. "Emergency message from the bureau."

"Why such excitement, Young Chung?" Hsin Yung-chin said with a smile. "Can you repeat it from memory? It's dark here."

"Course of typhoon unchanged. Centre reaches Latitude 27.2 degrees North, Longitude 125.4 degrees East. Notice closely. Keep wireless telephone turned on for the next 24 hours. Contact us from time to time. Report position of freighter every four hours."

"Good," said Hsin Yung-chin taking over the telegram. "Turn on the wireless telephone. . . Is this the first time we've run into a typhoon since you came on board?" he added.

"Yes, Captain. But please don't be mistaken. I'm not afraid. I'm only excited and on my mettle." And she marched out.

For the moment, the Yangtze looked very calm, not a ripple on the water. The reflections of the pale moonlight on the dark surface of the river swayed slowly but rhythmically. But the ship already felt the impact of a strong undercurrent and was beginning to rock back and forth.

An illuminated buoy went by on the left, soon followed by another. Captain Hsin looked at his watch for the time the freighter took to sail past the two buoys. Then he gave a low "Um-m."

Li Chih-kang sensed something was wrong. "What's the speed now?" he asked.

"Still 12.5 knots."

Hsin Yung-chin quickly stepped to the phone and took up the receiver. "Engine room. Hello! Let me speak to the chief engineer. What? He's come up here? Good. I'm looking for him, too." He had hardly put down the receiver when the chief engineer dashed into the room. Li Chih-kang saw in the dim light that the man was a mustached, tall, lean fellow in tight white overalls.

"Chou, why doesn't the speed go up? What about the guarantee you gave at the meeting?" Hsin Yung-chin asked the chief engineer bluntly without noticing the mood he was in.

"I'm carrying out the decision of the meeting to the letter. I've readjusted the main engine so that it can go up to 13.5 knots," Chou answered coarsely.

"But the steam pressure hasn't gone up. . . ."

"What can I do? The guarantee was given by the stokers. At the meeting, they were so sure of it. But now? The pressure won't climb any higher than 14 kilos."

"Chou," said Hsin Yung-chin sincerely, as he saw that the engineer was still sore and sulky. "You're also in charge of the stokehold, you know. The comrades there are full of go, and it's up to you to work together with them to find a way."

"I've expressed my views at the meeting. But they criticized me, saying I sang the same tune as the former captain, Yang. I'm afraid I'm not up to taking charge of them."

"According to your opinion at the meeting, we shouldn't have started on our voyage at all, is that it?"

"I'm just being realistic. It takes good coal to make the steam pressure go up, and the coal we've got is none

too good. Enthusiasm alone won't push the steam pressure gauge up to 15 kilos."

"Kicking up a row here will?" Hsin Yung-chin retorted sharply. "My dear old comrade Chou, why do you think only in terms of steam pressure, and not man's will or aspirations?"

"Well, it still remains that the speed won't go up. And this is a practical problem." Chou kept on muttering though he was beginning to feel that he was no longer absolutely in the right.

"You won't solve the practical problem unless you first solve the thought problem," replied Hsin Yung-chin. "You'd better go below now. I'll be right down," he added.

Hsin Yung-chin turned over his work to the steersman on duty. He asked Li Chih-kang if he would like to go to the engine room with him. "Why, of course," Li replied buoyantly, "I'll go to the stokehold to help shovel coal."

VII

When the two men stepped into the engine room, a wave of hot air struck at their faces. The metal sheeting on the floor and the polished iron railings all radiated heat. The place was scorching hot. And the rumbling of the engine nearly deafened them. Several oilers were applying lubricants to the engine. The chief engineer showed the old seaman a meter on the control board which indicated that the main engine was at full speed, and the

cause of the speed gap lay entirely with the stokehold. The old seaman noticed it and, without saying much, quickly left through a semi-circular corridor for the boiler room.

The room was lit up as bright as day. The meters were neatly arranged and kept. Three huge boilers stood in a row; flames were spurting out from the nine stoke-holes. On a blackboard nearby was a quotation from Chairman Mao: "**Be resolute, fear no sacrifice and surmount every difficulty to win victory.**" Stokers were shovelling coal or cleaning out the cinders. Their blue clothes showed ring upon ring of perspiration stains. One stoker wearing horn-rimmed spectacles was pouring a bucket of cold water on the burning cinders, and this immediately blanketed the whole place in a dense fog of choking steam. Hsin Yung-chin greeted the stoker, "Young Lu, can you stand it?"

"The quality of the coal is not too good," replied Young Lu, looking up from his work and pushing up the specs that had slid down to the tip of his nose. "We still have one kilo of steam pressure to go."

The other stokers all came up to greet the captain. They looked very serious and earnest, so Li Chih-kang noticed, and every one of them was doing his best to raise the pressure.

"How far away are we from the typhoon?" asked a tall stoker whose face was black with coal dust.

"Just about on the fringe of it," replied the captain. "So, comrades, we'll have to find a way to get the pressure up or else seek shelter somewhere and cast anchor. Would you all like to do that?"

"Don't worry, Captain," said Young Lu, putting down the bucket in his hand. "The pressure will go up that one kilo. I'd give my life for it."

"Right! We're ready to give our lives for the revolution, if need be," said the tall stoker wiping his face with the towel he had just rung out.

"Yes, this is revolution plus all-out drive. But we've got to be proficient in our work too," said the old seaman pointing at the lumps of coal cinder. "Come on, let me try. I'll see if I can find a way out."

"You're going to stoke the fire with us, Captain?" said the men, greatly heartened at the thought.

"And this comrade from the PLA, too. He came all the way from Heilungkiang to help us. You know who he is?" The old seaman patted Li's shoulder and said, "He's my former shipmate, was with me in the incident at Iron-Arm Reef. Now he's a cadre of the great Chinese People's Liberation Army. Later, we'll ask him to tell us how our heroic frontier soldiers blasted the 'tortoise-shells' in the fighting at Chenpao Island."

"Learn from the PLA! Salute the PLA!" the stokers shouted and applauded, Young Lu taking the lead. Li Chih-kang stepped forward and said, "Comrades, give me a shovel. Let's launch an all-out attack on Barrier 15-kilo!" "Excellent!" everybody agreed.

The stokers got on with their jobs with added zeal. The tall stoker teamed up with the old seaman while Young Lu handed a shovel to Li, who opened a stokehole and threw in six shovelfuls of coal in succession.

While they were stoking, Hsin Yung-chin and Li Chih-kang were both trying to figure out why the pressure would not go up. The workers had already tried many

methods. The question really was the quality of the coal. The cinders were fused into thick lumps blocking the flames, and this meant they had to be cleaned out often. Frequent cleaning caused sudden drops in temperature, so the steam pressure remained below 14 kilos.

Li Chih-kang's white shirt was soon soiled, and his sweat poured down. Still he joked good-naturedly as he kept on shovelling the coal, "Sure I'm hot and perspiring, but it feels good. I should have prepared for this and brought some local produce from the northeast."

"I know — ginseng, sable skins and ula grass, three valuable products of the northeast. Right?" Young Lu asked.

"Far from it. Wouldn't those things suffocate you more?"

"What are they, then?"

"You'll certainly like them if I tell you what they are: the ice from the Wusuli River, the snow of the Changpai Mountains and the air at 40 degrees below zero. How would you like them?"

"Wonderful! If I could only breathe some such cold air and have a lump of ice in my mouth!" At this, Young Lu drew a deep breath as if a lump of ice were really biting at his teeth.

"And another handful of snow to rub against your hot skin. . . ."

"You're quite a character, Old Li! You did make me feel cooler," Young Lu laughed. And, opening up the stokehole, he started again to clean out the cinders. "Old Li," he continued, "tell us about the fighting at Chenpao Island."

"What would you like to know?"

"Tell us how you smashed the revisionists' 'tortoise-shells.'"

"It was all due to five words."

"Five words?" Young Lu looked at Li stunned.

"Yes, **Fear neither hardship nor death.**' If it hadn't been so, how could we fighters have kept watch in the snow and withstood the 40 degrees below zero cold for hours at a stretch? Forty degrees below is not any easier to stand than 40 degrees above, you know."

"If you're not afraid of cold, we shouldn't be afraid of heat, should we?" said Young Lu as he stoked the fire with a long iron rod. Li got a rake and helped to take out the lumps of cinder. Their faces felt the scorch of the flames, and they ached so all over.

"Why, this lump is nearly as hard as the 'tortoise-shell,'" commented Li as it fell to the ground with a thud.

What Li said seemed to have given Young Lu food for thought. "I've thought of a way," he said excitedly to the tall and big man who was the head of the stokers. "But I don't know whether you all agree or not."

"Anything that'll make the pressure go up we're all for," everybody encouraged Young Lu.

"I think," said Lu pushing up his specs again, "it's because the cinder blocks are too thick. They're keeping the flames down. Suppose we blow more air in, won't that make the fire stronger?"

"The blower is already on full blast. Do we have another blower to step up the air flow?" questioned one of the stokers.

"Yes, we have," answered Young Lu. Then pointing at the ventilator installed to lower the temperature in the

hold, he continued, "We'll apply that to the boiler. If our PLA fighters at the front can stand 40 degrees below zero for many hours at a stretch, why can't we fight the heat for a few hours to smash the 'tortoise-shells' — these cinder blocks?"

"Young Lu is right." The tall stoker raised a fist. "We'll do as he says," he added.

"Come on!" the others joined in, and immediately went into action.

The boatswain and Ah-yang came into the stokehold with a bucket of saline water. Ah-yang took off the lid and called out to his comrades in a lilt:

"Hey! Come and drink this soda, tangy and ice-cold.
One cup — the heat is gone;
Another — your sweat goes.
To defend Chenpao Isle,
We're to race with the typhoon.
The flames of revolution leap high.
Hey! We seamen's aims are high as the sky."

Young Lu took a cup and went over to look into the bucket. In the moment of levity he shouted, "Old Li, Old Li, come and take a look! What beautiful ice cubes!" In no time, the bucket was surrounded by men who drank and talked heartily in an atmosphere of joy and optimism.

The ventilator was now driving air into the furnaces, and the flames shot up considerably. But the boiler room was like an oven. Flames spurted from the stokeholes; the heat was stifling. Hsin Yung-chin's breathing was short and his heart pounded. The shovel grew heavy in his hand. Suddenly there was a clang. Li had dropped his shovel full of coal. Hsin Yung-chin hurried over to

him and found his face deathly pale and his feet unsteady. "Chih-kang, Chih-kang!" he cried. Li did not answer. He had dropped to the ground unconscious.

"Quick! Carry him to the deck to get some fresh air," Hsin Yung-chin said to Ah-yang.

"It's going up! Going up!" someone cried excitedly. It was Young Lu, who had just noticed the needle of the pressure meter pointing near the 15-kilo mark. "Add more coal, quick!" he shouted again.

The shouts aroused Li who quickly jumped up, rushed over to the boiler and, grabbing a shovel, began feeding coal into the furnace. At the same time he shouted to the others, "Quick! Quick! Add more coal."

In an instant, the stokehold fumed in searing heat.

VIII

The typhoon was approaching. Stars vanished and black clouds hid the moon. The wind was howling in the murkiness of the night. Foamy water thrown up by high-crested waves rained on the deck and cascaded towards the bulwarks. The sea had the sinister face of a monster, and now roared at the top of its voice, now gave low ugly moans. Cutting into the frightful waves like lightning shooting through dark clouds, the "Fighter" plunged forward.

The 15-kilo steam pressure target had been reached. The main engine rumbled noisily. Through the air duct came in salty sea wind. Young Lu and the others were exulting in the joy of victory. Laying their shovels flat

on the floor, they sat on them and chatted away under the draft.

All of a sudden, the telegraph sounded an urgent order from the pilothouse. The main engine gave a groan. The ship's speed dropped. In the stokehold a powerful flow of steam escaped through the valve with a piercing shriek.

Hsin Yung-chin and the others were startled.

In came an engineer agitatedly. "Captain! Captain! The pilothouse phoned for you to return immediately."

Hsin Yung-chin ran for the deck, the chief engineer closely following. The stokers were all very anxious, and asked Young Lu to go up to see what had happened. Li Chih-kang who had gone to his cabin to rest also hurried to the bridge with the boatswain and Ah-yang. They saw ahead of the ship a bright beam flashing across the water. But before they could make out what it was, it went out.

"Report! Captain!" said the helmsman, pointing at two white lights on the starboard side. "Two fishing boats just now signalled us not to advance farther. There are a lot of fish nets ahead floating loose."

"A lot of floating fish nets!" Everyone was taken aback.

"Yes. The boats signalled that they were trying to retrieve the nets within three hours."

"What luck! Fish nets blocking our way in front, the typhoon chasing us from behind!" Hands in his trouser pockets, the chief engineer paced back and forth, vexed and restless. Those fish nets! A fatal threat to ships sailing in the storm! If the ship's propeller caught on them, it would be just like hobbling a galloping horse. What was more, the ship was now in the region of Iron-Arm Reef. Who knew what might happen!

Young Lu stamped his foot and uttered a vehement "Damn!" "Typhoon, fish nets . . ." he exclaimed. "As I see it, we might as well go full speed ahead. This is open sea. I don't think our propeller will get caught by any chance."

"We can't do that! Absolutely not!" Chief Engineer Chou put in, taking his hands out of his pockets and gesticulating to indicate that the idea was out of the question.

"Suppose we reduce speed," said Ah-yang, "at the same time keep close watch and avoid the nets. I'm sure we can get through."

Chou again shook his head. "We may go slow, but the typhoon won't."

Quick footsteps were heard outside and Young Chung, the wireless operator, came in.

"The bureau just called by wireless telephone that large quantities of floating fish nets are located east of Longitude xxx' xx" right in our ship's route. We're to pay close attention. . . ."

"This coincides with the message from the fishing boats," the helmsman cut in.

". . . The bureau's idea is for us to make a serious and cautious study of our situation and decide whether or not to continue the voyage. We're to phone back immediately," Young Chung went on to complete the telephone message. She then looked right into Hsin Yung-chin's face and asked, "Captain, how are we to answer the bureau?" All eyes turned on Hsin Yung-chin.

Hsin Yung-chin did not answer Young Chung right away, but in the silence flashed a light on the barometer. He then walked quickly to the bridge, holding up his hand

to feel the force of the wind. He looked up at the chimney to see the direction of the wind. Dense smoke like a long black dragon was trailing south.

The main engine was running slowly. Its rumbling, under the circumstance, was unpleasant to the ear and irritating. Black clouds were lowering near to the surface of the sea, while the foam-crested waves rolled, chased, leapt insanely. The two white lights on the starboard side now disappeared, now reappeared. The dark surface of the water seemed to be teeming with thousands of wild animals roaring and bawling.

Hsin Yung-chin hurried back from the bridge and said in his deep resonant voice, "Young Chung, report immediately to the bureau: 'discovered fish nets at 10 nautical miles from ship; are sailing at low speed for observation; original plan unchanged, guarantee goods reach front on time to strike back at imperialism, revisionism, and all reactionaries; the "Fighter" will surmount all difficulties and continue voyage.' Is everything clear, Young Chung?"

"Yes."

"Please tell the bureau leadership: We will never forget Chairman Mao's teaching: **This army has an indomitable spirit and is determined to vanquish all enemies and never to yield.**' Can you remember all this?"

"Yes, I can. I'll send it right away." Young Chung turned and walked out quickly.

"Boatswain!"

"Yes!"

"You go up to the bow with telescope and keep an eye on those floating fish nets."

"Yes," answered the boatswain in a loud voice and, too, hurried away.

The chief engineer came up to the old seaman, looking worried. "Captain," he whispered, "you've decided to go ahead, but have you thought out exactly how? Don't you often say we should stress the importance of tactics?"

As though he had not heard what had been said to him by Chou, Hsin Yung-chin called to those of the crew present, "Now let's go together to study the chart." With that he walked towards the chart room behind the pilot-house.

IX

Hsin Yung-chin entered the chart room together with Li Chih-kang and the others, pulling the curtain over the door behind them. Hsin Yung-chin switched on a red light. Two charts lay on a large table, one a sea chart and the other a chart marked with the path of the typhoon. Hsin Yung-chin took a pencil and marked the location of the floating fish nets. The "Fighter" had passed the mouth of the Yangtze and was now entering the sea. To the northwest lay Iron-Arm Reef. Following the normal route as planned would certainly bring the ship into the fish nets. A new route must be chosen, and it had to be a short cut to sea so as to throw off the typhoon. How was this new route to be mapped out?

Hsin Yung-chin knitted his bushy brows. He studied the sea chart in deep thought, much as a commander

studying his military map. Now and then he turned his gaze on the typhoon marks on the other chart.

Suddenly the voice of the boatswain was heard outside, calling, "Captain!"

He entered the room. One side of his clothes was wet, and water still trickled from his eyebrows and nose. He asked the captain for permission to go up the foremast to observe. "It's impossible to see clearly from the bow. The waves are too high there," he said in explanation.

Hsin Yung-chin did not answer, but looked intently at his clothing. "Where did you get your clothes wet? At the bow?" he asked.

"No, when I was coming over along the bulwark."

"How did you come here? Port or starboard side?"

"Port."

Hsin Yung-chin's eyes flashed, his solemn face suddenly beaming with a smile. "If that's so, the wind has changed direction. It's a northwester now. Excellent!" He walked to the door with big strides and, pulling back the curtain, ordered the helmsman:

"Hard port!"

"Right. Hard port!" the steersman repeated the order sharply.

"Direction 315 degrees. Third speed forward!"

"Right. Direction 315 degrees. Third speed forward!"

As the steering wheel turned, the ship inclined slightly to one side and then headed full speed in the direction of Iron-Arm Reef.

Captain Hsin turned, and remembering that he had not yet answered the boatswain, said to him lightly, "You needn't observe any more. The northwester will clear the route for us. We're on the down current, and the

wind will be in our favour when we pass Iron-Arm Reef. Come and have a look."

The captain went over to the chart table and, with a red pencil, drew on the chart a new navigation route. Then he left the room.

Hsin Yung-chin in the excitement had almost forgotten his former shipmate Li Chih-kang. It was only the doubtful look on Li's face that reminded him that Li, having been away from the sea for more than twenty years, must have been thinking of Iron-Arm Reef as still a forbidden zone. Surely, for years ships have steered clear of the Reef. Was it not here that the propeller blades of the survey boat got damaged, and Hsin had lost a finger? But now the "Fighter" was to sail within just about one nautical mile of Iron-Arm Reef! So Hsin began to explain to his pal the bold step he had taken.

"By the way," said Hsin, thumping his own head, "I forgot to tell you that Iron-Arm Reef today is no longer the Iron-Arm Reef of yesterday. Come, let's go and see."

No one expected Hsin Yung-chin to choose the route he did. It was not the normal navigation line. The water was deep enough, but the currents were uncertain. However, floating fish nets had blocked the normal route, and as the wind was blowing from the northwest, it offered a rare chance to take this unusual route. Li Chih-kang would naturally be doubtful. Hsin Yung-chin took Li to the window and, handing him a telescope, said, "Take a good look in that direction."

The waves were like a range of mountain peaks and valleys closing in upon the "Fighter" one after another. The violent storm poured rain down on her deck in torrents. The "Fighter," however, withstood it all. Just at



this time there appeared high above to the left of the ship a red glow that shone brightly among the dark clouds. In the centre of the glow was a brilliant beam flashing at regular intervals.

“Ah! A lighthouse! A lighthouse on Iron-Arm Reef!” cried Li Chih-kang excitedly.

“Yes, that’s the Iron-Arm Reef where Western specialists once thought it impossible to set up a lighthouse. Yes, this is the place which they thought was not even fit for birds to perch. Chih-kang, look at it! Look well! Armed with Mao Tsetung Thought, the brave and heroic Chinese people can do the impossible.” Both Hsin Yung-chin and Li Chih-kang were very much moved. Their voices, mingling with the sound of the waves, were filled with confidence and pride.

The stokers, meanwhile, were working hard to keep the steam up, so that the “Fighter” gained speed and, like an arrow, rode out the storm, broke through the waves, and made for the beam of red light.

The ship was nearing Iron-Arm Reef whose contour had now come into clear view. The waves were swashing against the rocks, receding in foam and disappearing from the base of the reef. The red glow from the lighthouse grew more brilliant. Suddenly Li Chih-kang saw in front of the lighthouse a huge portrait of Chairman Mao. “Ah, Chairman Mao is waving his hand. He is pointing out to us the road to victory!” he said to himself.

The “Fighter” had thrown the typhoon behind and was advancing at full speed on the broad expanse of the sea, along the red navigation route.

新来的老大

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