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How Wang Kwei lan Married the Man of Her Choice

Chen Hsu

Wang Kwei lan lived in Tsaishihfang in Chungsan District, Port Arthur Dairen. Across the street there lived a young man, Tung Mu lin, a fine fellow, good natured and sturdy, whom she used to see before the liberation. Tung Mu lin, on his part, was well aware that the Wang family had an honest, capable and energetic daughter. But in those days young girls were not allowed to get too familiar with young men. So whenever they chanced to meet on the street, either he turned his face away or she lowered her head, good manners forbidding them to exchange either words or glances.

After the liberation, a fish net factory was set up in the district and Wang Kwei lan went to work there. After her day's work, she used to go to the Yin family where she studied together with the daughter of the house. As luck would have it, Tung Mu lin, now working in a dockyard, was also a frequent visitor to the Yin family. He and Yin's son were good friends and they liked to talk about their work, plans and studies. Wang Kwei lan and Tung Mu lin came to know each other well in this way, and they respected each other for their hard work and eagerness to learn.

One Sunday, Wang Kwei lan and Tung Mu lin went for a walk along the pond in the Labour Park. First they talked about one thing and another, and then Mu lin suddenly fired this question at Kwei lan, 'You have known me for a long time now, Kwei lan, do you think I have many shortcomings?' Kwei lan, taken by surprise, did not answer at once. After a moment's hesitation she looked up at Mu lin and said softly, 'There is nothing much wrong with you, I should say, except that sometimes you are rather impetuous. Won't you tell me now what you think of me?'

Instead of replying, Tung Mu lin waited for a moment, then he blurted out 'Would you like to marry me?' The embarrassed Kwei lan blushed, looked at the ground and remained silent. Mu lin asked again, 'Don't you want to, Kwei lan?' She shook her head and said, 'It isn't that, the trouble is my old mother has got all sorts of feudalistic ideas in her head, and I'm afraid she won't agree to this.' 'But marriage is your own business,' he objected, 'why worry about your mother? It just depends on you. You have only got to be firm. Isn't freedom of marriage now guaranteed by the Marriage Law?' That reference to the Marriage Law settled the question for Wang Kwei lan and she gave her consent, assuring Mu lin she would be firm. To celebrate their engagement, they planned to try to outshine each other in raising their output, making progress in their studies and correcting their shortcomings.

The news of their engagement and emulation plan immediately spread over the whole factory and it did not take long to reach the ears of Wang Kwei lan's mother. She flew into a passion. 'What kind of nonsense

is this?" she roared 'It is downright rebellion! A young girl goes out to look for her own husband! See if I won't break her legs!' She worked herself into a frightful rage and her language got worse and worse. She went on scolding and cursing all day

The fact was that, Kwei lan had been adopted by the Wang family at the age of four. From the very beginning her foster mother had had mercenary motives in adopting her. The girl looked very charming with her long lashes and big bright eyes. The old woman thought that one day she might make a fortune out of her for the Wang family and enable her foster parents to live in clover. When she was scarcely thirteen her foster mother had approached one family after another to get her a husband. The first man chosen for her by the old woman was about thirty years old, and owner of a big estate. Kwei lan would not hear of the proposal, so the matter was dropped. Not long afterwards, the old woman picked out another man, a restaurant owner. He promised gold rings and gold bracelets as engagement presents. But this was again turned down by Kwei lan.

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The old woman let Kwei lan have her own way, because, having the girl in her custody, she thought that sooner or later she'd make her behave

But things did not turn out as she imagined. Kwei lan had spread her wings since she went to work in the factory and now she was actually engaged to a man of her own choice! This was more than the old woman could stand. She intended to give the girl a sound tongue lashing that very evening. But on a second thought she changed her mind. It would be far better to resort to honeyed words than to hard blows. So it was decided between the old couple to coax Kwei lan into accepting the man they would choose for her.

They sought everywhere and in the end they found the right one. True he was oldish more than ten years older than Kwei lan, but he had money and houses. 'Though he can not be considered a rich man,' the old woman said to herself, 'he is certainly much better off than that beggar of hers. Besides, he has promised to be generous in the matter of dowry and presents.'

But when the old couple told Kwei lan about it they got a flat refusal from her. The old woman suppressed her anger and started to coax her, but meeting with no response she dropped her mask and began to scold and curse her. At first Kwei lan remained calm but firm. She patiently reasoned with her foster mother. But the old woman would not listen to reason and went on scolding and cursing. She used such bad language that Kwei lan finally could not stand it any longer and she told her mother. 'You can scold and curse as much as you like, it won't keep me from marrying Tung Mu lin.'

This only made the old woman all the more furious. She went for Kwei lan and tried to strike her. Kwei lan swiftly dodged the blow and neighbors succeeded in holding back her raging mother. But the mother was by no means pacified. She got up at mid night and started to intimidate Kwei lan all over again. Kwei lan hardly had a wink of sleep that night.

The next morning she went to the factory and talked the matter over with her fellow

women workers. They all agreed that it would take a long time to change the old ideas of her foster mother, so there was no sense in tackling her straight away. As for Kwei lan herself in order to avoid any impairment in production, she had better remove to the dormitory, they said. The wedding day was fixed.

One Sunday, soon afterwards, Kwei lan's wedding was celebrated. Colleagues and friends of both parties came to offer their hearty congratulations. When the party was at its height, the old woman came, trying to break up the wedding. But all the neighbors were on the young couple's side and they managed to convince the old woman that she had better give up and go home.

Wang Kwei lan and Tung Mu lin have been living happily together ever since. They are working more energetically than ever and following the plan they made at the time of their engagement. Rains and snow storms do not prevent them from going to work. They are devoting themselves whole-heartedly to improving their skill, raising the quality of

their production and reducing the waste of raw material. Once, at a meeting of women workers held in the factory, Wang Kwei lan was lauded as a worker of great merit.

Vandhyala Srinivas Reddy
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REUNION

CHANG KIANG

Pao Tung hua who lives at Janghochieh Village, Lushan County, in Honan Province, is a comely and capable woman of thirty five, who is village delegate to the county peasants' representative conference. From her present smiling poise one could not possibly deduce what a poor maltreated wretch she was only a few years ago.

That is, up to liberation. Tung hua had been married off when she was twenty years old, completely by her parents' arrangement. Her husband never did any work at all, partly because of poor health. As a result of frequent nose bleeds, his skin had a sickly pallor. The father in law was the one who tilled the soil, and he cared for nothing else. So the

mother-in-law was free to subject Tung hua to all the humiliations the old feudalistic order was capable of

There were five members in the family aside from Tung hua herself her husband, his parents, and his two sisters. Her mother in law was well known in the village for her cruelty and did nothing but find fault with her daughter in law. Every day there was something to complain about. now it was the thickness of the gruel, then it might be the thinness of the soup, or again it might be that Tung hua had wasted a few grains of millet. Tung hua had not only to bear all the old woman's malice and insults. The two daughters ably assisted in abusing Tung hua, and her husband, despite his bad health, out did all the others in maltreating his wife. It was not rare to see him beating Tung hua with an iron spade or a carrying pole, making the blood stream all over her head and face. Tung hua blamed no one but Heaven for her misfortunes. Every day she toiled from day break till deep in the night. Yet hard work won her favour neither from her husband nor from her mother in law



Her husband outdid his mother in maltreating Pao Tung-hua. Though she toiled ceaselessly day and night, she won favour from neither her mother-in-law nor her husband.

Once, in the second year of her marriage, Tung hua tried to hang herself in the grinding shed. But neighbours fortunately found and rescued her in time.

When she gave birth to a baby boy who was named Kuan yin, Tung hua gave up the thought of committing suicide. But her mother-in-law did not soften in her attitude despite the arrival of a grandson. Cursing and beating were still the order of the day for Tung hua. When the boy was four years old, Tung hua could bear it no longer and insisted on living apart from her in laws. By rights, there should have been harmony now between the couple. But the husband continued to beat and curse his wife. Tung hua could only cry. With her suffering and everything, her face became more and more drawn every day.

Then, like a thunderbolt out of the blue, Lushan County was liberated by the People's Liberation Army and Tung hua was freed, together with all the other women living under the feudal order. As she had been so terribly oppressed in the old society, she was very quick to be awakened politically in the new

She was ready to come forward and work for the people, and thereby quickly won the respect of all, that is, except her husband. It annoyed her that good terms were still impossible with him. She said to herself, "Now a woman can earn a living through her own work. Why should I still suffer at the hands of my husband all day long?" So she left her husband, taking the child with her.

Tung hua and her little boy had a little more than two and a half *mou* of land. She toiled in the field during the busy farming season, and took up handicraft work at other times. But, despite her determination and industry, it was impossible for her to tend to farm and do the household work all by herself. Her husband, Chang Tung tung by name, found himself in the same difficulty. Since Tung hua had moved out, no one did the washing and mending for him. His two sisters were never at home. His mother complained of all kinds of aches in her old body since she now had to do the cooking herself. Each was missing something in his or her life.

Liberation brought enlightenment to them all. Tung hua was elected delegate to the county peasants' representative conference. The husband, influenced by the moral codes of the new social order, began to realise the dignity of labour and the inequalities fostered by feudalism. He set to tilling his own land and even joined the village militia to help protect the people's newly acquired freedom against all enemies. His nose trouble stopped as a result of improved living conditions and consistent work. The older sister married, the younger one was drawn into community work. Thanks to Communist Party influence, both sisters were brought to reason and would try, each time they visited their home, to persuade their mother to change her attitude towards Tung hua. Her parents in law were also drawn into the new community life, attending meetings through which they began to understand what the new society must be like. Though still living apart, they were all thinking much about each other.

In May 1950, the Central People's Government promulgated the new Marriage Law. Tung hua and Tung ting, as peasant delegate

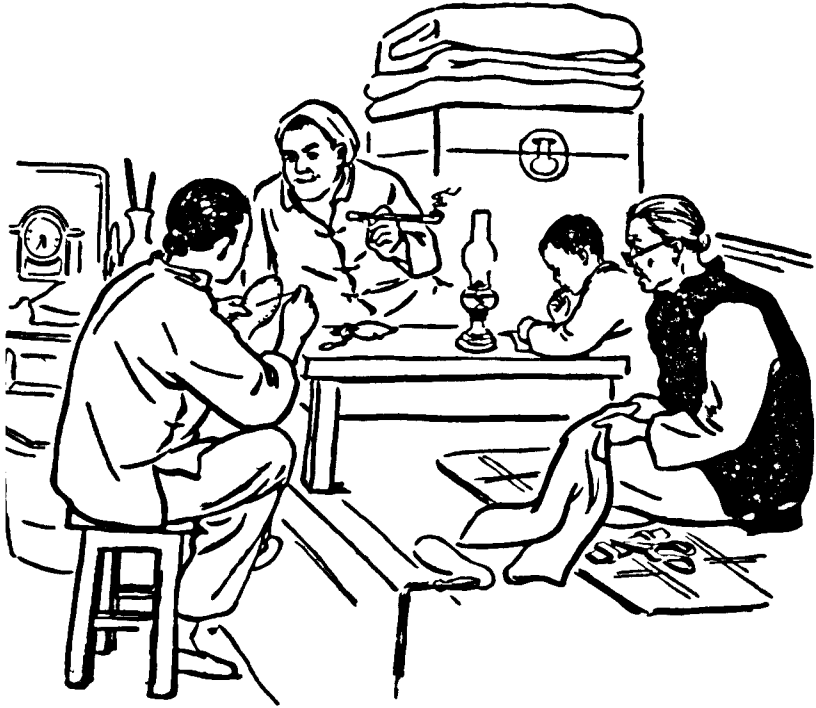
and militiaman respectively, had much to do with publicising and explaining the law among their fellow villagers. Both felt uneasy when they had to speak of Article 8 of the Law which says: "Husband and wife are in duty bound to love, respect, assist and look after each other, to live in harmony, to engage in production, to care for the children and to strive jointly for the welfare of the family and for the building up of a new society." But what about themselves? They were still living apart! Tung hua thought, "We don't yet follow ourselves what Chairman Mao has taught us!"

One day in June, little Kuan yin, was weeding in the field when he heard approaching footsteps. "Kuan yin, let me help you weed!" he heard a voice say and, looking up, saw his father. Though very young, Kuan yin was a quick-witted boy. For a moment he stared at the man who, though his father, had never taken the trouble to look after him. Then he nodded his head, "Go ahead!" and added, "I'll ask mother to give you supper!" At noon, Kuan yin reported to his mother

what had happened. She told him to ask his father in for supper that evening.

At dusk, Tung ting arrived with Kuan yin. He was treated to a good meal of pan cakes and a tasty meat and vegetable dish. After supper, he stayed just long enough to smoke one pipe. The same thing happened during the next two days. On the fourth day, Tung ting took out his pipe again after supper. By the time Tung hua had finished washing the dishes and feeding the pigs, Tung ting was still sitting there, smoking his pipe. "Where are you going to spend the night?" she asked him. "I'm not leaving!" was the answer.

Since that day, everything is changed. The family, once torn by feudal strife, has been united. Mother in law and Tung hua are on good terms. Husband and wife are at last beginning to taste the happiness of married life, and working together to increase their prosperity every day. Now the farm and household duties are all properly attended to. Tung hua has taken up spinning and weaving, earning enough to clothe the whole family both winter and summer.



Liberation brought enlightenment to all of the family. The husband, influenced by the moral codes of the new social order, began to realize the meaning of equality between the sexes. The family, once torn by feudal strife, has been united and has learned to love, respect, and live in harmony with each other.

Kuan yin, their pet, will go on to middle school in the county town when he finishes his primary school education. The boy is also the apple of the eye of his grandmother who, only now, begins to realise what peace and happiness, the new harmonious relationships with her daughter in law, mean to herself. She is ready to admit "No one but I am to blame for breaking up our family life before!" But Tung hua has another explanation "It wasn't you, mother, but the old feudalistic ideology which disturbed our family, as it did others. Thanks to Chairman Mao, we are happy and united!"

Ten years after the birth of Kuan yin, Tung hua is now calmly looking forward to the arrival of her second child—a child that will know only the happiness of the new society, the love of his parents and his grand parents. His arrival will be a happy event for all.

A Happy Family

YA BO

Chuang Wei niang was a widow living in Chujen Village Meishan Hsiang, Hui an County, Fukien Province. When her husband died he left her with an old mother of over seventy and two little children, all dependent on her. She toiled day and night all the year round, but still could not make enough to keep the family from cold and starvation. The children cried with hunger and the old mother always quarrelled with her poor daughter in law. In this way she suffered for five long years and could not find anybody to confide her troubles to.

Her neighbour, Chen Fa cheng was then a poor peasant and a widower. His wife died

eight years ago but on account of his poverty he was unable to marry again. He also had two children. As he had no time to look after them, they led a miserable life. Chen Fa-cheng often helped the widow to cultivate her piece of land, while Chuang Wei-niang, on her part, used to mend clothes for his children. Starting from such mutual aid there soon grew a deep affection between them. But marriage was out of question, since in the old society, remarriage for a widow was counted an abominable crime. If she remarried, she would be looked down on or sneered at, or even beaten to death by the villagers. So they brooded over their affection and continued to suffer

Then came the liberation. New China brings happiness and warmth to all oppressed people. On May 1st International Labour Day of 1950, the Central People's Government promulgated the Marriage Law of the People's Republic of China, which explicitly stipulates that "interference with the remarriage of widows shall be prohibited." Under the protection of the new Marriage Law, Chen Fa-cheng and Chuang Wei-niang ultimately

ly succeeded in breaking their feudal chains and got married like they had both wished for a long time. The two families were joined together and the children on both sides got parents . . .

Through the joint labour of this couple, their life is getting better and better. This year, they are leading an abundant life. The three elder ones have entered school, while the five-year old younger daughter has also started to learn a few characters from her elder brothers and sisters. They have got another baby, a lovely chubby little boy. With their surplus grain, they have bought an ox and new agricultural implements. Even the old mother has changed. She often fondles her little grandson or feels the back of the ox, saying cheerfully, 'All these good things have come to us through the People's Government!'

Chen Fa-cheng is now one of the people's representative of the village. Both he and his wife have taken active and leading parts in responding to the government's call for bumper crop in the great production movement of this spring. They have helped to arouse

enthusiasm for production in the village, thus ensuring an increase of 10 per cent in this year's harvest.

All the villagers admire their harmonious and happy family life and give the credit to the new Marriage Law. Influenced by the example of this happy couple, marriage by free choice is now increasing in the village. Three widows were remarried last year, and on New Year Day of this year, eleven young couples were married out of their own free will.

