

LIU HU-LAN

Story of a Girl Revolutionary

BY LIANG HSING



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*STORY OF A GIRL
REVOLUTIONARY*

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I

FAMILY AND BACKGROUND

In the central part of Shansi Province lies a famous plain. To the east, the Taiyueh Range extends, hill after hill, as far as the eye can see; to the west, the great towering peaks of the Luliang Range shut off the land that lies beyond. For hundreds of miles between these ranges stretches the great plain, and through it the river Fen curves round Taiyuan and then pursues its winding course southward towards the Yellow River. The creative genius and wisdom of the peasants, utilizing the waters of the Fen, have transformed this region into the richest wheat granary of the entire province. All who look out over this vast plain at harvest time nod with approval at the golden ocean of heavy ears of wheat.

Here, on October 8, 1932, in the village of Yun-chouhsi in Wenshui County, Liu Hu-lan uttered her first cry.

At this time, the peasants of the plain were also crying in despair. Despite such fertile land and such rich harvests, they were unable to straighten

their backs or hold their heads erect. They were crushed beneath the oppression of the landlords, the bureaucrats, the warlords and the Kuomintang reactionaries. These exploiters, large and small, were resorting to every foul means and underhand trick to squeeze out the last drop of the peasants' sweat and blood. The rich harvest reaped by the peasants' labour flowed like a river, like the Fen; but unlike the Fen, the harvest flowed northward, sifting through many hands and eventually reaching Taiyuan, the granary of the Yen Hsi-shan brigands who ruled the city. The peasants' sweat dripped on the wheat as they bent their backs in the field, and at home tears fell into their empty bowls. Such was the plight of the peasants.

One day at twilight little Hu-lan sat in her old Granny's lap, clasping her neck with her two small hands, while Granny rocked gently with half-closed eyes listening to the sweet childish voice singing a local ballad:

"The hills of Chiao-cheng,
Oh, the stream of Chiao-cheng,
It doesn't water the town of Chiao-cheng,
It waters Wenshui;
Doesn't water the town of Chiao-cheng,
But waters Wenshui."

The ballad tells of the poverty-stricken life of the peasants in the mountainous region of Chiao-cheng, north of Wenshui. Although the peasants of the Wenshui plain were supposedly endowed with the "Golden Rice Bowl," their life was as hard as

that of the mountain folks. Granny stroked Hu-lan's hair gently as the song went on; the more she listened the sadder she felt.

"In the mountains of Chiao-cheng,
There is nothing good to eat and drink,
There is only buckwheat meal,
And potatoes.
Only buckwheat meal,
And potatoes."

Granny sat motionless, listening to the song. After a long pause she heaved a deep sigh.

Outside it was getting dark, but to save lamp oil the family usually sat in the dark for quite a while. In the dim light, the childish treble sang on:

"The little grey donkey goes up the hill,
The little grey donkey comes down.
All my life I've never ridden
In a fine carriage.
All my life I've never ridden
In a fine carriage."

When the song came to an end Granny became even quieter. She hugged Hu-lan tighter and smothered this favourite grand-daughter of hers with kisses. A long sigh followed. It was dark, and quiet reigned in the little home.

The year Hu-lan was born her father was a young peasant of twenty-eight. He and his elder brother lived with their father who had seen the better side of fifty. The three men had to work

from morning till night to make ends meet. They neither sold their labour nor hired other hands to help them: the sweat of their own toil dripped on their own land. When the family expanded to eleven members, they owned about seven acres of land—not all in one piece, but scattered here and there in ten small lots; and it was not very good land either. This middle peasant household had a little farmhouse at the western end of Yunchouhsi Village. The eaves were low and the courtyard small; the only difference between them and the poor peasants was that they had a place to themselves and did not share their main entrance with other families. There was an inscription over the entrance too, although not painted ostentatiously in gold and red letters like those on the doors of landlords. The workers who built the farmhouse had inscribed the three characters "Peace is happiness." And this motto expressed the ideal of this middle peasant family, whose philosophy of life was: Live and let live. They were cautious and timid to a fault. Hu-lan's Grandpa was rarely seen on the streets passing the time of day with friends, and her father seldom went outside to chat with neighbours. The family went only from the house to the fields and back again; then very carefully they closed and secured the little door of their house.

Such was the conservative middle peasant family in which Liu Hu-lan was born and brought up. But although it was fairly peaceful in their small courtyard, great changes were going on in the big world outside.

In 1936, when Hu-lan was four years old, the reactionary Kuomintang government was ignominiously selling out the country. The Japanese imperialist army had crossed the Great Wall and was invading North China. The Chinese Workers' and Peasants' Red Army, under the leadership of Chairman Mao Tse-tung, had concluded its Long March of 8,000 miles and had come to the North to resist the Japanese. On February 17, 1936, they crossed the Yellow River through northern Shensi and marched eastward to fight the invaders. On March 2, they occupied Fenyang and made the Yen Hsi-shan brigands in Taiyuan tremble.

Fenyang and Wenshui were neighbouring counties, only a few dozen miles apart. Guerilla detachments of the Red Army rapidly penetrated to the mountains west of Wenshui County, and although the Red Army did not enter Yunchouhsi the peasants spread tales about it—of how the Red Army had surrounded Wenshui, and how in Kaisanchen, a town north of the county seat of Wenshui, they had confiscated eight hundred piculs of grain from the local despot Tu and distributed them to the poverty-stricken peasants. Hearing such accounts, the listeners clenched their fists in excitement and prayed that the Red Army would soon come to their village.

The Red Army scored victory after victory and extended its sphere of action. But in order to urge the Kuomintang to end the civil war so as to fight the Japanese, it withdrew to the western banks

of the Yellow River. After the outbreak of the War of Resistance to Japanese Aggression, the Red Army, reorganized as the Eighth Route Army, once again crossed the Yellow River. From then on it stood in the forefront of the War of Resistance, its roots planted deep in the Northwest and North China, and continued to develop and swell its ranks.

Underground members of the Communist Party of China in Wenshui rallied the local people and organized a guerilla corps to fight the Japanese marauders. In January, 1938, after the Japanese had occupied the county seat, this guerilla corps engaged the Japanese invaders in battle for the first time in Hsicheng Village, only seven miles or so from Hu-lan's home. The day the peasants had been looking forward to for so long had dawned, and they actually saw their own people fighting the Japanese! Armed peasants shuttled through the streets of the villages on Wenshui plain. One unit of fighting men had hardly left the village when another arrived. Everywhere there were meetings and singing. In this period nearly all the villages on the plain became guerilla bases in the war against the Japanese invaders.

By the time the Japanese attacked Wenshui County, the county government of the Yen Hsi-shan brigands had long since scurried away, vanishing like smoke. To carry on the war of resistance, the people in the rear of the enemy formed a new anti-Japanese democratic county government. Ku Yung-tien, a young communist, was appointed magistrate of Wenshui County.

Gathering together, the peasants of Yunchou-hsi excitedly discussed this great event. One of them shouted down the rest and asked knowingly: "Do you people know how old this Magistrate Ku is?"

Everyone turned to look at him, but nobody could answer. Delighted with his knowledge, the speaker crooked his forefinger, making the sign for nine and exclaimed: "Ha, I'll tell you. This much—nineteen!"

There were many exclamations from the people gathered there. Six-year-old Hu-lan, who had edged herself in among the grown-ups, gazed at the crooked forefinger of the speaker, her eyes blinking in her little round face; and imitating the grown-ups she also said: "Nineteen!"

Nineteen? Yes, nineteen! But this nineteen-year-old youth was already a veteran Red Army cadre, steeled in battles. Under the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party and with the help of his comrades, Magistrate Ku performed his duty well.

In the years gone by, Hu-lan had often seen the peasants sigh and had noticed the long faces of her parents. Theirs was such a hard life under the ruthless reactionary rulers of the old society. As the landlords used their position and power to dodge the taxes, the greater part of the burden arising from the requisition of grain, money and troops fell on the poor and middle peasants. Hu-lan's middle peasant family found it hard to struggle along.

Then the communists came. Under the direction of Magistrate Ku, a Rational Assessment Committee was formed in Wenshui County in 1938. The situation became quite different once the system of rational assessment was put into practice. The peasants' burden was lightened while the landlords were made to pay their due share of taxes. Hu-lan saw smiles on the faces of her family, and heard them praise the Communist Party, the Eighth Route Army and Magistrate Ku in Wenshui County.

The irrigation system of Wenshui was a fairly good one. But whenever the time came for the land to be watered, Hu-lan would see the peasants staring enviously at the water flowing into the fields of landlords. Once, tugging at her father's jacket and lifting her little head, Hu-lan asked: "Dad, Dad! Why don't we water our land now?"

Always a man of few words, her father said nothing. He sighed and patted his daughter on the head, his eyes still fixed wistfully on the water flowing into the field of a landlord. In the old society, the water for irrigation was controlled by the feudal powers, who decided whose land should be watered first and for how long. Every year during the watering season, Yunchouhsi had to wait until all the neighbouring villages, strongholds of feudal power, had irrigated their fields. But even then it was only after the landlords of the village had finished their watering that Hu-lan's family and the other peasant households could have their turn. After the War of Resistance, irrigation work at Wenshui was neglected. It was only after

the Anti-Japanese Democratic County Government was established that dykes which had collapsed were repaired and the administration of water distribution passed into the hands of the people. A democratic and fair method was worked out, which brought smiles to the faces of the peasants, including Hu-lan's parents. Once again, nodding their heads in approval, they praised the Communist Party, the Eighth Route Army and Magistrate Ku of Wenshui.

One day Ku himself arrived at Yunchouhsi. Smiling villagers soon surrounded him, and Hu-lan too squeezed into the crowd to look at the young county magistrate. Ku was saying to the peasants: "The Anti-Japanese Democratic Government has issued a directive on the reduction of interest, stipulating that interest must not exceed 10 per cent per annum. This order was issued long ago but has not yet been put into practice in the villages. Why? It's because the administrative power in some of our villages is still completely in the hands of feudal landlords. It's these people who are concealing the order, because once it is made known, they themselves will get less interest...."

Ku called on the peasants of Yunchouhsi to rise and struggle for the democratic right to resist Japanese aggression and raise their standard of living. The peasants nodded their heads repeatedly, feeling that every word uttered by this young county magistrate went to the root of their troubles. The young people of the village determined to follow Magistrate Ku to fight the

Japanese. Among them was a certain Chen Teh-chao who later became the head of that district. This was the first batch of partisans from Yunchouhsi.

One day Hu-lan heard some villagers discussing sadly the brave way in which Comrade Ku had sacrificed his life on the battlefield. Ku had by then risen to the position of a special commissioner. When the battle was raging, some one said to him: "Special Commissioner, you'd better take cover." He smiled and replied: "Fighters of the Eighth Route Army never flinch from their duty." And so he shed the last drop of his blood on the soil of Wenshui.

That was a glorious example of how a communist should live and die. The people of Wenshui and the peasants of Yunchouhsi took this to heart, and so did little Hu-lan. Ever after she always remembered that this was the way to live and die for the people.

II LIVING AMONG SIMPLE HEROES

Once the people of Wenshui realized that the Communist Party and the Eighth Route Army were their protectors, they made every effort to support them. The peasants of Yunchouhsi were no exception. Thanks to their active and continuous support, the Eighth Route Army was able to deal blows at the enemy from this village.

The force active in the locality of Wenshui at the time was a local armed unit—the Sixth Detachment. Once, more than one hundred men from this detachment set out to wage guerilla warfare against the enemy and, through over-confidence, failed to realize some Japanese troops were on their track. By the time they entered Yunchouhsi for a rest, the enemy was very close. Fortunately, at this critical moment the peasants learned of the proximity of the Japanese and warned their own men in good time. They immediately took up a favourable position on the surrounding dyke, so that the enemy troops who arrived soon after found

themselves in an extremely unfavourable position. When the battle started, the Sixth Detachment put up a stubborn fight, making things hot for the Japanese and their puppet garrison troops. Our main force, stationed in South Huchiapao Village, nearly three miles to the east, heard gunfire and were worried; but as they did not know the position of the enemy, they did not venture out. At this crucial moment the villagers of Yunchouhsi came to the rescue again. Risking his life a peasant ran out of the village through a hail of bullets and reported the situation to our troops in South Huchiapao Village. They came at once, attacking from the rear, and routed the enemy. The Japanese suffered heavy casualties in this encounter and quite a number of the puppet garrison troops were taken prisoner.

Not long afterwards, the Japanese raided the village, only to find the place deserted. The villagers had guessed that the enemy would return to avenge themselves, and all the inhabitants, old and young alike, had left the village bag and baggage. Mad with anger, the enemy troops could find no one on whom to vent their fury. At last they discovered one old man who had remained to watch over the place. The Japanese ordered him to find food and drink for them, but as they drove the old man through the village street, he suddenly freed himself from their grasp and plunged headlong into the well outside Hu-lan's house. This heroic tragedy happened right in front of her door!

The fact that the feudal forces in Yunchouhsi were weaker than elsewhere in the neighbourhood was, of course, an advantage for revolutionary activities. And since the interests of the masses were safeguarded in the revolutionary struggle, they gave their wholehearted support to the revolution. Such being the case, many anti-Japanese partisans took to stopping over in this village and the villagers for their part were very glad to give them cover.

Chen Teh-chao, a young villager who had joined the Communist Party in 1940, gradually expanded the Party organization in the village, and group activities started. The Japanese who had occupied the Wenshui area were conducting a campaign to "enforce public order." When it became too hot in other villages the leading members of the Wenshui Party Branch and District Party Branch concealed themselves in this village.

Pointing to Yunchouhsi, the enemy would say: "That's a little Yen-an."

The neighbouring village of Paohsienchuang was weak politically, and the small Party group there often had to go to other villages to hold a meeting. Yunchouhsi was the place they frequented most. Comrade Han Ju-fan of Paohsienchuang was then Party secretary of the fifth district of Wenshui, but although the Japanese tried many times to catch him, thanks to the protection of the Yunchouhsi villagers he slipped through their hands every time. Hu-lan heard whispered tales of his

adventures from the peasants who loved to describe his many escapes. One day a group of Japanese gendarmes came to the village to arrest Han. At once the villagers thrust a manure basket and pitchfork into his hands, and disguised as an old man collecting manure, he left the village safely. On another occasion he was caught just outside the village by three plain-clothes agents of the enemy. Luckily the incident was seen by a villager who immediately dashed into the fields nearby to report it to the partisans lying in ambush there. They rushed to his rescue and the three plain-clothes agents of the enemy were caught.

Reminiscing of the War of Resistance, the villagers of Yunchouhsi would say proudly: "So many cadres came and went, but there was never a mishap!"

The War of Resistance steeled and transformed the Chinese people in the course of struggle. Hu-lan's father was also swept by the war out of his limited world, the small courtyard of his house.

Many a time Hu-lan saw her father don his padded jacket, put some food in his pocket and walk out of their small courtyard after sunset. With other villagers he went in secret to the western mountains to deliver public grain and other supplies to the Anti-Japanese Democratic Government. One dark, stormy night in 1940 over a thousand peasants from Wenshui climbed the western mountains to deliver the grain. Nearly a score of them lost their lives on the way. They sacrificed their lives for the liberation of the Chinese nation.

On one occasion Hu-lan's father returned very much exhausted; but tired as he was he described with animation the dangers encountered on that trip to the western mountains to deliver cloth. The peasants had gathered on the dyke east of the village and set out before midnight, each carrying two bolts of cloth on his back. They passed stealthily through the fields, but just as they were nearing the pass leading to the western mountains they heard a sudden volley of enemy rifle fire. It happened so unexpectedly that the inexperienced peasants with the cloth on their backs scattered in fright. Some even dropped the cloth they were carrying. But Hu-lan's father ran on, holding the cloth tightly in his arms, determined to deliver it if he died in the attempt.

When he had described this incident, his family breathed a sigh of relief. But Hu-lan's father, honest peasant that he was, promptly added with emphasis, as if to sum up what he had said already: "What's promised must be done. Better die rather than lose public property." Glancing at the familiar faces around him he saw his daughter blinking her eyes as if trying to grasp the meaning of every word: "What's promised must be done! Better die rather than lose public property!"

The peasants of Yunchouhsi were not the only ones to be so brave. In the neighbouring villages and, in fact, all over the vast plain of Wenshui, the peasants performed heroic deeds time and again in their struggle.

Hu-lan's mother was from South Huchiapao, two or three miles from Yunchouhsi. She too liked to describe the struggle against the enemy in her village. One story Hu-lan had heard many times, yet she often begged her mother to tell it again. The enemy had surrounded South Huchiapao and driven all the inhabitants into the yard of the Village Administration Office. With a machine-gun mounted at the entrance, the enemy ordered the people to point out the Eighth Route Army men and anti-Japanese partisans among them. But none betrayed the people. Then the enemy resorted to beating as a means of extorting information from them. But it was no use. The enemy threatened: "If you still won't talk we'll burn your houses." But the threat proved futile. At last the enemy set fire to part of the village; and as the flames leapt up the frantic peasants stamped their feet in rage, but not a word did they utter even to the very end.

Hu-lan had a playmate called Chin Hsien, whose stepfather was a merchant with shady connections. Liu Fang, a cadre doing intelligence work among the enemy, realized that he might prove useful to them. So he enlisted his help to obtain information about the puppet troops in order to get them to serve on our side. Liu Fang often visited the Chins' house, and Hu-lan met him there when she went over to play. He taught her and the other children anti-Japanese songs, and later she learnt something about his work and the legendary life he led.

In 1941 when the situation on the plain worsened, many comrades were recalled to the bases in the mountains. But Liu Fang, acting on orders, came down from the hills to work among the masses on the plain. As the saying goes: The revolutionary marches toward the storm.

During that period Liu Fang disguised himself as a merchant. Everyday he rode a bicycle from place to place on the plain. Once as he was riding from Peihsinchuang to Tungchuang Village, he heard singing behind him, and looking back saw to his dismay a group of puppet garrison troops drawing nearer and nearer. Liu Fang showed extraordinary composure. He rode along slowly. After a while he jumped off as if to inspect the chain, then jumped on his bicycle again, and rode onward very leisurely. He entered Tungchuang at the same time as the puppet troops, without having aroused the slightest suspicion. Another time when he was staying in Tungchuang a traitor led the enemy to arrest him. He immediately dashed for the door. The traitor yelled: "That's Liu Fang!" A wall over six feet high blocked his way, but with a great effort Liu clambered over it. He then made a few turns and ducked into a haystack, so that although the enemy searched high and low they could not find him. Not long afterwards he was again seen in the enemy-occupied area seated among the audience watching an opera. When people talked of Liu Fang, his calm courage, quick mind and especially his close contact with the masses, they would always nod their heads in admiration.

Hu-lan met many partisans through Liu Fang. She saw Han Ju-fan, Party secretary of the fifth district of Wenshui, who had had so many escapes. Then there was Lu Hsueh-meï, a woman cadre working in the district. And she became more familiar with Chen Teh-chao, a local cadre.

Not only did Hu-lan meet these rank-and-file revolutionary workers who were simple yet great, but through them she pieced together many stories of heroic deeds. Her acquaintance with them opened up new vistas in her comparatively peaceful family life. She was able to see before her a new world, and its fierce struggle and heroism inspired her.

She was full of admiration for their life of revolutionary struggle.

That Lu Hsueh-meï, although a woman, was also taking part in revolutionary work impressed Hu-lan more than anything else. Young Hu-lan determined that she too would work like them.

III

SHE JOINS THE REVOLUTION

In 1945, Liu Hu-lan was only thirteen years old, but she looked at least seventeen. Her character was marked by reticence and the ability to do things steadily and soberly. All the villagers said that the child looked like a grown-up person.

After eight years of hard struggle victory was at last attained when Japan surrendered in August, 1945. On September 1, the Eighth Route Army liberated Wenshui, and the people thought their troubles were over. But on September 9, the troops of Chiang Kai-shek and Yen Hsi-shan, in conjunction with Japanese and puppet columns, launched an offensive against the liberated area of Wenshui. During the eight years of the war the peasants of Wenshui had never seen these bandits fight against the Japanese, but now they came strutting back to massacre the people. The inhabitants of Wenshui were furious.

The peasants outside the county seat of Wenshui, however, had become steeled under the leadership of the Communist Party and acquired the

ability to deal with the situation. So the Chiang Kai-shek and Yen Hsi-shan brigands were soon beaten back from the villages and forced to retreat with their tails between their legs into Wenshui county town.

The districts outside the county seat of Wenshui were liberated while the Chiang Kai-shek and Yen Hsi-shan troops ensconced themselves inside. The situation was very tense and the struggle grew fiercer. With the development of the revolutionary forces there arose a great need for cadres in all spheres of work. Consequently the fifth district of Wenshui County decided to train a number of women cadres to promote women's work. The task of training was entrusted to Lu Hsueh-mei. Women pupils were recruited from all the villagers and sent to a centre two or three miles northeast of Yunchouhsi for training.

This was great news for Hu-lan who had long been looking for an opportunity to study and participate in revolutionary work.

How many times had she gazed at the distant peaks of the western mountains, imagining the life and struggle of the people living up there. She often said to her mother: ". . . How I long to go there, Mum! Whenever I see the western mountains I wish I were there. Our old revolutionary base is up there. If I go I can learn so much and do revolutionary work. . . . Oh, Mum, I do want to go there!" But when Hu-lan spoke like this, her grandmother always raised strong objections.

Now at last the opportunity to study and participate in revolutionary work had come, and she must not let it slip. But the thought of the objections her folks might raise made her anxious. It might be possible to persuade the others to agree, but to convince her grandmother would be impossible.

Sure enough, Hu-lan's family would not allow her to join the training class.

Hu-lan's was a conservative, middle peasant family. During the war, they had learned something in their struggles, and supported the Communist Party and the People's Liberation Army. But they had their backward side too, inherited from the past. They were afraid that if Hu-lan became a responsible cadre in the village, she would be called upon to settle a host of quarrels and disputes. Such a prospect alarmed them because they had always avoided stepping on other people's toes. Moreover Hu-lan was a girl, and there had never been any girl cadres in their village. In short, there were many objections to her participation in the training class. The more Hu-lan thought of it the more depressed she became.

"Hu-lan," said Liu Fang smilingly, "the training class is about to begin, aren't you going to join it?" Flustered and frustrated, Hu-lan pretended not to hear.

She hurried to see her friend, Chin Hsien, and talked over the matter with her. Her enthusiasm was catching, and Chin Hsien said she would like

to go to study too. She took the matter up with her stepfather who at once granted her request. The ease with which Chin Hsien got permission to go made Hu-lan very envious.

In her childhood, Hu-lan had often envied Chin Hsien. When she saw Chin Hsien wearing new shoes and new dresses she would run home and ask her folks to make new dresses and new shoes for her. She would ask why it was that other girls could have new clothes and new shoes while she couldn't? Then her mother and grandmother would affectionately explain to her the difference between the two families. They told her that Chin Hsien's stepfather was a merchant who did not have to work in the fields like a peasant, and that Chin Hsien's new dresses were not bought with money earned by sweat and toil. Chin Hsien's clothes were made of fine fabrics bought from the city, while their own were of coarse materials spun at home, from cotton grown in their own fields. "Come here, Hu-lan! Granny will teach you how to spin," her grandmother told her. An expert spinner, she taught Hu-lan how to work; and though only a girl, Hu-lan could soon spin four ounces of cotton a day. She was now able to wear a new dress too. Though hers was coarse homespun, it gave Hu-lan a joy that Chin Hsien could not possibly experience. Later on, though Chin Hsien boasted of her new dresses, Hu-lan no longer considered them worth bragging about. On the contrary, she became more and more conscious that she was different from Chin Hsien,

being the daughter of a labouring family who lived by honest labour.

She had long outgrown her childish envy of Chin Hsien. But now that her friend had so easily obtained permission to go to study, a new envy seized her.

For several days on end Chin Hsien was busy, preparing for her journey. Hu-lan said nothing, but a struggle was going on in her heart. When cadres whispered: "Hu-lan, the training class is to open soon!" At first she remained silent, but later on she smiled at them.

On the morning of October 14, Hu-lan said quietly to Chin Hsien: "Let's go! It's getting late."

All present were taken unawares when she told Lu Hsueh-mei she had made up her mind to run away from home to join the training class. She had reached her decision quietly, following the example of grown-up comrades and remaining calm and unexcited.

Hu-lan knew others who had run away from home to participate in revolutionary work. When the War of Resistance broke out, her mother's younger brother had wanted to join the Eighth Route Army, but his family was reluctant to let him go. Finally, he had to run away from home to realize his aim. Hu-lan's mother often told this story, not without mirth.

Four girls set out to join the training class, going by different ways. Chin Hsien and a certain

Mrs. Meng had obtained permission from their families, so they walked openly through the street with their bundles under their arms. Hu-lan and a girl called Yu-lan had run away from home, so they had to steal away by a roundabout route.

They met at an appointed place outside the village, then started walking rapidly on, joking merrily along the way. But before they had gone half way, they heard a man running after them and shouting. Hu-lan was alarmed, thinking it must be someone from her family coming to take her back. But when the man came nearer she was relieved to find that he was Yu-lan's uncle. She instantly felt worried for her friend instead.

Perspiring and indignant, Yu-lan's uncle shouted: "How could you run away like this, with your father seriously ill in bed? Come on back with me at once!"

Yu-lan was unwilling to return home, and argued vehemently with her uncle. But he remonstrated with her very patiently, using the arguments most likely to influence her. "Your father is lying seriously ill in bed, when he learned that you had gone away, tears poured down his cheeks...." Distressed, she still refused to go back; then her uncle pleaded: "Maybe we can get around the matter this way. Go back for a day or two. When your father recovers, you can go to the training class.... Can't you go back for just a few days?" Yu-lan cried, then turned around, away from her companions. Soon she was following

her uncle home, along the road by which she had come. Like all young people who had run away from home to join the revolution and were later forced to return, she wept, shouted her protest and struggled against herself. But all this was of no avail and Yu-lan was never able to come out again to work during the world-shaking War of Liberation of the Chinese people. Thus a great era flashed past her without her realizing it.

Hu-lan sadly watched the figure of Yu-lan receding farther and farther away. Her eyes began to fill with tears. But time was running short, the three of them could not afford to delay any longer. Silently they walked on. Although it was only two or three miles, they felt as if it were a long and difficult journey.

All along the way Hu-lan could not help looking back again and again. She was not looking for her companion who had gone back, she was afraid her father might suddenly turn up to take her home too. It dawned on her that to run away from home did not mean emancipation from home, there was still the danger of being taken back. The greatest determination was needed to step out firmly along the road of revolution.

The three prospective trainees naively discussed the possibility of Yu-lan's being sent out again for training by her family after a certain length of time, and began to make guesses as to what they would learn. Hu-lan was not aware, however, that she had already successfully learnt her first lesson, while one of her friends had backed out of it.

Several hours after Hu-lan left home, the news that four girls had gone to the training class began to spread in the village. On hearing this Hu-lan's grandmother, who was over sixty years old, instantly hurried out to look for her grand-daughter. Hu-lan had been brought up by her grandmother, for her mother had been seriously ill after her birth, and unable to nurse her. She had become indispensable to her grandmother, and the old woman knew very well that Hu-lan loved her. When she was sick Hu-lan always wept secretly. How could she be so hard-hearted now as to run away from home?

Hu-lan's grandmother went out and looked for her for a long time. On her return she sat down and burst into tears. She glowered at her son and daughter-in-law. "It's impossible," she said, "that you two don't know where Hu-lan is. You don't want to tell me, that's all."

As a matter of fact, Hu-lan's parents were no less worried. Grandmother refused to eat, and nobody else had any appetite either. After scolding her son and daughter-in-law, the old woman blamed Hu-lan. "I brought her up all these years," she said. "She ought to obey me! I'll give her a good whipping when she comes back!"

Hu-lan's grandmother had made up her mind. She was going to let Hu-lan know what real discipline was. Meanwhile Hu-lan's mother had found out where the training class was, and told her of it. At dawn next day, her son borrowed a

wheelbarrow for her to ride on and the two set out for the training centre together.

Only the previous day Hu-lan had seen Yu-lan's recall by her uncle. When she was told that her grandmother had come, she hid herself, determined not to see her.

Comrade Lu Hsueh-mei received Hu-lan's father and grandmother warmly and did all she could to make them comfortable. She boiled water and prepared a meal for them. Hu-lan's grandmother, however, remained sullen. "I am looking for Hu-lan," she said. "What I want is to take her back with me immediately. If I can't see her, then I can't eat anything." Saying this she sighed.

Hu-lan's grandmother ate only half a bowl of noodles, then put down her chopsticks. Lu Hsueh-mei urged her not to worry and explained again that the training lasted only a few weeks and that Hu-lan would go back home as soon as it was completed. Hu-lan's grandmother was not at all appeased by these promises. But when she realized that it was impossible to take her grand-daughter home, she returned to Yunchouhsi, with tears running down her cheeks.

Hu-lan came out from her hiding place after her grandmother left. She uttered a sigh of relief, knowing that she had gone through another trial. But she also knew there were many such trials ahead and that she must brace herself to overcome them.

Forty days passed very quickly. On the last day of November, Hu-lan came home. She had graduated from the training class for women cadres and become a revolutionary worker. She threw herself into her grandmother's arms, who neither wept nor whipped her. "So you've come back home," smiled her mother. "Why didn't you tell us when you went away? You've worried your Granny to death!" Hu-lan laughed, and so did her grandmother, stepping down from the *kang* to cook something good for her to eat.

Some twenty days after Hu-lan's return, her grandmother fell ill. As she was dying, she held Hu-lan's hand tightly in her own and said: "Hu-lan, won't you try to please your Granny? Promise me that you will!"

Her mother whispered: "What Granny wants you to say is this: 'Granny, I shall never leave home again to join in revolutionary work!'"

But this Hu-lan could not do. Looking at her dying grandmother in great distress, she nevertheless felt she could not lie. Very solemnly she said to her mother: "I'd rather die than say that, Mum!"

IV

THE MAKING OF A REVOLUTIONARY

When Hu-lan was undergoing training at Kuanchiapao, she heard about a certain martyr of the village who had sacrificed his life rather than tell the Japanese where the public grain was hidden. This story was told her by a comrade living in the village:

During the later stage of the War of Resistance, the people of Kuanchiapao raided Hsishechen, a village then held by the Japanese, to take back their public grain which had been seized by the enemy. Shortly after, Japanese troops besieged Kuanchiapao, in an attempt to seize the grain again and to find out who had participated in the raid. The enemy troops ransacked trunks and cupboards to search for the grain.

In the house of one peasant they found a gunny sack for holding public grain. They arrested this peasant and clubbed him to wring a confession out of him.

"He refused to say anything!" the narrator of this story said emphatically.

Hu-lan pondered over this. Yes, of course he shouldn't have said anything. A few words might have brought ruin and suffering to a great many innocent people.

"That damn Jap pointed his bayonet at that peasant's heart. Still he refused to let out a word."

Hu-lan stared angrily before her as if she saw the glistening bayonet pointed not at that brave peasant but at herself. . . .

"That was a cruel devil!" continued the comrade. "He bayoneted the peasant who dodged and tried to parry his thrusts with his hands. But it was no use. Blood began to drip from his hands and body. Still the peasant refused to say anything!"

Hu-lan knitted her brows in agony. She looked at her own hands, and clenched her fists.

"When the Jap saw that no information was forthcoming, he made a deep thrust into the villager's belly. Cold sweat was streaming down the poor man's face and warm blood gushed from his wound, but he refused to utter a word. That's how bravely he sacrificed his life for the people of the entire village!"

After hearing this story Hu-lan blurted out in an emphatic voice: "A brave man!"

She looked blankly into space. She felt as if the martyr who had so heroically sacrificed his life

in preventing the public grain from falling into the hands of the enemy was still standing before her, with the bayonet in his belly. She visualized this tall and stalwart peasant, like a giant bronze statue towering above her. The impression of that brave martyr never faded from her memory.

While Hu-lan and her friends were undergoing training, the peasants of Kuanchiapao were waging a struggle against the corrupt officials of the puppet regime. This intensified her interest in revolutionary work. All the trainees for women's work took an active part, learning from actual participation in the struggle.

The peasants were thoroughly aroused. Among them was an old cripple, nicknamed "Iron-crutch Li," who was a conspicuous figure. He was always busy. One could hear him, at almost any time, shouting directions in his deep voice.

This old cripple Li was Kuanchiapao's "pioneer cadre." He had joined the Communist Party in 1939, and was now secretary of the peasants' association. He was an honest man and he enjoyed high prestige among the masses. The struggle now waged against the corrupt puppet officials was being carried out under his leadership.

It ended in great success. Two hundred piculs of confiscated grain were distributed to the impoverished peasants.

The grain was apportioned under the guidance of Li equitably and reasonably, to the satisfaction of everybody.

Hu-lan took an active part in this struggle from beginning to end. Behind the brave martyr and the indefatigable cripple, she began to feel the powerful leadership of the Chinese Communist Party. She felt this great guiding force in and around her, leading her and the people of the whole nation forward in every movement.

Throughout the forty days of Hu-lan's training she was kept busy attending lectures and discussion meetings and participating in the struggle. Only in the evening, just before she went to bed, could she relax. But at this time the courtyard outside would resound with singing.

Ever since her childhood Hu-lan had been fond of singing. Whenever she was with her mother or grandmother, she would sing of the mountains and rivers and of the peasants' hard life in her village. Now she had become more fond of singing, but the songs she sang had changed. Her songs now were about the War of Resistance and struggles of the people. Lu Hsueh-mei led in the chorus:

“Young comrades!
What an honour it is
To join the Eighth Route Army!”

Raising her voice, Lu Hsueh-mei sang:

“We have left our home,
We have come to the battlefront,
Like heroes!
To protect our parents and our homes,
We do not flinch from anything,
Not even from the supreme sacrifice....”

Then all the women would join in a thunderous chorus:

“To protect our parents and our homes,
We do not flinch from anything,
Not even from the supreme sacrifice....”

The light of the oil lamp went out, but as they lay on their *kang*, they continued singing. There seemed no end to the songs. The old woman living in the main room, who was a poor peasant, got up in the dark, threw her clothes on and came to their window to tell them solicitously to sleep early lest they should feel sleepy at their work the next morning. “Don't you worry about us, Auntie!” smiled Hu-lan. Then they lowered their voices and continued to sing about their struggle.

When she completed her training and returned home, Hu-lan brought these militant songs to her own village.

Hu-lan showed her mother a notebook, every page of which was crowded with characters she had learned in the training class, written in an irregular hand. There were also the songs she had learned, written for her by her friends. Formerly it was her mother and grandmother who taught her to sing; now she had become their teacher instead. Her mother often sang after her in a low voice:

“.....
To protect our parents and our homes,
We do not flinch from anything,
Not even from the supreme sacrifice....”

Hu-lan had a good memory and had learned quite a number of new songs. She had a sweet voice, which everybody liked. And they were anxious to learn from her. She sang at home and while she was spinning. She sang before going to a meeting, and sometimes when she was walking she would break into songs.

But her work after her return was not merely singing. Of more importance was her task of directing women's work in her village, for she was elected secretary of the women's association.

Hu-lan belonged to the first batch of women cadres Yunchouhsi ever had. As this village was inside the guerilla warfare zone during the War of Resistance, women's welfare work had never had chance to develop in a normal way. In the opinion of some cadres in the village the mobilization of women was not much use. They were prejudiced against women, considering them too timid to face danger and therefore liable to harm the revolution.

Hu-lan's first speech at a women's meeting started the backward women in the audience gossiping. Some sneered at her, saying: "Ah, what can a girl like Hu-lan do? What can a woman do anyhow?"

Of course a beginner in anything is always beset with difficulties, and Hu-lan was no exception. She had so much to say, but when she mounted the platform she forgot it all. She was tongue-tied after having spoken only two or three sentences. The cadres who helped to conduct the meeting had

to come to the rescue to convey to the audience what Hu-lan had wanted to say.

Some backward women in the audience burst out laughing. They winked at one another and said: "Hu-lan's singing is far better than her speech-making; better ask her to sing a song for us!"

Once a woman in the village quarrelled with her mother-in-law. They asked the women's association to settle their problem. What was to be done? Hu-lan thought over the matter for a long time but could not come to a decision. Finally she childishly made the woman kowtow to her mother-in-law as an apology. Another time a girl had a quarrel with her elder brother's wife. They too came to the women's association to have their dispute settled. What was she to do? Again she could think of nothing better than the impossible decision of humiliating the girl's sister-in-law by parading her in the streets. Decisions like these were of course imprudent. The masses expressed their disapproval and the leading comrades also criticized her afterwards.

Lack of experience does not constitute a major hindrance to progress, one can always learn in time. One should keep in mind the mistakes made and learn from them. The village head, in summarizing the work done by Hu-lan after her return from the training class, stated: "When she was given work to do she always did it promptly. Her achievements may not be impressive, but she has always done her best."

In addition to working in her own village Hu-lan often went with Lu Hsueh-mei to promote women's work in the neighbouring villages. The tall Lu Hsueh-mei and the fourteen-year-old Hu-lan were frequently seen going from one village to another to attend meetings and work. Neither storms nor the hot sun could deter them.

After May 1946, the peasants of the liberated areas launched a large-scale land reform movement. Through intense struggles millions upon millions of landless and land-poor peasants received land. In Wenshui County a similar movement was launched. In the twenty-odd villages of the second and fifth districts, more than a thousand acres of land belonging to feudal landlords were confiscated and distributed among two thousand poor peasants.

If grain, as has often been said, is the life of the peasants, then land may be said to be the source of their life. The Chinese Communist Party had not only led the peasants in Wenshui to carry out the struggle against the enemy for the protection of their grain but had also led them to win their portion of land. This gave them control over the source of their own life. It emancipated the broad masses of peasants from the feudal shackles which had bound them for thousands of years, thus enabling them to take the path towards prosperity and happiness.

Liu Hu-lan threw herself heart and soul into this struggle, the magnitude of which had no parallel in the history of Wenshui County. In her

own village she took part in the meeting to settle scores with a landlord called Shih. In Tahsiang Village, two miles from her home, she took part in the mass trial of a landlord and local despot. In both these struggles many leading comrades from higher administrative levels personally directed the movement from the very beginning. Lu Hsueh-mei led Hu-lan and other women workers to mobilize the village women for land reform. Their days were crowded with meetings. They lost weight through hard work, but they were happy. Hu-lan devoted herself whole-heartedly to the work and was constantly seen among the women, discussing the work with them. Being eager to learn she could easily appraise a new situation. Even when she was sent to work in another village it took her only a very short time to get acquainted with things before she went ahead smoothly with her tasks.

The head of Tahsiang Village perceived her strong point at once, and urged other cadres to follow her example. "Look at Liu Hu-lan of Yunchouhsi," he said. "She knows how to approach the people. Wherever she goes she gets quickly to the heart of the matter, whereas some comrades often get things mixed up and do not know what to do. We should all learn from her in this respect."

Chin Hsien, who had received training together with Hu-lan at Kuanchiapao, did not take up any work seriously after her return. She merely drifted along behind the others. Without undergoing difficulties and trials and without waging a relent-

less struggle against her old ideology, a girl with a family background like Chin Hsien's can hardly expect any real progress.

A woman in Yunchouhsi once compared these two girls. "Hu-lan treats all the poor peasants and farm labourers as she would her own folks," she said. "Whatever she says, she says it from the bottom of her heart, and whatever she does she always puts other people's interests first. But Chin Hsien is rather snobbish. She seems to despise the masses, and she always attends to her own affairs before she thinks about others."

At this period when the people's government of the liberated areas was leading the peasants to struggle for their emancipation, the Chiang Kai-shek and Yen Hsi-shan bandits, in league with the landlords, launched frantic attacks against the peasants.

The Chiang Kai-shek and Yen Hsi-shan bandits, after occupying the county seat of Wenshui in the autumn of 1945, had seldom ventured forth to the liberated areas outside. In May, 1946, however, they mobilized about 5800 troops and launched a major offensive against the liberated areas around Wenshui and Chiaocheng. Although ten months had elapsed since the Japanese surrender, there were more than two hundred Japanese fighting in the ranks of these bandit troops. Their lorries, armoured cars, and tanks were all manned by Japanese. By the end of June the strength of the enemy had increased to more than 15,000 men. The

armymen and people of the liberated area of Wenshui defended themselves heroically and dealt severe blows at the enemy.

The women's association of Yunchouhsi collected donations for the Eighth Route Army. Hu-lan and other women cadres visited every house in the village to persuade the people to contribute something. "We can economize a little in our daily life," she said. "Added together the things we save will come to quite a lot. What's more, to give encouragement to the men of the Eighth Route Army is really to protect the fruits of our victory." So the villagers saved their cakes and green vegetables and in no time large quantities of these things were collected and sent to the people's army.

Hu-lan accepted the task of supplying shoes to the army assigned to each village by the people's government. She organized the women in the village to make shoes. Difficult and exacting as it was, this task was nevertheless an important one in aiding the great War of Liberation. Tens of thousands of women in the country-side were mobilized, and Hu-lan was one of thousands of women cadres promoting this work in the country-side. Like a small, rapidly moving cog in a big machine, she pressed ahead with her work. People frequently saw her coming out of one house and entering another, and running from one end of the street to the other. Her labour soon bore fruits and her task was fulfilled.

Wherein lies the greatness of life? It lies in seriously and earnestly carrying out one's task. No

matter what kind of revolutionary work one engages in, trifling and unimportant as it may seem, one should give one's utmost and do the work well.

With regard to the role of small cogs, Comrade Stalin once toasted them with these words:

"...I should like to drink the health of the people holding next to no rank and whose titles are not envied. People who are regarded as 'cogs in the wheel' of the great state machine, but without whom all we marshals and army commanders are, to put it crudely, not worth a tinker's cuss; one of the 'cogs' goes out of commission and the whole thing is done for.... There are very many of them, their name is legion, because they represent tens of millions. They are modest people. Nobody writes anything about them. They have no titles and hold a low rank, but they are the people who support us as the base supports the summit."

Hu-lan was one of these "cogs in the wheel."

Bundle after bundle of shoes were made and delivered to the administrative office of the village. Hu-lan and other cadres examined these shoes keenly, praising and discussing them. Suddenly she came upon a pair of shoes as light as feather and with flabby soles. Shame on whoever had made this pair of shoes!

"This pair of shoes is awful!" Hu-lan shouted. All the others crowded around her. They felt the shoes and were shocked. The name on the soles showed that this pair had been made by a widow

of a former rich peasant family by the name of Tuan.

Hu-lan saw red. How could such shoes be sent to the Eighth Route Army? How long could such shoes last? The more she thought the angrier she became. Taking up a pair of scissors she ripped open the soles, only to find them stuffed with rags and cotton shreds.

Hu-lan went instantly to find the widow. Thrusting the shoes at her she asked: "Did you send us this pair of shoes?"

The widow hesitated and faltered: "No ... I didn't make them."

"Why did you put rags in the soles?" demanded Hu-lan. "Aren't you ashamed to give such stuff to the Eighth Route Army?"

The widow tried to evade her responsibility. "Well, I bought these shoes," she said. "It's really the fault of the shoemaker."

"Don't tell me it's the fault of the shoemaker," retorted Hu-lan. "You can't buy good things at cheap prices. How could you expect to get good shoes if you're not willing to pay for them? You were just trying to save money, but you did it at the expense of the Eighth Route Army!"

Hu-lan criticized the widow severely, and in the face of irrefutable evidence, the latter could not but admit her mistake.

A women's meeting was called. Hu-lan made this case public and asked all present to give their

opinions on the matter. All the other women had handed in really good shoes that would wear well. On learning of this shameful incident which had made a blot on the good name of the village, they could not contain their anger. Many of them levelled sharp criticism at the widow. This meeting, conducted by Hu-lan, was a great success; it helped to open the eyes of the people of Yunchouhsi.

The longer Hu-lan devoted herself to revolutionary work the better she understood the greatness of communism. The life of peasants engaged in individual production no longer appealed to her, nor the ordinary political life of the popular organizations. She wished to devote herself entirely to the cause of the revolution led by the Communist Party and to make more and greater contributions. So in 1946 she applied for membership in the Chinese Communist Party; she was then only fourteen years old.

At that time the China New Democratic Youth League had not yet been formed, and, as a general rule, the Chinese Communist Party did not accept members under eighteen years of age. When the question of her application for membership was brought up before the Party committee of the fifth district of Wenshui County the members discussed it over and over again.

Commenting on the application, the organization officer said: "She's an honest and reliable girl. She worked in close collaboration with the Party before the Japanese surrender. Since undergoing

training she has become pretty well steeled. The only thing is that she is too young." Then he continued: "We haven't got a single Party member among the women of Yunchouhsi; this has held up our work."

After a lengthy discussion members of the district Party committee decided to admit her as a candidate member. She was to be given full membership when she reached the age of eighteen.

The small Fen River flows into the Yellow River which is thousands of miles long, and the Yellow River pours eastward to empty its water into the sea. Only a year had passed since young Hu-lan joined the revolutionary ranks. Now, when she was only fourteen years old, she joined the Chinese Communist Party.

V THE ENGAGEMENT

When Hu-lan was small her grandmother used to say to her: "You will soon grow up to be a big girl. Then I'll get a good husband for you and marry you into a well-to-do family. Maybe I can still see some good days with you. . . . I have suffered so much during all these years. . . ." Hu-lan would smile bashfully and say nothing.

This was the hope of the whole family, and it was by no means peculiar to the Lius. The older generation in the village often acted according to their own wishes and arranged incongruous marriages against the will of their sons or daughters.

One folk-song which had been a favourite with Hu-lan ever since her childhood expressed the dissatisfaction of the girls of Wenshui County with regard to feudal marriage. The refrain of the song ran:

"Her father loves money,
Her mother is muddle-headed.
They've sold their daughter to a family

Living on the top of a mountain in
Chiaocheng—

They've sold their daughter to a family
Living on the top of a mountain in
Chiaocheng."

This song epitomized an old era. Ever since the establishment of the anti-Japanese democratic political power the people of Wenshui had been undergoing a transformation, and so had the fate of the daughters of Wenshui. Hu-lan's career was an example of this. Under the leadership of the Communist Party the political and economic status of women had been raised, and consequently it was possible for them to carry out a struggle against the feudal system of marriage. They were no longer willing to be sold by their elders like chattels. When Hu-lan sang this song she was not singing of her own sufferings, for a new era had already begun.

One day in the summer of 1946 a go-between came to Hu-lan's house. She smiled at Hu-lan's parents and said: "Ah! This time I've found a really good husband for your Hu-lan."

"Who is he?" they asked quickly, with great curiosity.

"Pai Mei," was the answer. "He's a straight forward, likable boy. I think it would be a very suitable match."

Although Hu-lan's folks were keenly interested, this was something that parents could no longer

decide arbitrarily. They must consult Hu-lan before they could make any decision, so they smiled but did not venture to give a positive answer.

As a matter of fact, Hu-lan and her family knew Pai Mei very well. They were neighbours. Hu-lan and Pai Mei had grown up together and been playmates during their childhood. Pai Mei was a very pleasant lad, and handsome too; the villagers often commented on his good looks.

The go-between then went directly to Hu-lan to sound out her opinion. Hu-lan smiled. When she came home she told her mother what had happened. "It's you," her mother advised happily, "and not anybody else, who are going to marry Pai Mei and live with him as a life-long companion; so think it over carefully and decide for yourself."

After a pause Liu Hu-lan said with her head bent low: "I think I'll say yes." She said nothing else, but again smiled bashfully.

Thus it was agreed that Hu-lan and Pai Mei were to be engaged, and the twelfth day of the eighth moon was fixed for the engagement ceremony. As the day drew near both families were busy making preparations for the auspicious event.

Now, it was Hu-lan's custom to consult Lu Hsueh-mei about everything, but just now Lu Hsueh-mei happened to have gone to another village to inspect the women's work there. Hu-lan was thus left on her own. If it were something in

connection with her work she might have discussed it with other cadres in the village. But her engagement! She was too shy even to mention it to men cadres. She only hoped that Lu Hsueh-mei would come back as soon as possible so that she could attend the engagement ceremony.

Only two days before the engagement, although it was raining cats and dogs, Lu Hsueh-mei arrived back from the other village. She hastened to see Hu-lan.

"You are going to get engaged to Pai Mei? Do you know his present situation in Taiku?" asked Lu Hsueh-mei in a worried tone.

"No," said Liu Hu-lan. "I only know that he's staying with a business man."

At the time, Pai Mei was serving his apprenticeship in a drugstore in the county seat of Taiku, then under the rule of the Yen Hsi-shan gangsters. His social and political connections were not clearly known. Of course it would be too rash to say off-hand that he was reactionary just because he happened to live in the enemy-occupied area. But with the enemy-occupied area cordoned off it was really impossible for the Party to help Hu-lan find out quickly how Pai Mei stood. And if the Party approved the engagement on the flimsy basis of Pai Mei's past behaviour in the village, that would not be taking a very responsible attitude toward Comrade Liu Hu-lan. Having explained all these difficulties, Lu Hsueh-mei said very earnestly: "It

is the opinion of the communists that marriage should be a matter of one's free will. Nobody has the right to force a person to marry someone whom he or she doesn't like. But when a Party member wants to get engaged he or she should examine the other party's political affiliation, the least to be expected is that there should be no reactionary political complications. As a revolutionary organization the Party feels duty bound to see that members do not err in this respect." Therefore Lu Hsueh-mei was against a hasty engagement.

Hu-lan felt as if she had suddenly awakened from a dream. What a narrow escape she had had! If Lu Hsueh-mei had not come back on that rainy day with her timely help, she would probably have committed a big blunder. She was so moved that she put her arms around Lu Hsueh-mei's neck the way she used to embrace her grandmother when she was a small child. "Comrade Lu Hsueh-mei," she said, "I don't know what I'd do without your help. From now on I shall always discuss everything I am going to do with the Party first. I shall never dare to be rash again. I am only a little girl and you are like my elder sister. You must guide me in all my actions. A blunder once made is hard to correct."

Lu Hsueh-mei looked at the innocent girl and said smilingly, "The Party, not I, is the guide."

It was still raining heavily. Hu-lan's folks were busy preparing for the engagement ceremony to be held two days later. Hu-lan ran to explain

to her mother her new approach to the matter: "Mother, tell Pai Mei and his folks that I've changed my mind. I and Pai Mei can't get engaged now and the engagement ceremony must be called off."

"What's the matter?" asked her mother. "Everything has been arranged and now you suddenly change your mind. How am I to tell them?"

"Mother, it's my fault because I didn't think seriously enough before; but now I've made up my mind to call off the engagement," said Hu-lan apologetically.

Seeing how firm Hu-lan was her mother knew that there was no alternative, and the engagement was broken.

At this time Yen Hsi-shan's troops occupied only the county seat of Wenshui and some strategical points. But they frequently made sudden forays into the villages, to seize grain and carry off men. One day about a thousand men raided Hsiachuchen, a village five miles from Yunchouhsi. Among them there were actually more than a hundred Japanese machine-gunners and artillerymen. They fired more than sixty shells in succession on this small village. Houses were destroyed and the cries and wails of wounded peasants could be heard everywhere. Then Yen Hsi-shan's lackeys entered the village, and with a club in one hand and a grain bag in the other, robbed the peasants of

their grain. Seventy thousand cattles of wheat were taken from the village.

A contingent of the Eighth Route Army hurried to the rescue. They wiped out more than forty of Yen Hsi-shan's troops, and the rest fled in confusion to the county seat. But the enemy did not take their defeat lying down. They planted some of their men in villages farther away from the county seat, lying in wait to rob the people of their autumn harvest.

When the people of Wenshui realized what Yen Hsi-shan's troops intended to do, they fought back. A fierce struggle ensued between the people and the enemy.

One day a wounded officer of the Eighth Route Army by the name of Wang Pen-ku came to Yunchouhsi. He was a company commander of the Twelfth Regiment. Wounded while fighting, he had been treated in a rear hospital in a nearby village, and was now transferred to the home of one of the comrades in his company to recuperate.

The Twelfth Regiment was loved by the people of Wenshui. It was the successor to the Sixth Detachment which had gone through thick and thin with the people of Wenshui during the War of Resistance. The Sixth Detachment had fought the Japanese invaders at Yunchouhsi, and now the Twelfth Regiment had come to fight against Yen Hsi-shan's troops.

After his arrival, all the villagers showed concern for Wang Pen-ku's health. He for his part

would often explain the war situation and current events to the people. Sometimes he would also give his opinion on the village's administrative work. Very sociable, he soon became friendly with many of the villagers and cadres. Whenever Hu-lan went to him with questions, he was very patient in answering her. Everybody liked to be with him, to talk and sing with him. On such occasions Hu-lan would often sing the favourite song of the villagers, "The Sentinel's Song."

The sun rises in the east
At five o'clock in the morning.
The villagers stand on the dike
To act as sentinels.
They look at the mountains far away,
And they look down the road.
Suddenly they hear the sound of footsteps.
A man appears—
He wears civilian clothes,
Carries a pistol, and looks like a hero.
"Who are you?" I ask him.
"Where do you come from?
Where are you going and
What is your mission?"

Wang would listen smiling, as almost every comrade of the Sixth Detachment (now the Twelfth Regiment) knew this song. Many people in Wenshui could sing it too, a song overflowing with the peasants' love for their own army. Though it had been sung hundreds and even thousands of times, it still had a charm nobody could resist. Wang

would find it hard to keep silent, and would join in the singing:

"Fellow countrymen!
I'm a soldier of the Eighth Route Army.
I'm going to Chihsien from Wenshui
To fight bravely against the enemy!
I'm going to Chihsien from Wenshui
To fight bravely against the enemy!"

The people and cadres listening to the song would applaud enthusiastically, while Hu-lan smiled and clapped and Wang himself burst out laughing. The children who had grown quite used to him would cluster around to throw their arms around his neck or try to get on his back. He felt that coming to this village after being wounded was like returning to his own home.

Hu-lan respected this veteran Eighth Route Army man who had fought the enemy heroically ever since the beginning of the War of Resistance, and been through all kinds of dangers. As they got to know each other better she was more and more attracted to Wang.

As the days went by their comradely friendship grew into something deeper. They discovered that absence from each other left a painful void. Each thought that a life-long companionship together would be a great aid to progress. But although the words were on their lips, neither was willing to say them.

It was a time of such intensive struggle against the enemy that they hesitated to talk about

marriage. However, both of them consulted their leading comrades who said that if their love was such as would really warrant a life-long partnership and would enable them to carry on their work better, they agreed that they should be engaged.

Hu-lan's parents heartily approved of the match. To make everything clear Wang said frankly to her family: "Soon I'm going to recover completely and report for duty. Being a revolutionary armyman I can't be content with a little plot of land and a warm *kang*. Today I'm in Wenshui, tomorrow I may be in Chiaocheng and the day after that in Chihhsien. I don't know where I shall be next."

Liu Hu-lan's mother smiled and said: "Hu-lan wants to marry you, then she'll belong to you. You take her along wherever you go."

"Not exactly," said Wang. "I must obey the orders of my superiors and she must obey hers."

Thus Hu-lan and Wang Pen-ku got engaged.

After the engagement, Wang not only frequently gave advice to Hu-lan with regard to her work, but also helped her with her studies. Much of their spare time they spent practising writing. In the evening when news of enemy raids were received, Hu-lan and other cadres would help Wang Pen-ku to move to some other village.

Enemy attacks became more and more frequent.

Once Hu-lan heard that Han Hua, a capable messenger of the people's government of Wenshui, had lost his life in a nearby village. This was a great loss as Han was a revolutionary cadre of some seven years' standing. The way he sacrificed his life served as an inspiring lesson to Hu-lan.

Han Hua was on his way to deliver some secret documents to the county government. While passing through Nanhsien he ran into some of Yen Hsi-shan's troops and could find no place to hide. He quickly destroyed the documents he was carrying and threw a grenade at the enemy. Taking advantage of the enemy's confusion after the explosion he started to shoot at them while making his retreat. He tried to kill as many enemy troops as possible and to save his own life: he was not going to sacrifice his life for nothing. But as the enemy troops recovered from the shock of the explosion they realized that he was all by himself. They machine-gunned him frantically. Han fell to the ground, his body riddled with bullets. The enemy rushed over to seize his pistol. But at this moment Han strained forward to fire his last shot, killing one of the enemy troops before he fell back dead. Enraged at their heavy losses, the enemy slashed Han Hua's corpse over forty times with their bayonets.

Hearing the story Hu-lan cursed the enemy indignantly. How many capable cadres, she thought, had sacrificed their lives! She was deep in thought for some time. She remembered many

martyrs, some of whom she had known personally. She recollected the brave sacrifice of nineteen-year-old Magistrate Ku. Then the martyr who had guarded the public grain came into her mind. Finally her thoughts came back to Han Hua again. She now knew that merely sacrificing one's life was not the true objective of a revolutionary fighter. To deal fatal blows to the enemy, to preserve the strength of the revolution, and to struggle to the bitter end—this was the greatest contribution of a revolutionary. Han Hua had fought alone against a great number of enemy troops! What an iron will he must have had!

Hu-lan became still more devoted to her work.

Wang Pen-ku was anxious to report for duty, and in November he decided to go back to his company, regardless of the fact that he had not yet completely recovered. Before leaving Hu-lan he said to her with concern: "Hu-lan, conditions are worsening. Remember, when the leading comrades transfer you to the western mountains, be sure to let me know at once!" Hu-lan was in a pensive mood, and answered distractedly. Wang Pen-ku repeated what he had just said, and she agreed briefly. Pausing for a while and as if afraid to disturb her, he whispered in an affectionate tone: "Hu-lan, I'm going." Hu-lan started and then smiled tenderly. "Yes, go," she murmured.

Some twenty days after Wang Pen-ku's departure, Yen Hsi-shan's troops occupied Tahsiang Village, less than two miles from Yunchouhsi.

VI THE FINAL SACRIFICE

In December, 1946, the Eighth Route Army transferred several regiments from Wenshui to reinforce the troops fighting in western Shansi. The Yen Hsi-shan bandits availed themselves of this gap to make a final effort to destroy the organizations of the Chinese Communist Party, the people's political power and the people's armed forces defending the towns and villages on this vast plain.

The enemy swept in like a flood from the north. People's government cadres at the county and district levels, and militiamen and guerillas from various counties, effected an orderly retreat to Wenshui. Hardly had these comrades established themselves when enemy forces swept into Wenshui on the 8th of December. From the bank of the Fen River in the east up to the foot of the western mountains, the enemy stationed their troops in almost every village throughout the wide Wenshui plain.

The sky all of a sudden seemed to have darkened.

All over the plain Yen Hsi-shan's troops went around arresting people. They tied them up and beat them to extort confessions and loot grain. . . . Heart-rending screams and wails shook the land. Secret agents in hiding came into the open and the landlords co-operated with the bandits and secret agents. A seventy-year-old landlord in South Huchiapao who had lost all his teeth now rigged himself out on a bony horse with a rusty gun slung across his shoulder. He terrorized the peasants all over the place, shouting in his cracked hoarse voice: "Either the whole tree or not a cherry on it—it's either I or the Communist Party!" These walking corpses, on the brink of their graves, had come back again to haunt the earth.

Lu, a local despot in Tahsiang Village, whose land had been confiscated during the land reform in May, 1946, now moved into action too. In close collaboration with Yen Hsi-shan's troops, he started killing people right and left. Cadres and activists were ordered to give themselves up. "Obey or have your heads cut off," the landlord threatened. "There is no other choice!"

The people's cadres, Party members and activists among the masses had already withdrawn from the villages. Some of them formed armed bands and, living in the open country, enduring hunger and the biting cold, they gave no respite to the enemy on Wenshui plain. Yet others moved

temporarily to the western mountains. Some Party members, acting under the directions of their leaders, remained in the villages to carry on the underground struggle against the enemy.

Some of the cadres who had already broken through the enemy's encirclement in their withdrawal found that a number of the comrades with orders to leave had not left the village. They returned at the risk of their own lives to contact them, and in this way brought them out safely. But some of the comrades were actually beyond reach and were thus temporarily cut off.

The majority of the village cadres, Party members and activists of Yunchouhsi had left with their respective organizations. Hu-lan was cut off from her superior, Lu Hsueh-mei, because the latter had been working in some other village and could not slip through the enemy's encirclement to come back to Yunchouhsi.

Hu-lan saw off batch after batch of cadres during the night. Knowing that these comrades were safe, she breathed a sigh of relief and felt her responsibility somewhat lightened. But she herself did not move, because as yet she had received no orders to do so. Should she stay behind in the village and carry on the struggle underground against the enemy? Or leave the village to do other work? She knew this was not a question for her to decide, nor was it right for her lightly to follow the personal suggestions of other cadres. She must wait for Lu Hsueh-mei. So each time

she saw a batch of comrades off, she would charge them with a message—should they see Lu Hsueh-mei, they must tell her: “Hu-lan’s carrying on with her work, waiting!”

She was conscious of the fact that she was no longer an ordinary person, but a communist. Now that the enemy was approaching and the situation looked so serious, it would be very shameful indeed if she should try to be “clever,” abandon her work and run away to “seek refuge.” She must be responsible to the Party and the peasants in Yunchouhsi. She must await directions from Lu Hsueh-mei before she could decide on her next step.

She was apt to jump at every knock on the door after nightfall. Two thoughts would immediately come to her mind:

“Maybe it’s good news, and Lu Hsueh-mei has sent directions! Or it may be the bad news that Yen Hsi-shan’s bandits are about to enter the village!”

Hu-lan boldly made up her mind to remain at her post till the very last minute.

Meanwhile Lu, the local despot of Tahsiang Village, was feasting his eyes with deadly venom on Yunchouhsi—“Little Yanan”—which was less than two miles away.

On the 26th of December, Lu led a contingent of troops into the village. Hu-lan hid herself. Lu’s men rounded up all the villagers for a “disciplinary speech,” and set fire to the house of

District Head Chen. As tongues of flames licked the sky, the peasants hung their heads in anger. They would never forget these bestial crimes. Having set fire to the house, the bandits scurried back to Tahsiang Village again.

As soon as they left, Hu-lan came out from hiding. But more nerve-racking days followed.

One night, District Head Chen secretly brought his armed unit back to the village. The moment they entered Yunchouhsi, they set up machine-guns and posted sentinels. Chen’s elder sister, seeing how blue they were with cold, and how bleary and sunken their eyes from the wind and dust, could hardly hold back tears. But she did not cry aloud, she ground her teeth and started telling her brother of the atrocities committed by Yen Hsi-shan’s troops and how they had set fire to his house. Chen stopped her, however, before she could finish two sentences, saying that more urgent matters must be attended to first. He sent immediately for Hu-lan and Chin Hsien, to urge them to leave the village that very night under escort to the western mountains.

When Hu-lan was told in the dead of the night that comrades had come to contact her, she anxiously pressed the messenger in a whisper: “You mean Lu Hsueh-mei has come? . . . Has Hsueh-mei come?” She did not see Lu Hsueh-mei but was taken to see the district head. She clasped his hands. Glancing around her she saw other members of the armed unit lying on the *kang*, trying

to get as much sleep as they could. They slept like logs, with their rifles tightly held in their arms. Separation from her comrades had given Hu-lan a sense of loneliness; but now they were unexpectedly with her again; they had come with weapons to protect her and, at the risk of their lives, to take her safely away. A feeling of gratitude warmed her heart.

When she heard that Chen had not seen Lu Hsueh-mei ever since the enemy encirclement, she grew anxious about her. But Chen told her not to wait any longer for directions from Lu Hsueh-mei. In his capacity as district head, he ordered her to leave the village with Chin Hsien that very night.

Chen underlined the following facts to Hu-lan: Chin Hsien's step-father had completely revealed his sinister character. He had openly capitulated to the enemy and was serving as Yen Hsi-shan's agent. Although he had left the village for quite a long time since his divorce from Chin Hsien's mother, he would welcome this chance to play havoc among the villagers. Heightened vigilance was necessary against this traitor, who knew the village so well. As for Chin Hsien, though she was backward and had done hardly any revolutionary work, she had been in close contact with the village cadres and was quite familiar with the general situation in the village. In the existing crisis, the enemy would try to use a girl with such great ideological defects to break through our lines; and the consequence of such a break-through was unthinkable. The fact that Chin Hsien was a

relative of that traitor now made precautions all the more necessary.

Hu-lan immediately realized the vital importance of sending Chin Hsien out of the village. She said that she would take her away that very night.

Chin Hsien, however, was hesitant. It was dangerous to remain, but if she left she would have to endure the hard life in the mountains and the difficulties of the struggle. She considered not the needs of the revolution but her personal interests, which made her incapable of seeing anything beyond her nose.

The district head and Hu-lan talked the matter over with her sincerely, and pressed her to set out at once.

Chin Hsien wavered.

They urged her with stern eyes and explained that there was no time to lose.

Still Chin Hsien hesitated.

She was not a communist, nor was she a cadre. They could not order her to go. All they wanted to do was to persuade her and let her realize for herself the danger of staying on in the village.

Chin Hsien at length said evasively that her mother had gone to visit relatives, and she could not make a decision without consulting her. To her, the guiding star was not any revolutionary organization, but her mother who had always attended to her food and clothing.

The district head looked at Chin Hsien and could only pity her ignorance.

Hu-lan was upset because she had no way to influence Chin Hsien and make her leave the village that night.

She thought perhaps Lu Hsueh-mei would still come to contact her and that some other comrades cut off from the organization might return to the village. She saw the leadership's eagerness to convince Chin Hsien of the necessity to leave the village, and the disappointment the failure to do so evoked in Chen. So she suggested that she should stay in the village a few more days till the enemy stationed their troops in the village and Chin Hsien's mother returned. Then she would try to bring her around, and leave with Chin Hsien for the western mountains.

After serious consideration, Chen consented, but on certain conditions. He cautioned Hu-lan to be very careful and reminded her repeatedly of the fact that Yen Hsi-shan's troops were billeted less than two miles away.

He and his men must not stay in the village longer than was necessary.

He awakened the others. They filed out into the dark yard, braving the bitter wind of a cold winter night.

"When Chin Hsien's mother returns," Chen whispered to his sister, "get her to urge Chin Hsien to leave the village as quickly as possible. Send

us word so that we can escort them to the mountains."

Before her comrades left, Hu-lan told them once more that if they saw Lu Hsueh-mei they must tell her Hu-lan's present situation, and if Lu Hsueh-mei had new assignments for her in the village she should inform her and try to give her new directions from time to time.

On this night so full of tension, Chen was anxious about the safety of Hu-lan and Chin Hsien, while Hu-lan was worried as to the whereabouts of Lu Hsueh-mei. Chin Hsien, however, was thinking only of herself, and how she could dodge the hard struggle against the enemy.

With her mother away, Chin Hsien was left alone. For several nights in succession, Hu-lan stayed with her timid friend, to keep her company through these terrible nights.

Late one night, Hu-lan thought of the heroic, selfless and fearless struggle of the people in Wenshui during the armed resistance against Japan. She remembered the enemy's atrocities, and the fact that near the village many of her dear comrades, disregarding their own safety, were harassing the enemy with very limited forces. With great warmth and feeling, she threw her arms around Chin Hsien's neck and whispered: "Chin Hsien, Chin Hsien, let's die rather than be slaves!"

This was a slogan dating from the time of armed resistance against Japan, a slogan often

repeated by the grown-ups when Hu-lan was still a child. Under its influence, how many had awakened from their dreams and stood up to win back their independence! With this slogan ringing in their ears, how many had bound up their wounds and charged forth again, or marched fearlessly to the execution ground!

Now, during these days of trial, this slogan was revived with a new militant content. Though spoken in a low voice, Hu-lan's words were those that stirred people's hearts and evoked thunderous echoes: Rather die than be slaves! Hu-lan was encouraging her weak companion and at the same time giving ardent expression to her own passionate conviction.

These were dark days. Everywhere enemy troops were madly slaughtering and pillaging.... On the vast plain of Wenshui the people's blood flowed like a stream.

Events followed one another in close succession. On January 8, 1947, Yen Hsi-shan's troops from Tahsiang Village made a surprise attack on Yunchouhsi. Acting on the blacklist prepared beforehand, they arrested Shih San-huai and Shih Yang-lu. Shih San-huai was an ordinary peasant, but the enemy seized him because he was District Head Chen's uncle. Shih Yang-lu was a youth who had once served in the militia.

After this incident, the atmosphere in Yunchouhsi became even tenser. Chin Hsien's mother

had not yet returned, but Hu-lan warned her that they were facing a critical situation and there was no more time to be lost. At last Chin Hsien made up her mind to leave the village with Hu-lan.

At daybreak on January 12, Hu-lan left Chin Hsien's house where she had been keeping her friend company and went home for breakfast. The moment she saw her parents she said:

"I'm going to leave to-night, to look for District Head Chen in the south over there. They will send comrades to escort us to the western mountains."

"Hurry up, hurry up and go! It's too dangerous here. The longer you stay, the longer we shall be in danger because of you. Hurry up and leave, by all means!"

Her mother was all eagerness that her daughter should leave as quickly as possible. Hu-lan took off her smock to wash. Her father fetched two buckets of water for her, but scarcely had she soaked the clothes in the tub when a gong sounded outside.

The beating of the gong sounded stronger and stronger; her little sister hurried to the door to have a look.

Yen Hsi-shan's troops from Tahsiang Village had launched another surprise attack on the village, and Yunchouhsi was already surrounded. Enemy sentinels were posted on the dyke running round the village, while all paths leading to the village were closely guarded by bandit troops. Enemy

officers had entered the village. They had pounced upon Yunchouhsi more fiercely than ever before.

With the sound of the gong came the shouted order:

"All villagers, men and women, old and young, must gather at the temple in the south. Only one in each family may stay at home to watch the house. If two are discovered, they will be punished as collaborators of the Eighth Route Army!"

The villagers left their homes in great confusion, and made for the temple south of the village with heavy hearts.

What should she do? Hu-lan mustn't go to the temple at all costs. Her mother decided hurriedly that she should hide in the house of their neighbour, Mrs. Tuan, who had given birth six days ago. Hu-lan could pretend to be looking after the new mother.

Hu-lan walked southward, mingling with the crowd, and when she reached the Tuans' gate disappeared through it like a flash. The families she found in the courtyard were in a state of commotion, hurriedly preparing to join the crowd outside. Hu-lan tapped on Mrs. Tuan's window.

"Can I come in?" she asked.

"Is it Hu-lan?" Mrs. Tuan responded warmly from her bed. "Why, come in."

Entering the room, Hu-lan found Mrs. Tuan's niece already there waiting on the new mother.

As Hu-lan was hesitating, not knowing what to do, she heard a child of another family in the compound running back into the courtyard to urge his mother to join the gathering at the temple. In a frightened voice he repeated the enemy's order. "They sounded the gong and shouted, 'Any family with two persons left in the house will be punished as secret collaborators of the Eighth Route Army!'" "Oh dear, there are too many left in here," said the women in the courtyard nervously.

Every word rang in Hu-lan's ears distinctly: Any family where two people stayed at home would be punished as "secret collaborators of the Eighth Route Army." Not only were there too many in the compound, in this small room alone there were already three people, apart from the baby. If the enemy should brand Tuan's family as "collaborators of the Eighth Route Army," Mrs. Tuan, having just given birth to a baby, would hardly be able to survive the shock. And that would certainly kill the six-day-old infant too. Hu-lan immediately resolved to leave. Turning around she pushed the door open and walked out. "If I must die," she thought, "I'll bear the brunt alone. It would never do to bring trouble to this family with a new mother and a baby."

When Mrs. Tuan saw that Hu-lan was going, she tried to stop her by saying courageously: "Don't be afraid, Hu-lan. Hide yourself here."

Hu-lan knew well enough there was no place to hide herself in this small room. But where

could she go? Once out of the yard, on the other side of the wall lay the open ground of the temple at the southern side of the village. Enemy sentries were thickly posted, and it was already impossible to return to the central part of the village. Having made up her mind not to involve Mrs. Tuan in any trouble, she was very moved to find the latter so concerned for her. Composing herself, she warmly reassured her friend: "Never mind, Mrs. Tuan. I'll go to the open ground where the villagers gather. They won't discover me if I hide myself in the crowd. Don't worry about me." With a jerk of her head, she immediately walked out of the courtyard.

The villagers driven out from their homes were nearly all present. Yen Hsi-shan's troops were searching every house. The whole village was in a frightful commotion. People were tied up and dragged out by force. An old man of seventy was brought under escort, because he belonged to a cadre's family. He was followed by another peasant named Liu who was related to a cadre, and another named Shih, whose brother had recommended Hu-lan for membership in the Communist Party. Shih was arrested while fetching water from a well in the middle of the village. It was at this very spot that the old peasant once tortured by the Japanese had jumped into the well, and now Shih was also arrested here. Less than two years had elapsed, and the victims were the same suffering peasants, only the oppressors had changed, with Yen Hsi-shan's troops replacing the Japanese devils.

At the open ground where the crowd had gathered, the troops were arresting one villager after another according to their blacklist. Fero-ciously they scanned the features of the peasants one by one. Presently a peasant who had worked for a time in the Eighth Route Army was dragged out from among the crowd.

Then the enemy began their search among the women, questioning them one by one.

"Are you Chin Hsien?"

"No."

They continued their search, asking the women in turn: "Are you called Chin Hsien?"

"No, my name is San Ni."

At last they came to Chin Hsien herself: "Are you called Chin Hsien?"

Panic-stricken, she answered: "I...I...Ye-es, I'm Chin Hsien." Guards immediately drove Chin Hsien out of the crowd with their rifle butts. She was imprisoned with others in the temple.

As soon as Hu-lan's mother saw that Chin Hsien who had been standing near her had been arrested, her heart began to hammer wildly with anxiety for her daughter. She wanted to get back and tell her to be careful, but it was too late. People were only allowed in, not out. She was burning with anxiety.... Suddenly somebody behind her pulled at her skirt. Before she could turn her head, she heard a low voice call: "Ma!"

Wheeling around, she gave a muffled exclamation of fear: "Oh! So you've come?" But Hu-lan soon disappeared in the crowd.

People were keyed to silence. The atmosphere was taut with tension. A member of the "Self-defence Corps" from Tahsiang Village who recognized Hu-lan, elbowed his way into the crowd and, taking her aside, threatened her under his breath: "You're Liu Hu-lan, right? Better surrender voluntarily today! What connections do you have in the Eighth Route Army? What villagers belong to the Eighth Route Army? . . . Stay where you are now, we'll question you presently. Tell what you know, then we'll do you no harm. If not, it'll cost you your head."

Hu-lan looked steadily at her enemy. She bit her lip lightly and uttered not a single word. Slowly she returned to her mother's side and told her briefly: "They want me to surrender. If I surrender nothing will happen, if not, they'll kill me. . . ."

Her mother stood as if thunder-struck.

Hu-lan wondered why she had not been arrested yet since so many had been picked out and taken away.

Her heart was pounding. She tried her best, however, to keep her head and looked at the distant horizon, thinking hard. . . .

Her face wore an extraordinarily solemn expression, as she visualized the severe ordeal she

was to undergo. With a jerk of her head, she resolutely took the ring off her finger and handed it to her mother. Feeling in one pocket, she found a handkerchief, which she also handed to her mother. In another pocket was a small ointment tin which she had kept and often played with. This too she took out and with all seriousness gave it to her mother. Comrade Han, the brave messenger of Wenshui County Government who had sacrificed his life some time earlier had destroyed all the documents in his possession at the time of danger. The five soldiers who had fought the Japs at Mount Langya until their bullets ran out and reinforcements were completely cut off had smashed their rifles to pieces with rocks to avoid their falling into the enemy's hands, before they jumped down from the cliff and died for their country. . . . As these thoughts fled through Hu-lan's mind, she rummaged through her pockets: every single article that might be kept was carefully handed to her mother. She would not let the enemy rob her of a single thing. Only life . . . that was beyond salvation now! Since she had fallen into the hands of the enemy, and it was not possible to live on honourably, all she could do was to give her life bravely, for the lofty ideal she had followed with all her heart—communism.

As she was thinking like this, the man who had just threatened her came again. This time he was rougher. Together with a gang of enemy soldiers he took her into the temple with loud cursing and shouting.

All those arrested were brought to the central hall of the temple, to be tortured and interrogated one after another. Hu-lan was called to the room in the west wing, where she was cross-examined by an officer of Yen Hsi-shan's troops.

"Are you called Hu-lan?" asked the officer.

"Yes, my name is Liu Hu-lan."

"You are the secretary of the village women's association?"

She grunted a contemptuous reply.

"How did you manage to keep contact with the Eighth Route Army all this time?"

She shook her head and said: "No contact."

"Which Communist Party members have you seen recently?"

"None at all." She shook her head again.

"Which family stored the bolts of cloth of the village?"

"I don't know!"

The officer was angry. "So you haven't kept contact with any of them?" he said petulantly. "You have met none and know nothing at all!"

Hu-lan kept shaking her head, repeating:

"I don't know anything, I don't know anything!"

As if he had got hold of something substantial, the officer threatened: "Somebody has confessed that you're a Communist Party member?"

With a jerk of her head, Hu-lan answered: "If you call me one, then I'm a communist!"

"What other communists are there in the village?"

"I am the only one," she replied resolutely.

"Who in the Eighth Route Army do you know?" pressed the officer.

"I don't know anybody!" she retorted.

"Liu Fang and Wang Pen-ku, do you know them?"

"No, I don't know them!"

"How could a young girl like you do so much all by yourself? What else have you done for the Eighth Route Army?"

"I've done all sorts of thing!"

The officer pounded the table in anger and shouted: "You're only fifteen, but what a tongue you've got! Aren't you even afraid of death?"

Hu-lan did not flinch. "It's all right to die, if die I must," she said. "I know nothing at all!"

Resorting to another trick, the officer tried to ease the tense situation by saying slowly: "Don't you regret having lived only to the age of fifteen?"

But Hu-lan proved even tougher, saying: "I've lived fifteen years. If you kill me, in another fifteen years I'll again be as old as I am now."

The enemy had calculated that by sending a member of the "Self-defence Corps" to browbeat Liu Hu-lan first, he would need less time for the interrogation. He had thought that frightened prisoners would tamely capitulate. This officer had not only intended to force Hu-lan to surrender, he had an even dirtier aim—he wanted to take this young girl to Tahsiang Village and humiliate her. He had not foreseen that she would prove so stubborn.

The officer pounded on the table again, the questioning went on for more than half an hour but to no purpose.

As he could make no headway, he decided to get the depositions later, when he could work on her gradually. He came to his last measure to force Hu-lan to agree that she would never work for the Eighth Route Army again. But as soon as he mentioned this, he was hurled back by the determined voice of the girl: "That I can't guarantee!"

"If you'll go to Tahsiang Village with me today, I'll save your life!" said the officer, getting impatient, and revealing his other motive.

"No!" came the clear-cut answer.

The officer banged the table in white fury. But Hu-lan stood there erect, as strong as steel.

The officer's face was livid with anger. He announced his ultimatum: If Liu Hu-lan refused to give in, she would be taken out and executed

together with the other peasants who had been arrested.

Hu-lan had heard enough and was becoming impatient. She only sneered defiantly. The officer called the troops, who had been standing outside the window, to come in and tie the girl up.

Hu-lan glared at the enemy and said with contempt: "No need to tie me so tight! I won't run away!"

The enemy officer paced the room restlessly.

When Hu-lan was pushed to the door by the soldiers he stopped them in a loud voice. Hu-lan stopped short, and turned her head to look at him.

It seemed all the enemy's tactics to browbeat and threaten people had been exhausted. All he could do now was mutter quite incoherently.

Hu-lan threw him a contemptuous glance and said indifferently, as if she were sitting in judgment of this officer:

"That again?—Well, no use talking!"

Holding herself erect, she strode resolutely over the threshold. The soldiers guarding her had to hurry to catch up with her.

The enemy had planned to kill six persons: two had been arrested on the 8th and four others arrested that very day. When Hu-lan was brought to the execution ground, she found all six already tied up. When she realized that those six peasants

would all be murdered in a few minutes, her heart burned with anger.

Looking aside, she saw Chin Hsien. Of all the villagers arrested that day, Chin Hsien alone had been unbound. Hu-lan turned her sharp bright eyes on Chin Hsien, and her look made Chin Hsien hang her head in shame.

Hu-lan fixed her eyes on the girl.

What had happened? Could it be that this weak-willed girl had given way to the enemy? Whoever proves for a single moment unreliable in face of the enemy will lose his precious political life for good. That's sheer destruction! Shameful, shameful indeed! Hu-lan was clear about everything now.

She turned her head in disgust away from Chin Hsien. Calmly and almost serenely she awaited the imminent ordeal.

The enemy officer was savagely casting aspersions upon the Communist Party and the Eighth Route Army, and trying to intimidate the people. "Those who have connections with the Communist Party and those who are disloyal to Yen Hsi-shan," he said, "must be wiped out with an iron hand."

While he was speaking, the troops brought out two chaff-cutters and scores of big clubs.

The enemy immediately read the names of the seven to be executed. A dead silence reigned. To

browbeat the people into submitting to his murderous actions, he asked purposely:

"These seven, are they good or bad?"

Contrary to his expectation, the peasants shouted together: "Good! All good, honest people!" The crowd was astir. Enemy soldiers pointed machine-guns at them, shouting and cursing, and tried to silence the people by force.

Shih and another were the first to be dragged out. They were beaten unconscious with clubs and then killed with the chaff-cutter. As he was being taken out, Shih said composedly: "I want to say something! Now I'm to die, but I know who has a hand in the plot!" Angry and loud accusations came distinctly from his mouth. The enemy began to club him to silence him, but he struggled and shouted: "I know, I know!"

Three others were killed in succession.

The officer then asked Hu-lan: "Are you afraid? Are you going to confess?"

But she was adamant: "Why should I be afraid? I won't yield before death itself, I'll never surrender!"

As the villagers could not bear to look on any more, they started to disperse. However, the enemy troops blocked their way from all sides and, brandishing their clubs and beating the peasants wildly, forced them back to the centre of the execution ground.

The peasants, so savagely slaughtered, had fallen only five or six paces away from Hu-lan. She looked on indignantly at these acts of atrocity, but waited calmly for her turn to die. Even with her hands bound, she showed no change of expression whatsoever. She looked around from time to time, sending silent messages to the villagers and her family and bidding them good-bye with her eyes.

She had been born and bred here. Every inch of the land and every blade of grass, dear to her heart, held stories familiar to her. A year ago when she left home secretly to receive training, she had passed by this same temple, going by a round-about way to the fields in the south. How fast her heart had beat then! . . . This temple now held by the Yen Hsi-shan troops had been the Village Administrative Office, the headquarters of democratic political power in the village. Hu-lan and the other comrades had often held meetings and discussions here, often carrying on their work into the small hours. It was here that she had discharged the task of managing the villagers' donations to the army. And it was here also that she had once singled out a pair of shoes badly made by a rich peasant woman. How indignant she had been at the time! For the sake of the revolution, she had put her whole heart into her work.

But now she was arrested. She was indignant that she could not break the rope, that she could no longer struggle against the enemy. It was all over for her!

But the struggle was still being waged on the Wenshui plain!

Many comrades had moved out according to plan. So long as these comrades remained alive, they would not give the enemy a single moment's rest. When she thought of this, warmth and happiness welled up in her heart.

The comrades fighting far away seemed to be near her again.

— Comrade Lu Hsueh-mei, I hope you're all right. I hope you haven't run into danger! Since our parting, short as it is, I have undergone the severest trial of all my fifteen years of life. My dear elder sister, I am still young and without much experience in struggle, but these days I have no one to rely on but myself! Where I have failed to live up to your expectations, please tell me, my elder sister!

— District Head Chen! I am sure you are very sorry you didn't force Chin Hsien to leave the village that day. But you mustn't feel regret, because you did your best. Though I am to lay down my life, I shall never forget the courage of my comrades who, at the risk of their lives, came to the village to rescue us at midnight.

— Pen-ku, are you crying for me? You mustn't!

The villagers on the execution ground were weeping, some had even fainted away. Her own eyes also smarted with pain.

— No, Pen-ku! None of us should cry! You must lose no time in leading our troops and comrades to recapture this plain, in order to wipe away the tears of these villagers! Not only I, Hu-lan, but all of us are waiting for you! Company Commander Wang! Comrades of the Twelfth Regiment! Come, quick, quick!

— Dear comrades, where are you now? Though far apart, we seem to be so near each other! You are fighting elsewhere, so we are sticking it out here! We sweat for the same cause and our blood will flow into a single stream! Yes, the road we take is one and the same!

Now only two victims were left standing by the chaff-cutter. One was seventy-year-old Chen, the other fifteen-year-old Hu-lan.

By this time the chaff-cutter frame was stained with blood, and the sharp edge of the cutter had become blunt and bent. And the executioners who were thugs in the service of the reactionary landlords and rich peasants in Yunchouhsi and Tahsiang Village were also sick of their job. With trembling hands they stepped timidly aside. Yen Hsi-shan's troops, however, swung their clubs and drove them back to the chaff-cutter, forcing them to go on with their dirty work. Presently the old man Chen was no more.

At last it was Hu-lan's turn. She glared at the enemy with angry eyes and shouted at the top of her voice:

“How am I going to die?”

“In the same way!” snapped one of Yen Hsi-shan's officers.

The words were hardly out of his mouth, when Hu-lan walked bravely to the chaff-cutter, without waiting for the enemy soldiers to drag her there. . . . The chaff-cutter, which had slaughtered so many people, fell once more.

Hu-lan's eyes remained radiant right to the last minute, as though she wanted to see for herself the end of Yen Hsi-shan's troops, and was waiting for the victorious return of the troops dear to her heart.

Lu Hsun, that great Chinese thinker and fearless revolutionary writer, had anticipated the birth of a new Chinese “national character.” He foresaw that his countrymen would struggle unflinchingly against imperialist and feudal forces, without the least sign of submission; while if the sacrifice must be made they would lay down their lives valiantly. What Lu Hsun looked forward to were “highly-principled people” of this type. Now heroes of this new type have grown up by the thousands and millions under the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party. Hu-lan was one of them.

Lu Hsun said:

“For the sake of the principle they believe in they sacrifice all they have, to blunt the sharp edge of the sword with their bones and flesh, and to

quench the fire with their blood. In the dwindling light of the flash of the sword and the flames of the fire, I see the light of dawn creeping from the east, that is the dawn of a new century...."

At this time the sky over the Wenshui plain still looked dark, but the light of dawn had actually appeared over the horizon in China.

At two o'clock in the afternoon of February 2, the Eighth Route Army broke into the county seat of Wenshui. The determination to avenge the people made all the troops fight like heroes. Yen Hsi-shan's troops laid down their arms within five minutes after the Eighth Route Army captured Wenshui. The puppet magistrate of Wenshui County was captured alive. In addition more than one thousand five hundred officers and soldiers of the enemy's 215th Regiment, including their commander, were also captured.

The people in Wenshui were jubilant. Folk-songs were composed to mark the occasion, celebrating the rout of Yen Hsi-shan's troops:

"The pillboxes were razed to the ground,
Deafening to the ear were the thunderous
explosions!
The officers were wounded,
And the soldiers all surrendered.
The cursed clique of village reactionaries is
smashed,
And the criminal secret agents are all
arrested.
Ah! At last Wenshui County is liberated!"

The murderers of Liu Hu-lan escaped for the time being; but in 1951 they were finally caught by the people and punished according to law.

To celebrate their victory, the people of Wenshui paid tribute to the memory of Liu Hu-lan and other martyrs.

The Shansi-Suiyuan Sub-Bureau of the Chinese Communist Party had this to say about her:

Comrade Liu Hu-lan, after joining the Party, showed herself loyal and brave. She sacrificed her life for the cause of the Party and the people. She was dauntless in face of the enemy, displaying the noble qualities of a communist. We therefore confer on her posthumously full membership in the Communist Party.

Chairman Mao Tse-tung, the great leader of the Chinese people and Liu Hu-lan's most respected teacher, honoured her with these words: "A Great Life! A Glorious Death!"

POSTSCRIPT

In January, 1951, while I was in Wenshui County, Shansi Province, I collected some material concerning Liu Hu-lan. In the belief that this material may be of use to those eager to know something about her, I have arranged it in the form of a simple biography.

This biography makes no claim to be a piece of literary work. I have only tried to write about the characters as they really were and put down the events as they actually happened. Nor is this a historical document in the strict sense of the word.

I collected my material chiefly through interviews with Liu Hu-lan's comrades, fellow-villagers, relatives and family. I did my best to collect all the material available, but owing to the limited time at my disposal and the fact that some of the people with a good knowledge of Liu Hu-lan had already left the place, it is possible that some valuable material has escaped my attention. I hope to be able to revise this work when new material is available.

June, 1951



